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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

COMING TO KASHI:

ETHNOGRAPHY OF AN AMERICAN ASHRAM

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Carol Brown

Norman, Oklahoma

1997

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COMING TO KASHI:
ETHNOGRAPHY OF AN AMERICAN ASHRAM

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

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CB

DEDICATION

For my remarkable and loving father,

Dr. Henry Newpher Hillard

1910-1978

who always wanted to have another doctor in the family

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, *Coming to Kashi: Ethnography of an American Ashram*, discusses the growth and development of a religious community founded by Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati in 1976. The overall premise unifies history and ethnography, placing the story of Kashi and its residents in the global context (M. Kearney, *Globalization Theory*), in my opinion the best vehicle for understanding the phenomenon of Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram in Sebastian, Florida. Through the personal stories of residents from interviews, questionnaire information, participant observation, and local research, this anthropological study hopes to illuminate a number of issues that have intrigued social scientists concerning new religious movements in America since the 1960s.

Along with research methodology, questions of previous scholarship in this field are examined and the lack of recent anthropological participation in the study of such groups is discussed. Max Weber's work on charisma, his analysis of prophet types, and his general theory relating ascetic Protestantism to capitalism are considered in light of this community and the time period. Rodney Stark's model for the potential success of new religious movements is utilized to summarize this project and "predict" what the future of Kashi Ashram might be.

Special attention is paid to the history of Hinduism in America, its early missionaries, and the impact of yoga and mysticism as important expressions of personal spiritual realization. The tradition of the Goddess, particularly the Hindu Goddess Kali, with relation to the feminist movement and the role of a strong feminine

role model come into play in the person and personality of the charismatic guru. Personal stories of the residents and questionnaire information identify what brought students to this American guru and why they have chosen to remain at Kashi Ashram, an interfaith, intercultural community.

America's multicultural environment, secularization, the decline of traditional Protestant denominationalism, the social and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s have all influenced the growth of new religious movements, as has the role of science historically. These aspects are discussed as well as the Hindu-based Brahmacharya lifestyle, rituals, and the primary teachings of the Kashi tradition. The controversy over new religious movements here is postulated in terms of Eastern and Western models of authority, a source of conflict due to a lack of cultural awareness and public perception fueled by media attention. The press has also aided in promoting positive attitudes towards new religions by reporting on their community involvement and the needs they meet in society. These issues are reviewed in relation to Kashi, especially with regard to humanitarian outreach and education.

Unifying history and ethnography and identifying the Kashi community in a global context allows us to understand this new religion with respect to "the big picture," an approach that may best suit our intercultural and transnational Information Age. It is part of the process of today's unbounded world system.

Words: ashram, Kali, Kashi, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, new religion

INTRODUCTION

Coming to Kashi is a combination of ethnography, history, and theory. It is the story of an American ashram told in part by its residents and interpreted by an anthropologist with a background in Religious Studies. Ethnography includes on-site interviews, questionnaires for general information, participant observation, and research in local libraries to learn as much as possible about the ashram and its residents.

Ashrams, spiritual communities based on the East Indian model that centers around a teacher or guru, became popular in the United States during the 1960s and following, as increasing numbers of Indian-based teachings found acceptance among intellectuals and counterculture Americans. The time period was one of social upheaval and the East Indian teachings and lifestyle offered some Americans an opportunity to explore different modes of living, and to search for life's meaning in ways contradictory to the typical American materialistic style.

Historically, American ashrams were linked to their East Indian parent traditions, sometimes directly as a result of the guru's Indian ancestry and arrival in the United States to establish communities. In other instances the link was indirect, such as is the case with Kashi Ashram, the focus of this study. At Kashi the Guru is an American woman of Jewish ancestry whose teachings are interfaith, incorporating not only East Indian or Hindu traditions, but also Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, and so on. For this reason, it is especially important to consider history in relation to ethnography, and to do so with an understanding of world religions.

Because the spiritual tradition of Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram was initiated in the United States by an American Guru, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, in the 1970s, it has been categorized as a new religious movement or NRM for short. However, it is neither “new,” as indicated above by its historic and indirect link with Indian traditions, nor strictly speaking, is it “American.” Its appeal and the appeal of the Guru are much more universal, as we will see. While most of Kashi Ashram’s residents are of European-American descent, I met a Hindu mother and daughter who have come to claim Kashi as their home, and several Europeans who are residents as well. There is evidence that the tradition is expanding. Still, in American historical and academic jargon, Kashi represents a “new religion.”

Anthropologist Anthony Wallace writes:

New religions have been the inexhaustible fountains from which, for thousands of years, have flowed, in turbulent variety of form and color, the waters which make up the sea of faith. That sea has nourished much of man’s still-infant culture – not merely his theological belief and sacred ritual, but his values, his principles of social organization, even his technology. . . For new religions are, above all else, movements toward the revitalization of man and society. . . Old religions do not die; they live on in the new religions which follow them (Wallace 1966:4).

The relationship between religion and anthropology has been, in Wallace’s words (1966:5), “tempestuous” and anthropology has “fancie[d] itself an irresistible, penetrator of mysteries.” Anthropology, like other social sciences, has its roots in the early period of European expansion and exploration, and early scholars attempted to explain the differences they encountered between human groups and religious expressions. Most often these “exotic other people” and their religions were judged by European standards with the Europeans ranking highest on the developmental

ladder both socially and religiously, and the “others” dangling from much lower rungs by varying degrees. Naturally, formative interpretations of the religious “mysteries” from various cultures around the world were skewed by this Eurocentric approach, a situation anthropologists and other scholars have tried to correct over the years.

The attraction to understand and explicate religious phenomena remains formidable, but practitioners of religions have not infrequently disagreed, finding the anthropologist and his or her work anything but irresistible. Gary Larson’s Far Side cartoons, which find no subject sacred or above reproach, frequently sympathize with “primitive” peoples being “invaded” by anthropologists or illustrate how the “invaders” are tricked by clever natives. Fortunately, most anthropologists enjoy these quips and anthropological studies have persevered. As Wallace says:

Only ethnographers and historians have kept snapping snapshots of the whole lady in her various costumes, and it is to them that we owe the present availability of detailed descriptions of shamans, pantheons, ceremonial calendars, states of possession, cargo cults, world views, and a host of other interesting phenomena. This body of material makes possible a sensitive anthropological appreciation of religion as a unitary process rather than as a conglomeration of arbitrary forms and functions and thus should help the two parties to our marriage along the path toward sympathetic understanding (Wallace 1966:5-6).

In this study religion as a unitary process will be advanced in light of Globalization Theory, an outgrowth of Immanuel Wallerstein’s World-Systems Theory, as it is applicable to the spiritual tradition of Kashi Ashram in Sebastian, Florida.

Discussion begins with Method and Theory in the first chapter, a description of the fieldwork process during 1995-1996 and how the project was arranged. Various theories are significant, such as Max Weber on charisma, types of prophets and

religious paths. M. Kearney supplies the global theory, and Rodney Stark's model for the success of NRMs serves as both format and summation in the final chapter. A wide range of support theories and histories have been used that represent various academic disciplines.

In Chapter 2: East, West, and American Multiculturalism historically traces the arrival of Indian traditions in the West. It includes discussion of the alternative reality perspective, and Goddess worship, its prevalence, suppression, and relationship to the feminist movement of the 1960s and following. Influential Indian swamis, the establishment of yoga in the West, and the importance of Jungian psychology are included. The second section of the chapter examines Weber's arguments, introducing Weber's analysis of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism, the latter being the foundation of world economy. Secularization and Protestantism, America's Great Awakenings, and the rise of popular Christianity are traced, followed by the 1960s with its social ferment and NRMs.

Chapter 3: Guru and Chelas records the story of Ma Jaya, a discussion of the charismatic guru, the relationship between the guru and chela or "student," and the personal stories of Kashi residents from interviews. The section on mysticism and yoga points out the importance of the individual mystical experience and the means by which it may occur. This union with the divine or realization of God within is reviewed, especially in Kundalini Yoga and as it was significant to Carl Jung. Meditation and yoga are integral to the Kashi tradition, as is the Brahmacharya life,¹ which concludes this chapter.

¹ The stage of life of a student in the traditional Hindu life-cycle (Kinsley 1982:7).

Foundations, the fourth chapter, discusses the oral and written traditions, Eastern and Western differences, the poetic Indian style, the Goddess' poets, and mythology, as well as Ma Jaya's written works and oral teachings from darshan.² The next section deals with Ma Jaya's teachings, and the third section discusses the Goddesses, Mother Kali, problems of perception, Kali, time and change, and finally Kali and Ma Jaya. The chapter concludes with Devotion and Ritual, including the principle group rituals of kirtan or "chanting" and darshan. A description is given of the Dedication of the Hanuman Temple, a special event at Kashi.³

Chapter 5: Contention and Acceptance reviews the controversial relationship between NRMs and former members, their families, and an organization called the ACM or "anti-cult movement." The impact of this organization and media hype tended to create problems for alternative religions. Here, residents of Kashi share their impressions of the situation and how over time the contention has abated. Acceptance of this NRM is seen in light of the positive press it has received for the school, humanitarian efforts, and recognition of Ma Jaya's work on behalf of AIDS sufferers and the less fortunate. One last reason for acceptance is Kashi's location.

Organization and Service presents a profile of the community from questionnaire responses and interviews. Statistics on the community's make-up, reasons for coming to Kashi and calling it home, and one resident's history of Kashi's generations begins this chapter. The organization and service section describes the structure of community support, work within the larger community, industry, and non-

² Darshan means "being in the presence of a Holy Person" and refers to the teaching and sharing of a guru with the community.

profit organizations. Attention is drawn to several areas: the River Fund, Ma Jay's regular rounds of regional hospitals and hospices, services provided around the country, the Memorial Boardwalk, the River House, a care facility for the dying, and the River School. The chapter concludes with two sections: one on recognition and retreats, and the other on teaching the teachers. The former discusses Ma Jaya's public recognition as a religious leader at the World Parliament of Religions, and her work with people in pain during retreats. The latter examines the future of the ashram in terms of succession, the transmission of teachings, and the student's commission from Ma Jaya.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: What Might the Future Hold? establishes the problem of predicting the future and the role of anthropology. It identifies the purpose of this study and applies Rodney Stark's eight-point model of success to the Kashi community. The chapter summarizes the main points with globalization as the key and considers what other theorists have to say about the future prospects of NRMs.

Throughout this dissertation the reader will notice that "foreign words" do not appear in italics. That is because in a global context there are no foreign words. The Sanskrit words from the Indo-Iranian language root are no more foreign than English words from the Germanic branch. Both share the same Indo-European linguistic heritage (Gee 1993:375), and since humankind is one biological race, we might as well recognize that our languages are also related.

Certain words frequently associated with new religions in America and Europe, such as "cult," are not used here, unless cited as part of an established name (i.e., anti-

³ The Hindu God Hanuman is the Monkey-God, the God of service to humanity who took the form of

cult movement) or within a direct quote. This is because they are so value-laden and misused that they are practically worthless for proper definition. They impose notions of “alien others” that are applied primarily as an attack, setting a group apart from society as a whole, and often without any logical basis for doing so. It is most likely that the popular use and misuse of the word “cult” forced scholars to find a newer term, new religious movement, that did not carry with it so much baggage and negativity.

As an anthropologist in what Wallace referred to as the “tempestuous” relationship with religion, it is appropriate to be sensitive to other people’s feelings, so that both parties may benefit from the effort. It is my hope that this dissertation will be a benefit to both anthropology, and to Ma Jaya and the people of Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram, who so graciously permitted this research project.

a monkey to be an example of humility to humankind.

CHAPTER 1

METHOD AND THEORY

INTRODUCTION

During Thanksgiving break in 1995, while my husband and I visited relatives in Florida, we spent an afternoon touring an ashram in Sebastian, Florida. The ashram had been there for twenty years and had been growing and prospering at a gradual but steady rate. My husband's cousin, Dr. Gordon Patterson, a history professor at The Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida, had arranged the tour, knowing my anthropological focus is religion and culture, and thinking that a visit to the religious community might be of special interest. He had had several students from the ashram in his classes over the years.

That afternoon the four of us, the Browns and the Pattersons, drove down Roseland Road and turned onto a typically lush, tropical Florida side road. The sign at the entrance read "Kashi" and off to the left in a series of neat portables, also typical of Florida, stood The River School, the ashram's private, college preparatory school, serving ashram children from preschool through the twelfth grade and children from local communities, such as Melbourne, Sebastian, Vero Beach.

Our tour guide, a resident at Kashi since the early days of the commune, told us the story of Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, his Guru, and the founder of the interfaith ashram that spread out before us. A pond with sizable fish in residence served as the focal point, the center of the ashram, and around it stood ornate and elaborately carved and decorated temples dedicated to various gods and goddesses of world religions. Hindu Temples. a

Jewish Shrine, a Buddhist Temple, a Christ Garden, and others dotted the periphery of the pond, and I began to wonder if these shrines were indicative of the residents' heterogeneous religious perspectives and if so, how it was possible that people with such diverse beliefs could live peacefully together in a commune. History has not shown us that the vast majority of competing theologies can coexist without considerable tension and hostility or worse.

Contacting the ashram later, I inquired if I might come spend a week there. I was interested to see if the community might be amenable to participating in an anthropological study and if such a study would be appropriate for dissertation research. Confirmation arrived and during my week-long reconnaissance in February, 1996, I participated in activities at the ashram, visited with residents, and accompanied Ma Jaya and her entourage as they made their regular rounds of West Palm Beach, Florida, hospitals and care centers (Chapter 6). Service to and care of the terminally ill is a priority for Ma Jaya and her devotees, I learned, and they are active in this and other charitable work throughout the state and nation.

Permission for this study was granted and I worked with several residents of the ashram by mail and phone until the following May. May through August of 1996, I lived in Sebastian, Florida, and conducted my research with the endorsement of Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati and the cooperation of the residents of Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram.

METHOD

Initially, it had been my desire to ask the residents to fill out a questionnaire with general information for a group profile, either before or after evening darshan,¹ but attempts at this endeavor failed. I learned from one interviewee that Kashi's residents dislike questionnaires and he had run into a similar dilemma when attempting to gather forms for regulating residential parking. Eventually, I gave up on the group questionnaires, except that those individuals I interviewed were more than happy to complete the form, as were a few others I did not interview. Then in early October a packet arrived from the ashram with a stack of completed questionnaires. I was delighted to have them. Ultimately, the total number of finished questionnaires stood at forty-nine or 34.75% of the population.

Twenty-seven interviews with residents ranging in age from 17 to 81, 9 males and 16 females, were conducted from May through August. The number of ashram residents fluctuates, since during the summer months people travel or may be away working elsewhere. Most often, the population hovers around 200.² While I was at Kashi, the official resident tally was 140; 102 adults and 38 children under age 18, 62 adult females, 40 adult males, 18 female children, and 20 male children. Ages ranged from toddlers to the elderly. Other statistics concerning resident questionnaire responses can be found in Chapter 6.

¹ Darshan is defined as, "seeing, experiencing; sharing the presence of the Guru" (Kashi Foundation, Inc., July 1996); and ". . . to see the holy . . . to become that which you see" (Bhagavati 1995:142).

² Other ashrams or "houses" around the country are associated with Ma Jaya. This study focuses entirely on the primary commune in Sebastian, Florida, its guru, residents, and activities.

The interviews themselves focused on three primary questions: 1) How did you come to meet Ma or come to Kashi in Florida? 2) What keeps you at Kashi? What aspects of life here meet your needs in a way that living elsewhere would not? Do these aspects have a lot, a little, or nothing to do with the communal lifeway at Kashi? and 3) Have your religious beliefs and practices changed [from your childhood religious beliefs and practices, if applicable]? How has your life here at Kashi and/or your relationship with Ma changed your awareness of spirituality, religiosity, your experience of the sacred? Specific questions arose throughout the interviews for the purpose of clarifying terms or for explaining individual situations. The questions generated a wide range of discussion topics that provided, in most cases, a well-rounded view of each person's life, or of as much of it as s/he cared to share with me. The entire process from questionnaires to interviews was voluntary, and those who participated in the project seemed to enjoy responding to the interview questions and telling their life stories. Anonymity was assured in writing in keeping with university and government human service regulations.

Participant observation played another key role in fieldwork. Participating in ashram activities gave me the opportunity to observe everyday life situations and personal interactions, school and community events, special religious ceremonies, such as the Dedication of the Hanuman Temple and the Installation of Sannyasins, and to attend Memorial Services and an Intensive Weekend Retreat led by a number of the residents and the Guru.

I visited local and county libraries to read all of the published data available about Kashi: newspaper clippings, magazine and journal articles. I purchased a number of Ma Jaya's books and pamphlets at the ashram store called Ma's India, picked up brochures

and pamphlets available through the ashram offices, and I photographed the grounds, buildings, and shrines. By late August, I wrapped up the project for the summer and headed back to Oklahoma.

The people of Kashi were generous, pleasant, and helpful to me. It was easy to talk and empathize with them. They had not always had comfortable relations with “outsiders,” as we will see later, and some were skeptical about my intent to do a study at Kashi. Others had arrived, “all sweetness and light,” while intending all along to write sensationalized tabloid fare. This is not the intent of scholarship as I see it, nor is it typical of my character. While seeking accuracy and impartiality in my work, I am genuinely concerned that I not jeopardize others by my research or in any other way if I can help it.

Interview participants received a copy of their interviews and several reasons made this endeavor appropriate: 1) seeing the interviews in their unedited form built trust and confidence, and participants could recall the interview process as one that was not designed to trick, misinterpret, or take advantage of them; 2) reviewing the interviews engaged the participants more fully in the process, enabling them to correct my misspellings of Hindu terms or names and fill in my blanks in the dialogue that could not be recognized from the tapes; 3) as it turned out, the entire exercise became a learning experience, since the disjointed and spontaneous nature of the oral tradition appears quite different in print from that of the edited and polished written tradition. Some participants were quite surprised to “see” how their everyday speech looked in print and one was quick to point out that body language and subtle nuances do not transcribe; and 4) because the interviews were essentially life stories, and as such, the property of the story-

tellers, I felt participants should have a copy for their own records, but with the understanding that publishing the stories required my permission.

Several interviewees were quite grateful to have received their transcripts. I hoped this process would help alleviate concerns about my project at Kashi and propel me into the trustworthy category, even though I am an anthropologist, an “outsider” by definition, and not a potential convert to this new spiritual movement. Still, a few at Kashi may not be content until they have seen the finished dissertation.

THEORY

Theoretical discussions of and models used to explain the phenomenon of NRMs in the United States since the 1960s have been profuse. Sociologists and psychologists have been the most prolific in this area of study, publishing numerous multi-author volumes and journal articles. Anthropologists, on the other hand, have not been active in this field of research on American NRMs.

Sherry Ortner explains that in the 1970s and early 1980s, some anthropologists felt that the discipline had been overridden by “mystics, religious fanatics, California cultists,” that American Anthropological Association meetings had become “dominated by panels on shamanism, witchcraft, and ‘abnormal phenomena,’ and that ‘scientific papers based on empirical studies had been willfully excluded from the program” (Ortner 1984:126). That is one example; there are others, but the discipline had begun to take a turn toward structural Marxism, cultural ecology, political economy, and in the 80s to praxis (Ortner 1984:126-151). It is not possible to give a full accounting of the discipline’s theoretical

evolution here, but Ortner argues that a model that “unifies both historical and anthropological studies” needs to be developed and such an approach would be extremely useful for the study of NRMs.

Gordon Melton reminds us there is nothing really “new” about all these “new religions” (Melton 1987:46-56). Historically, religions offering alternative approaches to the ever-changing but still dominant Protestant mainstream have been active in the United States since before the onset of the twentieth century, since the 1800s at the very least. Regardless, social scientists have sought to determine how these modern groups form, what kinds of individuals lead them, and what determines group success or failure. Theories abound and obviously one key to success is longevity.

Like other social scientists, I am keenly interested in these questions, and though there is published data about Kashi Ashram, its residents had not been interviewed by an anthropologist nor had they told their own stories for an academic study. I felt what they had to say would be invaluable for illuminating many of these issues.

From the onset, my questions about Kashi touched on all three aspects, meaning, how new religions form, what kinds of individuals lead them, and what determines their success or failure. I believed that the answers to these questions would emerge from the residents’ stories. The three primary questions above directed my inquiry during interviews and from the stories and questionnaire sample a general understanding began to emerge, an understanding concerning the personal appeal of this teaching, a group profile and history of Kashi’s formation, the significance and charisma of the guru, and the potential for Kashi’s future success.

Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram was founded in Florida in 1976 and discussion of that time period is essential, as is the historic dynamic and events leading up to it. Interview participants in their fifties, especially, talked about the 1960s and 1970s time frame as a decisive period in their lives. Numerous NRMs burst onto the American scene during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Most have long since disappeared or dissolved (Bromley 1987:221). Kashi, on the other hand, has grown since its inception. We might speculate that this is due mainly to the charisma of Ma Jaya, the commitment of her students, and to her active role in social service. In fact, we might do more than speculate. The chela's stories provide ample explanations for Kashi's longevity, for the deepening relationship between the teacher and student. Moreover, Kashi's constant change, its perpetual renewal and rejuvenation in terms of humanitarian outreach and spirituality, eliminates complacency or boredom. There is always a challenge, an opportunity, for personal growth, and no less important, an extended, multigenerational family with which to share life. But before going further, it may be helpful here to introduce Max Weber and the other primary theories utilized in this work.

THEORIES, DISCUSSION, AND PURPOSE

Not long after the turn of the twentieth century Max Weber, one of the founding fathers of the social sciences, wrote extensively about religions, identifying certain cross-cultural aspects of social behaviors and institutions that could be compared and then applied to explain and predict social change. Religion played an impressive role, though

not the only role, in maintaining the established social order or in completely breaking with it in an attempt to forge a new order (Weber 1963).

Weber's theories have been used frequently by scholars in interpreting modern religious groups and their leaders. Here, his concept of "charisma," with his explanation of exemplary and ethical prophets, the active agents in social change, will be used to elaborate the Kashi phenomenon, but his work has not been without criticism and for this study, reinterpretation in conjunction with historical evidence will be necessary. His relatively rigid distinctions between exemplary and ethical prophet types and ascetic and mystical paths do not accurately reflect the leader of this NRM or its place and function in the world.

Ma Jaya seems to be both prophet types, depending upon the ashram's developmental stages, the needs of followers, and society at large. Because she elaborates a combination of both Eastern and Western religious teachings, she accommodates exemplary and ethical prophetic styles. In addition the community is both distinct from and part of the "outside world." It operates at multiple levels, meaning ascetic or the path of good works directed toward the community within and community at large, and mystical or the path of retreat from the world, usually experienced through personal meditation and interaction with Ma Jaya. The obligation to serve those in need in the world, the ascetic path, reinforces Weber's ethical prophet, and Ma Jaya leads the way for her devotees as their role model, an aspect that also suggests Weber's exemplary prophet. In this scenario the lines are not so clear-cut as Weber's theory implies nor are the ascetic and mystic distinctions. Weber believed in cultural specificity, culture-boundedness. Yet, in our current example this seems not to be the case.

Wallace (1966:156), too, notes a clearer demarcation of cultural traditions. In the instance of Kashi, nonetheless, the mystic path, typical of exemplary “prophecy” is not viewed in opposition to the ascetic way of “good works,” typical of ethical “prophecy” nor can Eastern and Western spiritual traditions be seen as culture-bound. They are part of the interactive global process and as Wallace (1966:5-6) states, anthropology itself may be understood as process, part of the same interactive globalization.

Especially significant to this study is the tradition and person of the guru, an area Weber addressed, and the relationship between the guru and chela or “student.” In India the guru historically had greater-than-parental authority over the celibate student, as was the custom encouraged by parents. Here, we may find where conflict arises in the American context.

Regardless of Indian or American contexts, the relationship between guru and chela is intensely personal and reciprocal. At Kashi interviewees revealed a depth of commitment, devotion, and dedication, providing personal testimonials and descriptions of sacred manifestations occurring in guru-chela interaction.

While the Indian heritage is strong at Kashi, the community’s founder is a native-born citizen of the United States, a major distinction between this movement and NRMs, such as the Unification Church, and ISKCON, for example, whose leaders were or are native-born citizens of other nations, transplants to America as it were. This may be a deciding factor in Kashi’s success. Along with the interfaith dynamic, it assists in establishing cultural continuity. The interviews and participant-observation provided a different guru profile than one might expect, perhaps, one more reason for her popularity – she does not conform to the stereotype of the guru. Another reason is the belief held by

many that she is the personification of the Great Mother, Kali, and has the charismatic gift to take pain away, which is sometimes referred to as “devouring the ego,” and to bring about personal and interpersonal restoration. Attending a weekend-long retreat at Kashi enabled me to see how Ma Jaya works with people in that setting. More will be said about this in Chapter 6.

Weber did not have much to report in *The Sociology of Religion* on women, except that wherever female deities, female leaders of religious organizations, and their corresponding traditions took precedence over male-dominated ones, the results were fertility-based expressions of ritual devotion, putting it nicely. Such a case is not even remotely related to the Kashi tradition, as I have witnessed it. Perhaps, Weber's ethnocentrism and preference for male-centeredness, as was typical of his time, was stuck on overdrive in this instance. It is sometimes easy to forget that theorists reflect the general thinking of their times. From my observations at Kashi, no similar scenario exists there as Weber suggests was prominent in India. However, it is important to reiterate for this study that during the 1960s and following, the women's liberation movement became one of a number of human rights groups attempting to achieve political, social, and human equality in a dominantly patriarchal society. Because of this influence, the divine feminine had a greater appeal than it might have had at the turn of the 20th Century. Human rights groups were beginning to break free of their former suppressed status.

Between 1911 and 1913 Weber studied extensively, writing three volumes on religions in India, China, and on ancient Judaism. His untimely death prevented his completion of the major work used here, *The Sociology of Religion*, published posthumously in 1922 (Weber 1963:277). His emphasis on ascetic Protestantism as the

religious tradition that best combined religious salvation with capitalism is apparent in the religious configuration within the United States today. His 1905 essay, *The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit of Capitalism,'* is his most famous work (Weber 1963:276). This brand of Protestant Christianity has evolved since Weber's time, but has dominated American culture and has been the main opponent, along with parents of group members, of competing alternative religions,. Since the 60s "the popular believer's Christianity" has become successful, the Pentecostal, literalist, and conservative varieties (Ellwood 1987:246). The matter of contention between these factions is addressed in Chapter 5.

In his theorizing Weber does not include the global perspective, the impact of telecommunications, and the ease of population mobility that have influenced cultures and religions world-over. Naturally, these did not exist in Weber's day to the extent they do now. Whether perceived of as local, transnational, or global, communities and corporations are no longer as geographically isolated as they were at the turn of the twentieth century.

Today, and since the advent of television especially, universal symbols lend themselves to globalization and are applicable to social structures and linguistic comprehension everywhere around the world. M. Kearney (1995:547-48) writes that with the migration and various movements of populations, information moves with them: symbols, capital and commodities, and these become globalized, transnational. They become represented in "non-local contexts and influences" and events at the local level are influenced by occurrences miles away. The shift occurs between two-dimension sharply bounded centers and peripheries, and multi-dimensional and unbounded global space, an understanding inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein's view in *The Modern World System*

(1974) of global relationships in the European world-economy that began in the fifteenth century (Kearney 1995:549-50). With nation-state “deterritorialization,” “a people may be ‘anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state’” (Kearney 1995:553).

Universal symbols and language replace local ones, such as in airports, with fast-food franchises, Cable news, Walt Disney enterprises, etc. These may occupy particular spaces, but they belong to a universal, non-local space. Religious images and social movements may provoke the same kind of universality and globalization with constant intercultural contact, and as social interactive dialogues and episodes occur, relationships develop (Lofland 1987:95-96), symbols are redistributed, intercultural continuity takes shape, though it may not be perceived of as such.

For example, certain Eastern traditions have become commonplace on the American scene. Few towns are without community centers or agencies that offer yoga classes or martial arts training. These businesses are part of the local, national, and international economy and the political landscape, and their acceptance in the mainstream, especially in the physical fitness industry, makes their historical origins irrelevant, or at least, not a problem for the general public. Their “foreignness” has been overcome by their universalization.

Last summer, while talking with an individual in North Carolina, our conversation led to local yoga classes. The woman said that yoga was “invented in the United States.” Her perception, though mistaken, is not unusual, for what becomes commonplace often becomes perceived of as a national product or a product devoid of any national origins, regardless of historical evidence otherwise. A second example, also from North Carolina, is of interest. While attending the Annual Blue Ridge Institute for Social Service

Executives and their families last July, a Southern institution that prides itself on resistance to change at all costs, the addition of early morning Hatha Yoga classes was mind-boggling. Such an innovation is unheard of at “the Institute,” at this bedrock of Southern convention, yet it was there all the same.

Religious and mythological images provoke the same kind of universality and globalization. Crucial to the discussion of Kashi, a community with ancient East Indian mythological roots but which was initiated during the period of social ferment of the early 1970s by Ma Jaya, is an understanding of the universal character of the Hindu and Tantric tradition that inspired it. During that time period, Americans from what was termed “the counterculture” were exposed to Indian practices and lore. Mythologically, the symbolism found in the oral and written Indian traditions has become “unbounded,” meaning, not restricted geographically to time or space. It became as relevant in the USA among this culture as it was in India.

One example might be applied to that of the River Ganges, the most sacred body of water in India. This river is a “sacred place, sacred space.” However, it is “a prototype for all other sacred waters and her presence is seen in countless rivers and invoked into ritual waters all over India” (Eck 1982:40-41). Extending the River Ganges’ sacredness to other bodies of water within India, provides for the potential universalization of sacred place and space outside of India as well. In the global context, the Ganges could be identified with any body of water, wherever devotees of Indian traditions live and worship in the world, or if we apply Kearney’s concept to bodies of water, it could indicate that a river may be anywhere in the world and still be part of the Mother Ganges. At Kashi in Florida one finds the sacred Ganga, “the pond,” with its temples to the gods and

goddesses of world religions. These are built encircling the water that serves as the center of the ashram, in Eliadian terms, “the center of the world” (i.e., the relationship between water and the Goddess who created the gods and the universe; Eliade 1969:350-51).

Besides the theory of globalization, other explanatory discussions will be found throughout the text. These pertain to influences of various world religions; modern psychology, particularly that of Carl Jung and the growing interest of depth-psychology during the 60s and 70s; the influences of Indian yoga, the experiential, meditative dynamic of the tradition, and Hinduism in general, all of which have universal characteristics. Here, the following works have been helpful: Eck (1982) on Kashi in India and Indian literature, Hixon (1994) on Kali, Wilber (1977, 1985) on transpersonal psychology and personal growth, Eliade (1958, 1964) on yoga and shamanism, Jung (1996) on Kundalini Yoga, Fuller (1984) on Kali and South Indian worship, Harding (1993) on Hinduism and Kali, Griffiths (1982) on Eastern and Western religions, Thangaraj (1994) on the guru phenomenon, and Kinsley (1982, 1986) on Hinduism and Hindu Goddesses. Social dynamics relating to caste and class distinctions from a national to global context are discussed, especially in Chapter 2, with relation to social unrest and liberation movements of the 60s and 70s. Anthony Wallace’s premise is that NRMs arise only during times of social upheaval, otherwise, they are unlikely to take hold. This does not explain those that survive beyond the crisis period, nor why certain times of crisis and not others are conducive to the growth of NRMs. In addition, social status continues to be a focus of debate, that is, whether the proponents of religious innovations arise from the lower or middle classes. At Kashi there are no class distinctions per se, though the majority of residents responding to the questionnaire identified their middle class roots. Kashi has an

egalitarianism social structure and well-trained and educated chelas work in various capacities in every area of administration, from teaching at the school to publishing, organizing events, maintaining work schedules, organizing food and cooking details, and finance.

While many NRMs are restrictive and their gurus protected from the public eye, at Kashi people of any religious tradition or none at all are welcome, so long as they harbor no ill-will towards other religions, their practitioners, or individuals society has stigmatized as a result of the AIDS epidemic. Ma Jaya, herself, is constantly in the limelight, because of her extensive travels, retreats, involvement in arts shows, charitable works, and interfaith conferences. She is accessible to visitors during regular public darshans, whenever they accompany her on her weekly rounds as guests, and at various events on and off the grounds, such as fund-raisers for the school or the River House, and so on.

As much as this study of Ma Jaya and Kashi attempts to understand the community's history as related by its devotees, placing the community into the big picture historically, and explaining why people come to Kashi to stay, any study of a theoretical model compared to an actual religious or spiritual community is bound to create some dilemma between theory and praxis. This study is no exception. Depending upon the emic or etic perspective of the investigator and/or theorist,³ variations in outcome arise. Attempting to find a balance between these two is more difficult still, as one is tempted to either promote the theory at the expense of the practice/history, or visa versa. An attempt

³ Emic interpretations explain a phenomenon from "an insider's point of view," in this case, for example, from the viewpoint of a devotee or that of a scholar trying to see the phenomenon from the devotee's viewpoint. Etic interpretation is "an outsider's point of view," such as a scholar looking at the externals of a community, for example, forms of rituals, types of behavior. In the latter no attempt is made to

to objectively interpret the historical events and personal accounts, and show their relationship is the purpose here. It is impossible to review and apply the huge range of theories or academic studies on NRMs, so we will have to be content with the current selection, hoping that future studies may fill in the gaps and include those theories that have not been utilized.

From the general theories, several concerns need to be considered. Vast psychological studies of individual leaders and followers in NRMs are categorized by Western scientific definitions of “normalcy” or “pathology,” often without consideration for the historical and possible multicultural contexts influencing these individuals. Even though science and rationalism continue to impact non-Western consciousness, alternative groups may view particular behaviors as non-pathological from their ideological perspectives. Globalization has made the line initially drawn between Western and non-Western systems of thought finer, thinner, more tentative.

For example, altered states of consciousness resulting from the practice of yoga, meditation, or other rituals are not pathological in the East Indian context. They are quite normal. Lots of folks experience them. “Counterculture” Americans were introduced to these Indian practices in the sixties and seventies, just as they were to the mythology, oral and written traditions, and the guru phenomenon, as a part of the consciousness-raising movement. From the American medical, scientific standpoint, however, these states may be viewed as non-normative, possibly as delusional psychoses.

What is problematic here is that the Western scientific definitions are *not* cross-cultural, since what they imply is a system of beliefs, that is, the belief in the validity and

understand the ritual as the practitioner understands it or at a deeper level than is observed in outward

superiority of science over spiritual, religious, or magical interpretations of the same phenomena. It is possible that some Westerners might prefer the latter approach to the former, thinking that science does not have all the answers to every question either. By identifying such phenomena as normal, people find agreement with their own life experience, their own history, and the traditions they adopted at some point in time.

Ethnomedicine, however, is making considerable contributions toward explaining the cultural distinctions and problems arising from Western medical vs. non-Western medical perspectives. Psychological and belief-related aspects come into play in ethnomedicine and in some instances the two “camps” are beginning to work together to the benefit of patients/clients and practitioners. Furthermore, Western medical science is beginning to catch up in this arena, recognizing the relationship between faith and healing, possibly one more example of the impact of “interculturalization” and acknowledging that what was once considered non-normative is now becoming “the norm.”⁴

What is apparent is that as we become an even more globalized community, such discrepancies of phenomenal and behavioral interpretations by the social sciences will need to be redefined. Some type of adjustment or understanding of ideological differences is necessary for cross-cultural comparisons in this area and a more thorough utilization of the historical contexts, all of which will aid in appreciating the interactive global process, or the big picture.

behavior.

⁴ For advances in ethnomedicine, see especially the following: Camino 1992, Csordas 1988, Etkin 1979, Fabrega 1974/1975/1978/, Finkler 1984, Fontenot 1994, Foster 1984, Green 1980, Holloway 1990, Hufford 1992, Hughes 1978, Lichstein 1992, Logan 1978, Mathews 1992, Philips 1990, Sobo 1992, and Wedenoja 1989.

Be that as it may, competition between disciplines has not always helped the situation either, where the study of NRMs is concerned. Bromley, Hadden, and Hammond have reported on the problem regarding the proper interpretation of behaviors and the major clash between sociology and traditional psychology. A few examples will suffice. Sociologists are more apt to employ participant-observation, which affords a context for behavioral actions. Psychologists and psychiatrists are more apt to work with exceptional cases, former members of NRMs, which eliminates the on-site context and places it in a very different and emotional frame of reference. As a result, psychologists tend to “exaggerate” problems, while sociologists tend to “underestimate” them. Psychologists also interpret personality or behavior shifts as “suspicious,” whereas sociologists see such shifts as role changes, not personality changes (Bromley, Hadden, and Hammond 1987:215). They state, too, that societal hostility directed toward NRMs, which is commonly associated with attitudes promoted by the “anti-cult movement,” is also directed toward those researching such groups (Bromley, Hadden, and Hammond 1987:210).

The last major theory to be employed in this project concerns NRM successes. In 1987 Rodney Stark (1987:11-29) published “How New Religions Succeed” with his theoretical model for measuring the potential success of such groups. While other authors in the multi-author volume in which Stark’s work appears, argued what constituted “success,” he ultimately defined success as:

a continuous variable based on the *degree to which a religious movement is able to dominate one or more societies*. Such domination could be the result of conversion of the masses, of elites, or both. By dominate I mean to influence behavior, culture, and public policy in a society (Stark 1987:12).

Stark had written previously that no religion ever completely dominates in a given society, as alternatives always exist due to repression. He outlined and explicated the test propositions for his model of success, noting that if an NRM did not fulfill any one of the conditions, its chances of success were slim, but the more fully it fulfilled the propositions, the greater the chances for success. On the other hand, since most NRMs fail, the propositions were based on the areas of failure, those weak links which caused the downfall of most NRMs. Knowing how such movements failed, he then posited how others could succeed.

New religious movements are likely to succeed to the extent they:

1. Retain *cultural continuity* with the conventional faiths of the societies in which they appear or originate.
2. Maintain a *medium* level of *tension* with their surrounding environment; are deviant, but not too deviant.
3. Achieve *effective mobilization*: strong governance and a high level of individual commitment.
4. Can attract and maintain a *normal age* and *sex* structure.
5. Occur within *favorable ecology*, which exists when:
 - a. the religious economy is *relatively unregulated*;
 - b. conventional faiths are *weakened* by secularization or social disruption;
 - c. it is possible to achieve at least *local success* within a *generation*.
6. Maintain dense internal network relations without becoming isolated.
7. Resist *secularization*.
8. Adequately *socialize* the young so as to:
 - a. limit pressures toward secularization;
 - b. limit defection (Stark 1987:13).

Looking at the great religions in antiquity, Islam being the last great religion to take hold, Stark compared these with contemporary religious movements, such as the Mormons, Mennonites, Shakers, and Christian Science, and later groups founded in the 1960s and 1970s, the Unification Church, ISKCON, Scientology, etc.

Ellwood (1987:245-246) explains that most of Stark's points reflect conditions common to popular religions or are easily generated by them. Popular religions he equates with the Little Tradition in a technological society and says it might parallel peasant religion in pre-modern (or modern) societies. In India the tradition of the Tantras developed as a popular religion among the lower castes and from there spread to other classes and to other nations, especially to countries in Europe and to the United States. As a Great Tradition, such as denominational Protestantism in the United States for example, runs out of steam, popular religion fills or can fill the void left behind in those areas most lacking in the declining Great Tradition, meaning an impact on family, local community, inward experience and so on (Ellwood 1987:245-246). NRMs illustrate this scenario in terms of world views, rhetorical styles, the needs they meet in society. And since popular religions have always been more receptive to change, their prospects for success in society's evolution appear promising.

Stark's model will be tested in the conclusion of the dissertation. His model, however, lacks reference to any ideological foundation that is significant for the development and maintenance of a spiritual community. Ecological or economic factors are important, but without a decisive ideological and spiritual base that binds a members of a religious movement together and provides the impetus for longevity, other efforts to grow and survive could fall by the wayside.

Supplying an ideological base and the historical context, the purpose, here, is to gain an understanding about Kashi, answer the three primary questions about coming to Kashi, staying at Kashi, and changes in beliefs. Lastly, Stark's model will be tested against the profile of this American commune. We will not only begin to see why Kashi is the

home and heart of so many folks of all ages and from multiple cultural backgrounds, but also, assuming Stark is correct in his theorizing, whether the future will be bright or dim for this new religious movement as we enter the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

EAST, WEST, AND AMERICAN MULTICULTURALISM

INDIA COMES TO THE WEST

The cultural influences of India found their way to the United States in the 1800s. Prior to that, however, there had been a great fascination with things-Indian in Europe and here. Raymond Schwab's (1984:xix) *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East* gives the reader a thorough history of Europe's introduction to the Orient. European fascination with the East coincided with Western Romanticism, not as some critics suspected, that it arose with the "Beat Generation," forerunner to what will be referred to in this work as "the counterculture" of the 1960s and 1970s.

Intellectuals in Europe and the United States had become intrigued with a view of reality very different from that of the classical Judeo-Christian world-view that permeated Western society. Unlike the traditional perspective that emphasized a distinction between God or Godhead and humanity, the latter being created by and subservient to the former in an impersonal world full of natural laws, this alternative view emphasized a continuity between God or Godhead, humanity, and the universe (Ellwood and Partin 1988:30-31). The alternative viewpoint was part of the existing Western tradition through ancient and mystical schools of thought, i.e., during the Hellenistic Period: the Religion of the Great Mother, Gnosticism, Mithraism, the Hermetic tradition, Neoplatonism. The Middle Ages developed it further in The

Kabbalah of medieval Judaism, alchemy, and so on (Ellwood and Partin 1988:33-48). The eighteenth century brought additional influences: Freemasonry, Swedenborg, the works of Mesmer, Saint-Germain, et al. The Rosicrucian Society in America, a German movement begun in the 1600s, was established in 1694 in Pennsylvania and by the nineteenth century, Spiritualism and Theosophy attracted devotees to this alternative view of reality, a view that perceived the cosmos from the feminine, rather than masculine, perspective (Ellwood and Partin 1988:54-65).

Historically, the feminine perspective had been overshadowed, suppressed by the established order of the orthodox hierarchy (Haskins 1993:44), the patriarchy, religiously represented by male deities and dominated by males politically. Haskins reiterates that “the Christian religion, like its Jewish and Islamic counterparts, is conspicuous for its lack of a feminine deity. The Virgin Mary, though celebrated as the Mother of God by Christians and particularly Catholics, has never been regarded as divine; in fact Catholics are particularly careful to stress her very non-divinity and inferior human and feminine status, and her essential exclusion from the masculine godhead” (Haskins 1993:44).¹ Not since antiquity, then, had any real promise of a cogent feminine religious tradition appeared in the West.² Christianity’s monopoly on

¹ In much later commentaries, not in the gospels per se, does Mary come to be seen as “the Queen of Heaven”, “a title already given to the pre-Christian goddess Istar [Jer. 7:18], ‘God-bearer’ . . . ‘Mother of God’ and ‘divine Wisdom,’ attributes which derived from the church’s conflicts during the early centuries in establishing both the divinity and humanity of Christ” (Haskins 1993:44).

² Throughout the period of pre-Christian dominance, goddesses from Mesopotamia and elsewhere in the Western and Middle East world flourished, such as Istar, the sister and lover of Tammuz, the Shepherd; Isis in Egypt, Mother of the Gods and wife of Osiris who rules the realms of sea, the earth, and the dead; Astarte in Canaan, wife of Baal; Cybele, the Great Mother in Phrygia, who was worshipped in Asia Minor and who was the companion and lover of Attis; Athena of the Greeks, the Goddess of Wisdom and War; and the later Gnostic-Christian Goddess of Wisdom, Pistis Sophia (Haskins 1993:45). Grimal recounts a thorough history of the goddesses from Egypt’s Hathor, the Cow and as Hathor-Sakhmet, the “Eye of Re [God]”, to the goddesses of the Neolithic world, of

religion from the days of Constantine in the Roman Empire effectively forced competitors to go underground or to be incorporated into the Great Tradition of exoteric, orthodox Christianity. Esoteric, Little Traditions, though they continued to exist in the popular beliefs of the people, never had a “political prayer” in antiquity.

However, in India the feminine principle and the popular preference for goddess worship, especially in Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism of the later period, remained a powerful force. Because all aspects of life and belief were understood as inter- and causally-related, women were considered “manifestations of the Goddess, the Shakti (female power), and a reverence for the natural mother [was seen as] really reverence for the Divine Mother” (Harding 1993:6). This feminine influence, though subtle and understated, became part of the esoteric tradition of the West, and in the United States an esoteric renaissance was already well underway by the 1800s.

In 1893 India came to the West in the person of a charismatic swami named Vivekananda, the disciple of the Hindu saint, Sri Ramakrishna, from Bengal. Ramakrishna was a great and devoted follower of the Hindu Goddess Kali, the Great Divine Mother (Isherwood 1965:58-68), and while Vivekananda did not espouse as intensely the Great Mother tradition himself, he regarded Kali with awe and taught his students to respect her always.

Vivekananda appeared at the first World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 and was an instant success. He had been educated in the Western sciences and was the first Hindu missionary to impact American intellectuals (Kinsley

Sumer, Babylon, the Hittites, Phoenicians, ancient Greeks and Romans, Persia, the entire East Indian pantheon, China, Japan, the Celtic lands, Norse mythology, North and Central America (Grimal 1965).

1982:21). During the six-week long conference, major and minor world religious leaders gathered to discuss belief systems and issues, and as a result of the parliament, Vivekananda founded the first American Hindu group, the Vedanta Society (Melton 1987:48; Ellwood and Partin 1988:184-188).

The Vedanta Society taught three fundamental truths, that: “The real nature of men and women is divine; . . . the aim of human life on earth is to unfold and manifest th[e] Godhead, eternally existent within, but hidden; [and] . . . truth is universal” (Ellwood and Partin 1988:187). The last reflects the essentialist view, that is, that all religions, all deities, lead ultimately to the same Godhead or Truth; they just do so by various paths, all of which are equally good (Ellwood and Partin 1988:187).

At the World Parliament of Religions other religious leaders had success as well: Annie Besant of the Theosophical Society, second only to Vivekananda in charisma and appeal; Anagarika Dharmapala, who, with the help of Paul Carus, organized the first Buddhist group in America, the Maha Bodhi Samaj.³ About the same time, the National Spiritualist Association of Churches and groups aligned with metaphysics and New Thought, drew adherents throughout the United States (Melton 1987:48-49). The religious and spiritual environment was ripe for the growth of the alternative reality tradition, and in fact, it had been a work in progress for considerable time as a result of Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and the popular and magical traditions brought from Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere.

The 1920s brought the next most influential Hindu to the United States, the Master Yogi, Yogananda (1893-1952), a man possessing psychic powers and teaching

the traditional philosophy and practice of yoga in America for a period of over thirty years. Founding the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), eventually with 150 plus centers on four continents, Yogananda had a major impact on the West. He was charismatic, intelligent, and popular. A Bengali, he brought with him the poetic and romantic spirit of India. Basing his teachings on the ancient Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, he provided a way to overcome ignorance, which prevents human beings from realizing their full potential and joy. Through Kriya Yoga, he taught, “one can redirect one’s life-energy (*prana*) from outward things towards the opening of the centers (*chakras*) which give spiritual sight necessary for realization of one’s true nature” (Ellwood and Partin 1988:189).

Yoga appealed to some Westerners, especially Carl Jung, for it linked psychological and physiological factors or forces, or spirit and biology, which may ultimately be seen as one in the Hindu belief structure (Ellwood and Partin 1988:180-181). Whereas the dominant American and Christian tradition separated God and human or human and nature, the Hindu context provided a means of unifying them within a holistic cosmogony, and the skilled and enlightened individual could come to experience non-duality. It was this more than anything else, the Hindu assurance of a kind of awareness that would eliminate radical dualism on an experiential level, that appealed to Westerners, and Vedanta interpreted for them the virtues of Indian culture and spiritual practice (Ellwood and Partin 1988:181).

Psychologist Carl Jung traveled throughout India in 1930. His psychological interpretations of Eastern thought helped to disseminate Eastern traditions in the West

³ For an excellent history of Buddhism in the New World, see Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to*

or make them more comprehensible for Western audiences (Jung 1996:xviii, Introduction by Sonu Shamdasani). Shamadasani explains that “[t]he emergence of depth psychology was historically paralleled by the translation and widespread dissemination of the texts of yoga. Both were topical, exotic novelties. Newly arrived gurus and yogis vied with psycho-therapists over a similar clientele who sought other counsel than was provided by Western philosophy, religion, and medicine” (Jung 1996:xviii). Jung believed psychology served as the best bridge between Eastern and Western thought. His colleague, Herman Keyserling, stated, “The further we [psychologists] get, the more closely do we approach the views of the Indians. Psychological research confirms, step by step, the assertions . . . with the old Indian science of the soul” (Jung 1996:xix). He believed yoga was superior to any Western psychological system, though Jungian psychoanalysis came closest to yoga, and both were methods of self-improvement (Jung 1996:xxi). During this period in which the field of psychology emphasized behaviorism and personality studies, Jung’s approach provided something lacking entirely in Western psychology, that is, “an account of the developmental phases of higher consciousness” (Jung 1996:xxiv).

In 1959 Hindu yogi Vishnu Devananda arrived stateside, piloting his own airplane,. He brought another type of yoga practice, Hatha Yoga or the physical yoga of breathing, and established three centers or “camps” in Quebec, New York state and the Bahamas. These centers offered “yoga vacations” for physical and spiritual self-improvement and Devananda’s movement came to be called the True World Order (Ellwood and Partin 1988:198-199).

the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America, 1986.

Devotional Hinduism or bhakti, brought by devotees of the God Krishna, imported this personalized variation of Hindu belief to American shores. Also in 1959 an Indian guru, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, a disciple of Guru Dev or Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, arrived to establish what came to be called TM or Transcendental Meditation, a popular movement throughout the following decade.

In the wake of the Korean War and with the 1965 repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act, gurus, yogis, and greater numbers of East Indians entered the United States, bringing with them particularly the two principle foundations of Hindu life, the powerful family tradition and the primacy of religious practice,⁴ but leaving behind, for the most part, the caste system that had dominated Indian culture. This type of political and social structure would not have operated well on the open and capitalistic market which has different sets of obligations and values, as we will see presently.

However, from the early days of the European colonization and exploitation of North America, alternative reality traditions existed and with emigration from Europe, India, Africa, and elsewhere, an “intercultural continuity” began to develop that later came to be called “the melting pot” that was United States of America. Lofland (1987:95) posits that “[i]n a global system of ever-changing, intercultural contact, variation in the character of such contact becomes itself a topic of importance. Such culture as practiced by social movements, because they are promoters of social change, is even more important.” A holistic, non-dualistic reality was already part of Native American religion and culture, so the United States, from its European political

⁴ For a discussion of Hindu family life, see Religion and Society in India: A Cross-Sectional Encounter IN Max L. Stackhouse, *Creeds, Society, and Human Rights: A Study in Three Cultures*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984:199-233.

inception, was never one culture, but rather an intercultural or multicultural phenomenon with regional or localized pockets of specific culture-groups spread out from coast to coast. These groups did not share a singular world-view, and they had different life expectations. Indian thought, for example, values God as the goal of life, and one who has attained that goal, the realization of God, is most highly respected (Harding 1993:39). Nonetheless, Indian and other groups and the larger systems to which they belonged, ultimately had to compromise, interact, with capitalism, which regards success, and recognition for it, not in terms of God-realization, but in terms of worldly achievements, particularly wealth and the power associated with it. On American soil pre-conquest traditions and later arrivals also had to reconcile with the greatest religious proponent of capitalism, which, according to Max Weber, is ascetic Protestantism.

PROTESTANTISM AND AMERICAN CULTURE

Between 1911 and 1913 Max Weber's studies focused on world religions and their relationship to social and economic change. Beginning with the universal belief in the supernatural, his main interest was how religions served as sources of social change. In short, Weber (1963:xxxiii) suggested that the primary catalyst of religiously-based social change was the charismatic leader who was committed to reordering society and was able to motivate others to that same commitment. The charismatic leader offered hope for a better situation in the present, better than that of the normative social order.

The term “charisma” referred to the personal qualities of an individual or to a characteristic “inherited” through a lineage, such as papal charisma. Charisma, he viewed, as a gift or natural endowment, or as gifts that could be produced by extraordinary methods (Weber 1963:2). Wallis (1982:106) says that Weber’s charisma concept relied on the authority of the leader as recognized by his or her followers and that these gifts or powers could be acknowledged as being divine in origin or exemplary. Citing Shils and Weber, Stone (1982:156) explained that one aspect of charisma establishes an “underlying connection with some fundamental essence or sacred power” and that this connection is reinforced through “charismatic healing, miracles, revelations that by-pass traditional or rational authority. The connection becomes the central feature of existence.”

Charisma itself entailed either exemplary or ethical prophecy and prophecy refers to revealed knowledge from God or acquired knowledge, as from a teacher to a student. The charismatic leader was therefore identified as either an exemplary prophet or ethical prophet. The former was seen as a “vessel,” standing in personal relationship with the Divine; the latter was perceived as an “instrument” of God’s will and was compelled to fulfill a divine mission (Weber 1963:xxxv). Weber noted that East Indian religions best represented the first category, while Judaism, Christianity, and Islam fit the second.

Confronted by discrepancies between “what ought to be and what is,” or coming to terms with suffering and evil as they effect especially the “good” and undeserving of such misfortunes in the world, people embarked on a search for meaningfulness in life, a search that attempts to resolve the experiential discrepancies.

The meaning or goal became interpreted as the quest for salvation, Weber says, and was never a problem except in relation to the world.

Salvation had two aspects: one could either approach the world head-on and attempt to master its problems, as in the ascetic path, or one could avoid the world, retreat from it, as is typical of the mystical path. Essentially, the ascetic abandons the “cloistered cell” and takes his or her place in the world, serving as a prophet in opposition to the status quo (Weber 1963:175). The mystic, on the other hand, seeks salvation through his or her contemplation/meditation, “divine-inwardness,” finding God within and wishing to take this knowledge of eternal salvation to other souls (Weber 1963:175).

According to Weber (1963:lii, 166-176), each path had two possibilities based on inner- or other-worldly tendencies, but only one of the four had the potential for producing sufficient power either economically or politically to affect social change. That was the path of the inner-worldly ascetic who seeks to master the worldly part of his or her personality and having accomplished that, seeks to extend that mastery to all aspects of life, and to other people’s lives as well. The other-worldly ascetic who masters the flesh has the greatest interests in devotional goals, while the inner-worldly mystic makes no attempt to escape life, but has no real concern with it either. Other-worldly mystics try to avoid all subjective desires, since these interfere with salvific interests. The last three, Weber believes, have the least chance of affecting social change, though, he admits, these characteristics may be combined (Weber 1963:117).

Throughout Weber’s work he points out that the most effective inner-worldly ascetic path in terms of social change was ascetic Protestantism, which did not require

a total life-pattern commitment, as did Roman Catholicism or Hinduism. Hinduism, with its insight into karma and causality, and its unified understanding of knowledge and action, never faced the paradox of the “perfect god’s creation of a permanently imperfect world” (Weber 1963:179). Ascetic Protestantism did, however, and one means to coping with this paradox was to place great stress on work in the world as part of the path to salvation, and as such, there was a need to legitimate productivity and justify individual needs religiously. In sum, the combination actually led to the “accumulation of wealth” by ascetics during the Middle Ages, as they produced cheaper labor than their married Christian counterparts could produce and eventually established the middle-classes in that historic period (Weber 1963:218). As a result, the first capitalist state was produced by the inner-worldly asceticism of Protestant Christianity and since capitalist economic activity did not bind people together as did other forms of exchange, interpersonal relationships did not develop between lenders or receivers of loans, business owners and workers, and others. A different kind of class structure began to evolve based on economics, not on community or familial social organization.

Peter Berger writing on secularization and Protestantism states the following:

As there is a secularization of society and culture, so is there a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their lives without benefit of religious interpretations.

While secularization may be viewed as a global phenomenon of modern societies, it is not uniformly distributed within them. Different groups of the population have been affected differently. . . the impact of secularization has tended to be stronger . . . on Protestants and Jews than on Catholics [in Europe] (Berger 1967:108).

At the risk of some simplification, it can be said that Protestantism divested itself as much as possible from the three most ancient and most powerful concomitants of the sacred – mystery, miracle, and magic . . . In other words, the radical transcendence of God confronts a universe of radical immanence, of ‘closed-ness’ to the sacred . . . Protestantism served as a historically decisive prelude to secularization (Berger 1967:111-113).

One other major doctrinal premise influenced ascetic Protestantism

dramatically, and that was the doctrine of predestination, a guarantee to the faithful as defined by a given tradition. Predestination, the idea of “free grace,” associated salvation with vocation and “the idea of success in rationalized [economic] activity was seen as God’s blessing” (Weber 1963:218). Radical Calvinism extended the ascetic role further, reconciling with politics. It was the will of God that the sinful world should be dominated, overcome, and the mechanism for this became political institutions. Revolution on behalf of the faith or its missionary enterprises was to be expected.

Martin Luther, on the other hand, though he rejected religious warfare and active resistance, felt such matters influenced only secular concerns, which were not the focus of the religious individual. Weber’s last chapter noted that the teachings of Jesus the Christ established that salvation required total indifference towards the world. Secular authority had no rule over the individual conscience and in matters of war, Luther believed, each person reconciled with God on his own. Service in such military activities did not destroy man’s relationship with God. Luther’s hands-off policy gave freer reign to the state to do as it would for material and other gains and the state knew it would always have the support of enough soldiers or sailors to man its forces (Weber 1963:227-230). Justification by faith alone became the doctrinal

basis of salvation, the warriors would find a place in heaven, and it was all predetermined.

Weber (1963:269) concluded that, while capitalism had existed among every religion, even during the medieval period, in these “there evolved no ‘capitalist spirit,’ in the sense that is distinctive of ascetic Protestantism.” Muslim and Hindu traders did not lack drive, but they did not possess the Puritan’s “rational and ethical limitation of the quest for profit” (Weber 1963:269-70). This ethic was built into the system, and as seen in the previous Berger quotations, only Protestantism removed all magic and the quest for salvation via supernatural means from its ideological base.

Theologically, several “Great Awakenings” had been taking place in American Protestantism. Philip Hammond explains that

. . . during the First Great Awakening (c.1730-1760), the ostensible theological thrust was evangelical, but the unintended consequence was the further (and irrevocable) disestablishment of Puritan Protestantism. During the Second Great Awakening (c.1800-1830), the theological impulse was again evangelical, but the broader outcome was a pattern of religious voluntarism that has persisted to this day. Similarly, in the decades following the Civil War, the theology took a radical turn in the direction of liberalism, but the more lasting impact could be said to be the institutionalization of religious pluralism. If one were to summarize two centuries of religious change, then, one might say that whatever their theological intentions, the periods of religious ferment led to even greater levels of individual choice (Hammond 1987:262).

Popular evangelical currents gave rise to Pentecostalism with its missionary fervor and greater enthusiasm, reflecting the growing harmonization of capitalist enterprise with religious individualization. But as telecommunications linked people world-over in the global community, an “unbounded” community running on a singular capitalist economy, an awareness of social and human injustice became

apparent in a way not realized before, and people began to respond to the oppression they saw or experienced with idealistic social activism. Old solutions to the problems of the human condition were not working, and middle class Americans looked elsewhere to find meaning and purpose in life. Many turned away from the mainline denominational Protestant churches and traditional Roman Catholicism and Judaism toward rejuvenated Pentecostal or evangelical sectarianism; others looked to the East for more holistic and universal explanations.

Scholars have speculated what this shift means. Hammond says that some think the “[n]ew religious movements in the last third of the twentieth century will lead to yet another increase in institutionalized individualism, just as the previous episodes of religious ferment [the Great Awakenings] did . . . Yet the appearance of NRMs on the contemporary scene has led some observers to the opposite conclusion – that the ‘sacred’ may be returning” (Hammond 1987:270-71).

THE 1960S AND FOLLOWING

The Oriental Exclusion Act was rescinded in 1965 by President Lyndon Johnson, allowing Asians and East Indians to emigrate to the United States once again (Melton 1987:52). While some Indian gurus and yogis had come to the states, the influx after 1965 increased dramatically. Gordon Melton lists some of the Eastern teachers who arrived between 1965 and 1972: Swami Bhaktivedanta, founder of ISKCON, in 1965; Yogi Bhanan, founder of Sikh Dharma (3HO), in 1968; Swami Satchidananda of the Integral Yoga Institute, in 1971; Maharaj Ji, Divine Light

Mission, in 1971; Sun Myung Moon, founder of the Unification Church, in 1972. A number of Buddhist teachers, like Tarthang Tulku, Tibetan Nyingmapa School, also arrived (Melton 1987:52).

After the First World Parliament of Religions in 1893, Indian religion was invigorated with a missionary zeal, the fullest expression of which could be seen in the United States from 1965 onward. Vivekananda and Yogananda had laid the groundwork for this Hindu expansion and the times were right for its appeal to spread among the middle classes.

Some Americans traveled to India to study with yogis and gurus there, such as Satya Sai Baba, who never came to the states himself, but who, nonetheless, had a following in the West. A number of prominent pilgrims studied with Sai Baba and brought back home his teachings, sharing their experiences with interested audiences. Elsie and Walter Cowen from California, Indira Devi from Tecate, Mexico, and Hilda Charleton from New York, were such pilgrims and back at home held kirtans and classes on Thursdays, Sai Baba's preferred day of worship (Ellwood and Partin 1988:212-214).⁵ Several Western Sai Baba Centers were established and the values he advocated, such as vegetarianism and dietetic purity, were followed (Ellwood and Partin 1988:214).

Television brought into American living rooms scenes of the world abroad and especially, the Vietnam War, the first historically telecast war, a war which brought "a new relationship between global media communication and consciousness" (Kearney 1995:554). Deterritorialization had begun and with it the reality of transnational

spaces. Television also broadcast social change and unrest at home: race riots, freedom marches, the “sexual revolution,” feminist, black, and gay-rights liberation movements, campus activism, etc.⁶ Social activists and Indian swamis found college campuses lucrative grounds for spreading their various messages.

Here, Melton reminds us that the intellectual community, colleges and universities, have been centers for the exchange of ideas and alternative religious expression. It was not new in the 1960s and 70s. In the 1880s Harvard and Boston Universities featured prominent speakers from the “new religions” of that day, such as Swedenborgian devotees, William and Henry James. Students and faculty reported on their travels abroad and the new and interesting ideas they had acquired (Melton 1987:49).

In the 1960s along the California coast at Big Sur, the Esalen Institute became the center of the consciousness-raising movement, which Toolan (1987:4) has likened to the early American utopian communities, i.e., New Harmony and Oneida. Responding to the traumas of that period, which “triggered a crisis of soul, essentially religious and probably always latent” (Toolan 1987:5), Esalen became the West Coast hub of activity for every possible type of therapy and in its formative days, served as a think-tank for such notables as Abraham Maslow, Arnold Toynbee, Joseph Campbell, Bishop James Pike, Ansel Adams, and Paul Tillich. Psychological alternatives

⁵ Kirtan is the chanting of devotional hymns to the gods and goddesses, often accompanied by the playing of Indian musical instruments.

⁶ By 1948 the medium of television had begun its influence with two million sets in use across the nation. By 1969 eighty-three million TV sets were in use. In the 1980s and 90s, the media as an instrument of news reporting had “fused” with the entertainment industry, making the distinction between fact and fiction less clear (Brown 1989, “Scholarship and New Religions in America: A Bibliographic Essay,” unpublished).

flourished – Gestalt, group therapies and psychodrama, psychedelics and primal scream – and as Esalen shifted its focus from interpersonal to transpersonal, the oriental traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism and the contemplative traditions arrived at the institute (Toolan 1987:5-25).

In California and elsewhere mainline denominations in the 60s and following banded together ecumenically, often at centers on college campuses, to meet a wider range of student needs. One might consider the possibility that these centers were a means of shoring-up the flagging denominations and defending traditional religion against the growing NRMs and the “new consciousness.” Other ecumenists shared real concerns for America’s religious pluralism and wanted to enter into dialogues to promote human awareness and justice, and to discourage the irrational fear of the “others.” They found the knowledge of shared humanness to be of greater importance than those elements which emphasize human distinctions.

Ultimately, the general response to the many disturbing episodes of the 60s and 70s has been called the “revolt of the middle classes,” intricately linked to a loss of confidence in government, politics, education, economics, religion, etc., and to the personal search for meaning in a troubled, change-ridden society (Ellwood 1987:243, Friedman 1989:51).

One of the greatest reactions to this loss of confidence in religion and other institutions, to social upheaval and inequality, and to the distress of the war, took shape in form of “the counterculture,” frequently symbolized by hippies, the “drug culture,” and wandering middle-class American kids disgusted with the life’s paradoxes. Wallis tells us that the stories of educated kids dropping out are common.

that large numbers of these students were attracted to world-rejecting movements of the 1960s and that such movements “possessed clear cultural continuities with the counterculture, and since secular change efforts had failed, many young people were open to the idea – sometimes encouraged by the drug experience – that a supernatural realm existed and that salvation was now likely to come only from that direction” (Wallis 1987 85).

In a very real sense, advances in the sciences decades earlier played a significant role in the evolution of alternatives for coping with and understanding social change, one often forgotten. Parapsychology, developed in the 1930s, studied paranormal experiences and gained “full recognition” as “a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science” (Melton 1987:54). A Swiss chemist initiated a “scientific revolution” in 1938 with the synthesis of properties later called LSD. The effects of the mind-altering drugs “set up a religious revival when several of the scientists turned from research to evangelism . . . The popular discovery of consciousness-altering chemicals and their widespread availability [after WWII], coupled with the identification of psychedelic experiences with religious experiences, seem to have strengthened the turn to religion as an aftereffect of their imbibement” (Melton 1987:54-55). In addition, psychiatry and psychology were both open to alternative religions. Freud, Watson, and especially Jung looked favorably upon religion and religious experience, and this science has been seen as a bridge between realities (Melton 1987:55).

In the 1960s the works of C. G. Jung became popular everywhere with students and adherents to the counterculture. Among other reasons, Jung provided

“modern psychological elucidations of Eastern thought. For his journeys to the East, he was adopted as their forefather”(Shamdasani, Jung 1996:xviii). With the works of Jung, translations of yoga texts, classic Indian literature and poetry, stories of the Hindu saints, such as Ramakrishna and Yogananda, and a book called *Be Here Now* by an American teacher named Ram Dass, counterculturists, intellectuals, and others were set. With breathing and other physical techniques advocated for attaining higher levels of consciousness, they embraced the East in the West, and not just at Esalen. They embarked on spiritual paths and found them meaningful in an otherwise paradoxical existence. Going beyond the “bounded” culture they had known to the “unbounded,” global community with its wide-open potential, they found agreement, a common culture with “primordial ties.” Friedman relates that this type of expression reflects “a moral search for the soul of man awaiting its freedom from civilized chains and finding roots in the distant pre-capitalist past” (Friedman 1989:54-55). For some during the period of the 60s and 70s, the search for a greater-than-materialist-truth, led them to a woman from Brooklyn, New York, an utterly unconventional guru, but, as one of her devotees has said, a guru with a “Great Heart.”

PERSONAL STORIES

“In the late 60s, the early 70s, I was doing primal therapy. I was sixteen, and I was looking for this thing to happen that would fix me of my pains or my obstructions. Being who I was, being screwed up, I started primal therapy in San Francisco. I had been through a horrible family life. I

did a lot of drugs, a lot of traveling. I was looking for a way not to be who I was.”

“At about six months my therapist said [she] had met this wonderful person in some kind of meeting . . . and she explained what had happened to her, how happy she was and impressed. There were also a few other people doing therapy who I felt were very committed to it, to fixing themselves, and I looked up to them, [and one of them] just left [for] Ma.”

“All of this was enough for me to go find out what [was] going on. I went with a bunch of Norwegians who had come over to do primal therapy. ‘Ya, ve zo screwed up!’ They were funny people to be with. I just remember that moment of seeing her [Ma] for the first time and how it opened everything inside of me including my head and I really kind of like fell in love with her, not really knowing what that was. All my Norwegians freaked out, stood up, and said ‘Ve are getting out of here!’ It was like overload to them. I think it had something to do with the energy level. It connected with the search somewhere, that longing, and after that everything else that happened was just sort of secondary” (A. R.).

“I saw a picture, an article in a magazine. She was with someone called Hilda Charleton on the one side and Ram Dass on the other. A famous picture. And I said, ‘Oh, whoever she is, I’d like to meet her.’ Some friends of mine had gone to see her in New York and had brought me a picture of her which I kept for years. I guess I knew about her in Berkeley. I lived in

Berkeley, '72 to '74. Around 1974 I went to Esalen. And my girlfriend went to study with Ram Dass. I was at Esalen about two years, asking for a guru, and I felt my life was in a shambles. I started reading books and my heart started turning toward gurus. I heard about Bubba Free John and about Rajneesh. Then Ma came to Esalen.”

“Esalen is so famous. We had every guru, every spiritual teacher, anybody who was ever anything in the consciousness scene. [They] wended their way through Esalen at some point. I was in a meeting room and heard Ma outside. She was talking very loudly and I kind of rolled my eyes. I turned to my friend and said, ‘Ach, another guru!’ We were all very jaded there. One famous person seemed to melt into another. The door opened and she came in and I went, ‘WOW!’ I just felt her essence and it was almost as if I was hit somehow. She turned around as if she felt something also, and she saw me way in the back of the room. She turned to me and said, ‘You know, we haven’t even started yet. What’s your name?’ I told her and she said, ‘You’re very beautiful!’ I fell madly in love with her right then. She left and called us all phonies, except of course, for those of us, like me, who liked her” (I. O.).

“I was living in Boulder, Colorado. I was 33 years old, married with two children. I saw a picture of a woman and there was something that I can’t even describe that was appealing to me. I was very drawn to the picture. It didn’t make me want to go the seminar [she was going to give]. I just

remember seeing her face and thinking she was so appealing. Then I forgot about it.”

“So, friends of ours had given a call to my husband and said, ‘There is a woman coming to Boulder that I think you would like to meet.’ [She] turned out to be the same woman who was on the poster [picture]. I had to work that day and my husband went and came back. He said, ‘Well, she isn’t God, but if there is ever anyone who was, she would be it’.”

“A few weeks later she sent one of her closest students out to Boulder to do an evening with everyone, meditating, singing, and he was an absolutely gorgeous man. Sitting there, I was spellbound by him. It was at this home where a lot of her students lived and I really didn’t know anyone. I was a little more than nervous. After we stopped singing, we were just kind of sitting in silence and all of a sudden, he reached over and just touched my heart with the end of his finger. I just crumpled and cried. It totally wiped away all that fearfulness. We talked that night and it was all so new. It was like stepping into the most incredible adventure, and although I had known something about spiritual life, that was my first opening. Up to that point I was an atheist. He started to explain things to me about spirituality. He was a student of Ma’s and his guru was Baba Neem Karoli. He had been in India with him.”

“After that I wanted to be at the house. They [the people at the house] were all talking about Ma, saying it wasn’t him [the handsome student] I felt, but it was really Ma. I didn’t know what they were talking about because I

hadn't met Ma, and then, all of a sudden, it was like fireworks. It was like the most incredible fireworks went off and I realized that Ma was my guru, that you spend your life looking for it, and Ma was it" (Q. D.).

"I graduated in '64 from Yale, had a Fulbright in Paris, studied political science, and got a job in Washington, D.C., as a correspondent. I wrote a book that received awards and I achieved a lot of worldly success at a young age. I didn't have anything that I wanted to prove either academically or professionally, but I was drawn in a direction, a spiritual direction. What I saw through my own searches convinced [me] that God was a reality, there was really a God, and that it was actually possible on some level to merge with God. So, doing anything else made no sense to me."

"I started on a quest, looking for God. I went to a number of spiritual retreats. I went to three Ram Dass retreats. I went to the Self-Realization Fellowship and visited Yogananda's ashram. I went to Satchidananda, to his retreat, and to [other] retreats in California. Ram Dass' retreats were good, but I still didn't think he was my guru. I was going to kirtans in New York with a guy who used to be with Baba [Neem Karoli]. Ma was teaching, but it was still private; she wasn't public. You weren't supposed to go and she wasn't teaching publicly. I heard she was teaching in Mount Manressa, which is a Jesuit retreat on Staten Island. I went down there anyway, to the Jesuit retreat, and sat way in the back, expecting at any moment to be kicked out. I was sort of hiding against the wall and Ma walks in, clearly the

opposite of anything I expected a spiritual teacher to be. She was wearing a lot of jewelry and makeup and swearing and doing all sorts of things with people in a more raucous way than I expected a spiritual teacher to do. Anyway, she is doing this and then there is a girl from Wales who is in a lot of pain. She had different problems, and Ma had to bring her out of this [pain] to help her. Ma asked her and the girl sang 'Summertime.' That was really a nice thing and Ma asked, 'Who will sing to her?' The last thing I was going to do was sing, because as soon as someone saw me, they'd throw me out, however, at that moment I got this incredible searing pain in the middle of my chest, an enormous pain, and I started to sing. Ma said, 'Who is that? Oh, it's you, _____ [she gives him a spiritual name]. Come with me!' It was a very amazing experience. That is what other people describe as an opening of your heart" (P. R.).

"In 1975 I was working for the telephone company, and a friend of mine who had been in the Peace Corps in the Philippines had encountered an interesting spirituality, and was attending classes with this teacher named Hilda. I only went [to Hilda's] one time. It was a big meeting and Hilda sat in the front and they talked about God. There was a definite Eastern flavor to things. Hilda used to teach every week. I think it was on Thursdays, and my friend had discovered Hilda as being a person who could lead her toward her own spirituality. I said I'd like to go and I think Ram Dass was actually

there that night. Ma was mentioned but she wasn't able to be there. They called upon her [Ma] and there were some psychic things about it."

"A month or so later my friend calls and says, 'Hilda needs a favor.' I said, 'Sure, I'll help. She's a nice lady and all that.' While I was at Hilda's, the phone rang and I answered it, and it was Ma. I felt something right away and I kept seeing this purple light, which I came to understand later, was an Eastern thing representing the Mother. I kept seeing this purple light while I was speaking with her and she asked me if Hilda was there. I said, yes and went to get her. Hilda took the phone and Ma told her to hold my hand and Ma proceeded to speak to Hilda, to tell Hilda several things about my life which no one knew. I didn't even have time for my mind to click in at that moment. It just felt right. It was the feeling that, of course she knows this and this is someone who was going to mean a lot to me" (O. W.).

"In 1975 I was the director of an ashram in upstate New York. I wasn't very happy with the teaching and I prayed to a picture of Christ, a picture of Christ that was very beautiful. I would suddenly get covered with white light and I knew something real was happening. I was told to go visit a person that was teaching with Ma at the same time, Hilda. I got the message to come to Ma's class the next morning in the building that I was director of. I was the director of the studio and rented it to Ram Dass,. The next morning I walked in and I saw a woman surrounded by a lot of fellows. I didn't know who she was. A fellow came out and asked my name and a few minutes later

he came over and spoke to me that ‘Ma would like to see you.’ So, I walked into the office and she said, ‘Come sit in front of me and look at my eyes.’ And I just looked in her eyes for five minutes without closing my eyelashes and at the end, I knew she was the Divine Mother.”

“But I didn’t want to have a woman guru. I went around to some of the [her] houses. They were beautiful houses, [but] the accommodations were terrible and I didn’t want to go there. I went back home and prayed to my picture of the Christ and I got covered with white light again. Sound came into my head that these people are mine – they will help you to do what you need to do to become who you need to be. Being a true devotee, when you ask for help from Christ and you get it, you’re stuck. That’s it. Like it or not; woman or not. It didn’t make any difference. I knew that was what I had to do. A few days later, I moved into the ashram, one of the houses at Queens. I met Ma on the same day that Ma met Neem Karoli Baba, but one year later, exactly to the date, July 31st”(P.J.).

“I had been in a previous teaching in the early 70s, and I had a friend in that teaching who was in Chicago. I was doing stuff in California, traveling to LA and San Francisco, looking up old friends, staying awhile and getting odd jobs. I was a hippie. [Before that] I went to the university for about a year, stopped going to class, stopped studying, dropped out, went to work in a factory, then I got drafted. I volunteered for the Marine Corps, went to Vietnam for two years. That was an eye-opener.”

“War is a horrible way to live. You don’t fight all the time. You don’t kill people all the time. [But] the lifestyle, the horribleness of that kind of living, that kind of fear, that kind of taking something or trying to hurt somebody. It’s horrible. It was a horrible war. Then I went back to the university for another two terms. I became a hippie. I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I couldn’t take care of myself. Not only didn’t I know what I wanted to do, I really didn’t know how to take care of myself, even with all that good experience in the Marine Corps. But I realized after the hippie stage, [I was] looking for a teaching, looking for something deeper, whatever it was reconnecting with whatever it is, than a community life. A community life had to have a singular focus. I needed a teacher, rule, authority, discipline, something like that.”

“I went to San Francisco, got a job, got married, had a daughter, and I was still looking. Then I found Baba Ram Dass. [He] was the warm-up man for Swami Muktananda, so my friend [from Chicago and I] went to see him. I didn’t know who he was. On the stage sitting with them [Ram Dass and Muktananda] was this big guy, bald head, in orange also, and that was Rudi [Rudrananda]. I went to see him twice. I loved Baba Ram Dass. He was great, like middle America’s swami, guru, Eastern type. My friend ended up with Rudi in New York. I stayed in California another couple years, [then] went to meet Rudi. I stayed there, in the Catskills, worked very hard. When Rudi died, I stayed in New York with my friend, and then ended up living in one of the houses in Queens, one of Ma’s houses” (P. W.).

“I grew up in an extended family, during WWII, and I grew up with aunts and cousins, and uncles, and brothers -- eighteen people in my house. There was always an older person to take you out, people to teach you. One cousin taught me embroidery. One sang songs to us. There was always somebody. I learned about carpentry from my uncle. I always had my head in the car with my boy cousins. I learned about the engine.”

“I remember living with my mother when we moved into a situation where it was my brother and me, my mother and father. It wasn't the same. It was a lot more tense. You were right up against whatever problems you had and there was no buffer. [When] I was ten my dad had wanted us baptized Catholic and we were, after growing up Baptist, [and] after having been christened Episcopalians.”

“When I was very young, my aunt had a Masonic picture. I was telling her about this picture and she said, ‘Oh my God, listen to this child talk about that picture.’ [At] ten I dreamed of Christ and I dreamed I was following him across a field. There was always something, dreams, something. Then when I was eighteen, we had philosophy in high school and I met a girl from New Jersey who was interested in being a Quaker. [S]he wanted me to go to meetings with her. It was quiet for a long time. [Later] I was sitting in the woods, not doing, that whole thing – doing, not doing. And all of a sudden everything around me was alive in a way that I had not ever realized before. I count that as my first conscious experience.”

“So, no matter what my husband and I have gotten involved in, going toward some kind of knowledge, it was for clearing away psychological baggage. Spirituality has always been there. I heard about Ma from my husband. Ma sent us to live in different places and I was living in Colorado with the kids. Whatever it [all] meant, it was change, and I could either do it or not do it – it wasn’t a question. It was like being in school: if you’re going to be in school, then you follow what the teacher tells you to do, or don’t be in school” (X. A.).

“**When I was about six**, we lived in New Hampshire. My family moved around a lot. We started out in New York, at least when I was born, and then by the time I was six we lived in New Hampshire. My sister and brother were both born, I guess, [when our parents] explained to me one day that ‘Daddy’s going down to New York to find a spiritual teacher.’ I simply said, ‘OK.’”

“We were kind of interfaith already, my dad being Jewish, my mom being Catholic. We had a Begging Buddha, a Christ Puja, and we listened to Hindu music. That was neat. He comes back home and we basically pack up to move to Brooklyn. He had found Hilda [or] re-found her or heard about her. Anyway, we moved to New York and then after a year or so, we moved into one of the New York houses, like mini-ashrams. We lived there about three years. I always loved change, so it was an exciting thing for me

to do. I hadn't really noticed the transition; it wasn't bumpy. It was just different – we're going to do this now" (Y. W.).

“My parents were very kind people who grew up in [the] middle class suburbs – hard work, education. [B]ut for me, something was missing, something I needed to do. I was a good student, but neurotic and unhappy. I had a fellowship to [a prestigious university]. I was a good teacher. I taught school in a black community for several years and moved out to California for a year. I tried other means of making a living and they just hadn't worked, even when I succeeded they didn't work. I finally acknowledged that I was not happy and that I needed to look for God. I stashed my belongings with a friend, got a traveler's letter of credit, and set out to travel around the world, which was an idea that had been implanted a year earlier. I had some money saved and I wanted to be just a ship on the water, just no one. If I traveled I wanted to just be someone on the bus. I wanted God to run things, because I felt that trying to do it myself had not brought me happiness or satisfaction. I didn't want to make [any] plan[s]. This was in '71. To be honest, I clearly felt I was being driven to this course by my unhappiness and my misery.”

“I started in Europe and had some adventures. Got to Istanbul and proceeded farther East. I spent some time in Tehran and Kabul, stuck there because the border between Pakistan and India was closed because of the war. There was a kind of community of travelers to the East, and so finally

in January of '72 there was a way to get to India. It was warm in India and somehow I felt very much at home there. I wrote my dad at the time that it felt like India was the Great Mother on the belly of the earth. [E]ventually, circumstances brought me to Rishikesh, to Hardwar, to the Holy River. I didn't know anything about Hinduism, but I certainly felt that it was a Holy River. I spent a few wonderful months there. In Resikesh I arrived in the middle of the night. I could hear the river nearby and I felt like I had come home."

"When I got back from my trip around the world, I had two goals: I wanted to live in a spiritual community and [I wanted] to meditate for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. I [had] practiced meditation when I was in India. I got back to [the university] and there were two spiritual communities, one was New Age spirituality and the other group was 3HO, American (Sikh) Yogis. I was living in the ashram, fell in love, and married my first wife. I became a 3HO (Sikh), a good Sikh, full beard, turban and all white, the whole scene. We were involved in different jobs, but after a few years, about '76, my heart just kind of dried up. I certainly respected the teaching I was in, respected its tenets and teacher, but it was not the end point for me. There was something still further. So, my wife and I moved to an apartment."

"Then a 'friend of a friend' came to town, to Phoenix where we were living and we went over to meet this person. He was a very special person and all he could talk about was this wonderful woman named Joya. Joya was

perfection. My wife said this should be next and I said 'OK.' I said, 'You go on to New York and then I'll follow you' to Queens. I arrived somewhat later than expected, but I met Ma at Montauk. It was 20 years ago about this time. I was sitting in the back of the room, still wearing a turban and full beard. I just remember Ma had me stand up and she said 'Welcome,' just a few words. [U]p to that time I had been a seeker, I'm still a seeker, but it was clear that I really hadn't found what I was looking for and after coming to Ma that particular question just seemed to go away. There was no flash of light or anything" (B. O.).

"I was in Hollywood, working with a well-known producer, and I noticed that he was on this strange diet. Whenever we would have big group meetings around a meal, he'd have this little container of food that was green and weird. So, I asked him about it and found out that he was on this nutritional program that actually was calming him down a lot so he was no longer throwing things and being abusive to people. I was fairly burnt-out physically from a very intense, stressful life and wanted to make some changes in my diet. I ended up flying to New York to see this doctor who put me on a program of natural hygiene. This doctor came to Los Angeles periodically to see his clients or patients, and one day he came to visit in the home of this producer. There was a woman there who was assisting the doctor and she looked at me and said, 'I think there's someone you should meet.' Very out-of-the-blue. She invited me to this home in Tapango

Canyon for what was going to be a phone class by her spiritual teacher, who was Ma. It turned out that the entire Kashi Ashram was on this diet, working with this very same nutritionist. What was interesting was that just prior to this woman's looking at me, just in this circumstance that she was assisting the doctor, I had actually started to go into spontaneous meditation by being on this diet program."

"One night I actually had a dream that I attributed to the diet, where I was on an operating table and I was dying. A voice, my own voice, said, 'You better find yourself a guru.' I didn't even really know what a guru was and I knew that it wasn't my body that was dying; it was my ego that was dying."

"After hearing th[e phone] class, I was compelled to go visit Ma. This was in 1978. I wrote to her and she said to move here immediately. [That] was highly unusual. I did come down for a time, but I lasted only two and one-half months" (G. O.).

"The first time I met Ma, I was approximately eight [years old], in New York. My mother had met Ma in California. I think my aunt introduced [Ma] to me. Right after that we moved to New York. I remember it was at some hall. I remember me and my sister being all dressed up and meeting Ma. I loved her immediately. She was a beautiful woman. She made [someone] take us out for ice cream which was great. We lived in New York for about two years, me and mom and my sister. My mom and dad

divorced when I was really young. He still lives in California. [Then] we moved to Florida. I think it was in 1979, or 1978, so I was nine years old and I've been here ever since" (H. O.).

"My parents heard of Ma [when] we lived in Colorado, before we moved here and Ma had the ashram. She had different houses throughout the United States where she would go and give darshan. I'm not sure how often that was, I was very little, but my parents had some friends who had heard of Ma, so they went and saw Ma. We ended up going to meet Ma in Colorado at a house up in the mountains. She was staying in someone's bedroom that lived in the house. There was a bed in the middle, up on a cement slab kind of higher than the rest of the room. The bed had a big blue blanket over it, like a big blue comforter and that's the only thing I remember. I don't remember her [Ma]. I just remember seeing the comforter. When we moved into the house in Colorado, [it] had a similar setup to what's here on the ashram. There were maybe nine or ten people living in the house, and there were a couple of houses up in the mountains. We were in the second new house. We lived there for two or three years."

"I was little and my brother was about two. Ma was very sick and so she was asking people who wanted to, to move down to Florida because she couldn't travel anymore. We drove down with ___. Ma [had] called [and given us our spiritual names] and we got into this yellow Volkswagen bug

and drove down here, [me and my brother] were killing each other [fighting with each other] all the time” (Y. P.).

“I met Ma in May of 1977, in Los Angeles. I had been living in Los Angeles for about three and one-half years, having moved there after I finished college to get into the arts, the entertainment industry, music . . . There was a lot going on out there in the 70s, so I thought that was the place to be. I was starting to realize that it was not the fulfillment that maybe [I] had idealistically hoped to find there. Around 1976, I was pretty disillusioned. I was pretty lost. I was 23, 24 years old, and really starting to wonder what I was doing with my life. I wasn’t the kind of person who wanted to just settle down, get married, have kids, have a nice house with a white picket fence and all that. I can remember when I was a kid, I knew I wanted something different and I used to picture living with a lot of people and pursuing my love for the arts and creativity.”

“As a teenager in the 60s, I remember writing ‘God is Love’ all over everything. Although my parents were very open spiritually and accepting of many different kinds of people, especially since we were Puerto Ricans in the Midwest, in a largely white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant setting. They were always inviting people to our home who might otherwise have nowhere to go. I had great training in that tolerance of diversity, but I can remember arguing with my father about how I didn’t feel you had to be a Presbyterian and go to church every Sunday and all that stuff, to be in harmony with

Christ's teaching and things like that. He never tried to shove it down my throat, but it was a source of usual teenage friction. I was pretty much a typical textbook preacher's kid."

"I was rebelling, also in the arts, and getting high a lot on pot. I wasn't a heavy drug user, but it was definitely, in retrospect, affecting my attitude towards life in a negative way. I went back to LA after a rather painful Christmas holiday and said I don't know what I am going to do. I'm going to give [it] a few more months, and then if this doesn't work, I'm going to leave or do something else, maybe go back to school. I still had a great love for music and wanted to connect with other people who shared that. I got a call, [inviting] me to come play some music, so I drove across town in a thunderstorm and the guy's power was out at his place. I could hear music from outside and it immediately touched my heart. It was like music I hadn't heard for a long time. There were three or four guys and two other women. One girl, a few years younger than me, had this voice that was just incredible, and when she sang, it was like opening my heart. When we would take a break, the rest of us would go have a beer or something and she would go and do yoga in the corner. She was a vegetarian, all these little things, and I started questioning her about it. I was searching for something to fill that emptiness that I had been experiencing."

"About four months later, she called me up and said, 'If you aren't doing anything tonight or tomorrow, you should come to this church in Santa Monica because there is this woman visiting and talking and I think you'd be

interest.’ It was Ma, of course. I remember that day I went to dinner with a friend of mine before I went that evening and we were in a restaurant on Sunset Boulevard. I’m talking to this friend of mine across the table. There is this older male, a Jewish man, typical, probably from Brooklyn, sitting and reading while we’re talking. I’m telling her I’m going to see this lady and she is sort of a guru, and that I need a spiritual teacher. So, this guy pops up, ‘You want a guru? Here, I’ll give you a sacred mantra – sense of humor, sense of humor – remember that. That should be your mantra.’”

“I went to the church in Santa Monica. We all sat there in pews. There was a big picture of Hanuman and maybe a picture of Baba, and some people were singing kirtan to the divine mother, to Kali. The kirtan was beautiful. Then Ma came out. She was up in front, sitting in lotus position and talking about simplicity, the liver and all these things, and how you can have a simple life. I’m thinking, how boring. Simplicity, that’s boring. Then she had us do a meditation about believing. It was like a fire breath and I remember that was very powerful for me. She was obviously a special person, but [I knew] she [was] not my guru. A guru comes from India and it’s an older man. He has an accent and has spent a lot of time in the Himalayas and does not have a Brooklyn accent” (G. G.).

“I had gone through a lot of hardship growing up. My mother died when I was three months old, and I was brought up by my stepmother and my father. I was definitely abused. I was raised Jewish and I always loved

God. I loved the Christ, [too], and I felt I could identify with the Christ on the cross. At one point I was going to nursing school and I remember meeting this young girl who wanted to be a nurse and a nun. I came home and said, 'I want to be a nun.' Then I was put in a mental hospital when I was seventeen. The school counselor suggested it to my stepmother, and I was put in a mental hospital. I did have learning disabilities, which I still have. I always pushed myself to try, but I got beaten up a lot. A friend of mine tried to kill herself and I told the guidance counselor. [She told me] my [birth] mother had died in a mental hospital, which I didn't know at that point. I also found out his [my father's] mother had been put in restraints in Bellevue."

"She [my stepmother] was supposed to be my mother, [but] everything was a lie. They put me in a state hospital and my stepmother said, 'Isn't this nice. This is where your mother died and I made sure you got in here.' It brought me a lot of anguish and I wanted to kill myself – you learn a lot in a mental hospital. I learned how to be tough. I saw all these people that really needed help and as a whole, I always did better when I was away from my parents. That was the hardest time in my life. They put me on an awful lot of drugs, and I just surrounded myself with total darkness."

"A friend of this friend of mine invited us to this class in New York. Then we came to the ashram in Florida and Ma invited us to talk to her. She said to me, 'I want to take care of you for the rest of your life. I want you to live here.' It just filled my heart and my soul. I realized that nobody had

ever wanted me before. I felt safe for the first time in my life. Ma gave me back my life” (O. R.).

“I met Ma in California where I grew up, and I worked in a bookstore with a girl. It was her husband who was the one who met Ma. He was searching for someone like that. I went with them to meet Ma and the first time I met her, she made a real impact on me. I knew my life would never be the same. I remember saying to myself, ‘Well, I could just not ever see this person again, if I chose to,’ and I really dragged my feet. I wasn’t on a spiritual path. I wasn’t looking for anything. I hadn’t read anything. I stopped going to church in junior high. There were all these people sitting in church and all week there were bombs dropping on Vietnam. What sense does that make?”

“When I was in high school, I went up to a communal living place [where] they took care of kids with disabilities. I was up there for a week or two, and I remember one day just saying, ‘I’m going to live in a community when I grow up.’ It was during the Vietnam War. Coming out of the 60s, and that was the group ahead of me, I felt like everybody was hypocritical. I’m more a product of the 70s. I wasn’t on a religious quest. It just happened. I wasn’t searching, but I was floundering out there and I fell into the right place. I also met one of the people in California I became close to and married [later]. I really wanted to be with this person.” (R. A.)

“I had several families. My blood family was fairly nonreligious, except for my mother [who] was Southern Baptist. We didn’t go to church, but I wanted to go to church because I loved God from day one. I also had another family that I spent a lot of time with and they were Mormons. I got pretty involved in the Mormon Church, [but] then the family moved away. I just went wherever I thought I could find God. One of my best friends was a Baptist or something and I went to that church. I became a Jesus Freak. I felt constrained by the dogma of any church, and got involved with Sai Baba. Then I got involved with Gurumayi. She took over the lineage from Baba Muktananda, and Siddha Yoga. Siddha Yoga has millions of devotees around the world. [But] it is fairly self-serving.”

“I saw a flyer, Ma’s picture, at a natural [foods] grocery where I shopped. I felt some very deep connection and was planning to see her in the Fall of 1993, but I didn’t make it. [Later] I went to see her. She did a retreat, actually, and I went to Friday night darshan. I didn’t understand her [Ma]. I didn’t understand anything, but I did buy her picture. I went through some very hard times, and I kept her picture with me until the Fall of 1994, when I saw her at Sedona again” (G. O.).

“I was in my late 30s. My wife was a year younger than me and we already had three children when we first heard about Ma. Since we were about eighteen years old, both my wife and I independently began following a spiritual path and doing our own studies (scriptures and meditation

techniques). When we married in our middle 20s, we continued what we had both started, and we moved up to northern New Hampshire in 1969. [We] continued doing the same thing, meditating and yoga, learnings and teachings, along with regular 'householder' life, as it is called in the Hindu tradition – husband and wife, children and jobs.”

“In 1973 when we were still living in New Hampshire, we began to feel a kind of hunger, as if our spiritual reservoir we had built up was beginning to get down very low. It was beginning to dry up. We knew we weren't looking for any teachers of the same level that we had had before, that we wanted something a lot more than that, although those teachers were very worthy of respect and gratitude. From a friend of ours in New England, we heard about a woman teacher, Hilda Charleton. She was a very spiritual woman who had spent eighteen years in India, being with holy people and teachers. When she came back from India, she was probably in her late 60s. By 1974 I was feeling a deep hunger for this One, whomever this One was. We went down to meet Hilda Charlton, to be blessed by her, to have our children blessed by her. [But] I knew this wasn't the One yet. She sent us back a very great gift, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the great Hindu saint whose favorite form of God was Mother Kali. So I was reading about Kali, Kali, Kali for a whole year before I went to continue my search. I was a social worker in New Hampshire.”

“I went down to New York City to one of Hilda's classes and it was wonderful. You could just feel God and love and spirituality fill the whole

place. After darshan, a couple of my friends said, 'Oh, you should have been here last week. Hilda brought this woman here. She was an amazing, incredible woman. She had all this makeup on and she was so funny. She was so earthy, and she had such a great sense of humor. She cursed more than ten drunken sailors.' There was something about that that just thrilled me to pieces, and I understood what it was. There were, in the scriptures of the world, here and there, not very often, references to great spiritual beings who didn't fit the stereotype of great spiritual beings. These types of holy people in scripture always touched a place in my heart. When I heard this about Ma, that place just went click."

"Later, when I saw Hilda, she told me to call her at her apartment at six p.m. sharp. I was in a noisy Chinese restaurant and went to the pay phone and called. I didn't know it but Ma was sitting there with Hilda. Coming out of the receiver was this exquisite feeling, like standing under an ice cold waterfall. It was like pouring of the shakti, which is a vehicle of Ma's love, of any great god's love. [Hilda] said, 'I want you to come tomorrow at 5:30.' I went to this beautiful penthouse overlooking Central Park West, and it was full of people. Then Ma walked in and sat down and called me up to sit down in front of her. I just looked at her and she looked at me and I felt, 'I'm home. Home.' Everything was completed and at the same time knowing I had years and years of work to do. Love [was] pouring out of her, like a golden liquid, like liquid gold. As soon as I could get to a phone, I called [my wife] and said, 'We got it! We got it. I found her!'"

“It’s always this: Guru calls you, that’s how you find guru in the Hindu tradition. You don’t find guru, the guru calls you, ‘Now, it’s time to come!’” (A. F.).

CHAPTER 3

GURU AND CHELAS

MA JAYA'S STORY

The story of Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati has been well documented in ashram literature, local and regional newspapers, and journal articles, and it is here we begin the discussion of both the guru concept and the relationship between the guru and her chelas or "students." As one chela noted in a personal story, a guru is thought to be an older, Indian man who does not have a Brooklyn accent (G. G.), but stereotypical notions that have prevailed are short-circuited by the person and story of Ma Jaya.¹ And one may begin to see the process of globalization at work, that "interculturalization" affects every level of life in both the public and private spheres.

Joyce Green was born in 1940 in Brooklyn, New York, of an Orthodox Jewish family. Growing up in poverty on the "mean streets" in an ethnically-mixed area, she learned to survive and embrace life, to "keep a sense of humor, and respect people of every race and background" (Kashi Foundation 1994). Her mother died when she was thirteen years old and her father, whom she adored, but who was a gambler, did a less-than-satisfactory job of parenting. Joyce learned more on the streets than she did at home. Life along the Boardwalk at Coney Island and the street people at Brighton Beach served as her teachers.

Her mother's death was a terrible blow to the young girl, who found it hard to understand why her mother should suffer in pain and die at a young age. Her mother

promptly explained to her that nobody could provide an answer to “why” such things happened, and that Joyce should get out there and help people, rather than ask unanswerable questions.

At age 15, Joyce married her “Italian stud,” as she calls him, and they began raising a family in Brooklyn. She decided to try a weight reduction program and learned that yoga could be an effective method for shedding pounds. In the yoga class she was taught breathing exercises, a part of traditional yoga, that she practiced enthusiastically and for long periods of time, but in 1972, she began to have visions and experience stigmata. Her visions of Jesus the Christ were terrifying at first, especially for a Jew. In her 1995 book, *Bones and Ash*, she says,

When my Christ came to me
my whole life changed
What used to matter
had little or no meaning
at the feet of Jesus

I made the conscious decision
to dedicate my life to service
after getting rid of my fear
of seeing Christ
in my living room (Bhagavati 1995:105).

Joyce’s spiritual awakening brought visions even more “culturally-remote” for an American Jew than those of the Christ. She experienced God in visions of the Buddha, the Indian God Krishna, and Indian saints (Borfitz 1987:27). As one chela tells it, Joyce went to Hilda Charlton who helped to define for her “what was going on in her spiritual life. It was so extraordinary and Ma was puzzled by it all. Hilda put Ma’s spiritual experiences in a context, an X-Y axis. She knew exactly what

¹ Braun 1995; Kashi Foundation brochures, 1994 and 1995; Lippe 1995; Matousek 1996: et al.

everything that was happening to Ma meant, what it represented, as well as what it showed about Ma” (A. F.).

The powerful experiences of Joyce’s inner journey led her to her own teacher and guru, the former being Swami Nityananda, the latter being Neem Karoli Baba. She received a spiritual name which, over the years, would change, until she came to be called Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati or in the shortened form, Ma, meaning “Mother” in the East Indian context and a Sanskrit title of respect. She went to the Jesuit mission, Mount Manressa in New York City, and shared her experiences with the missionaries there. Soon she began teaching students at Mount Manressa and meeting Hilda for darshans with her students. Ram Dass, too, was drawn to Hilda’s classes, hearing of this exceptional woman and perhaps knowing they shared the same guru, Neem Karoli Baba.

But all this caused great consternation on the homefront with her husband and children, who could not understand Joyce’s transformation and her newly-awakened spirituality. The chelas tell how during this initial period, Ma attempted to keep her darshans and appearances before groups private, not open to the public. She was striving to keep her marriage and family in tact, though in a short time, both would dissolve. Rebuilding those relationships in the wake of this new spiritual path would take years (H. Q., et al.).

In 1976 Ma Jaya and a few select followers moved to Florida to found Kashi Ashram. After one abortive attempt in a resort community on the coast, they settled in Sebastian, along the Sebastian River, renting first, then purchasing, the initial seven acres from a local dentist. The property, primary scrub, sand, and ponds, was not all

that hospitable, but the chelas were there for more than mere comfort. One chela related, “20 years ago when we were all still hippies and first moved here, we didn’t have [the] luxury of this much space, [not] for many, many years. We lived in three or four houses, all crammed together [with] several people in a room, sleeping on the floor. [But] all of our attentions were on Ma. We wanted to learn from her” (Q. D.). Students came to Kashi to study with Ma Jaya, drawn by her extraordinary gifts and charismatic presence, her dedication to God, her distinct and often bawdy personality, and her ability to relate to each one at his or her individual spiritual level.

THE CHARISMATIC GURU

To accept the feet of the Guru
in one’s heart
is to begin to live a full life
Once the Guru has received the chela
everything unknown becomes known
or at least all that needs to be known
becomes known

The Guru picks you up
from the dark, infinite abyss
and brings you light in your life
Alone no more
the voyage becomes exciting
Once filled with foreboding
the chela now walks proudly
without pride on all paths
holding the hand of the Guru

To heal the scars of life
the Guru purges the chela’s gloom
and says,
*You are safe my sons, my daughters
safe in my arms* (Bhagavati 1995:62).

The previous quote from Ma Jaya's *Bones and Ash* gives us a glimpse of the relationship between this charismatic guru and her students. Part of Weber's concept of charisma was earlier noted as the identification of a religious leader's extraordinary gift(s) by his or her followers, and this recognition is an integral part of the guru-chela relationship. Andreas Braun, in his 1995 dissertation, writes about Ma Jaya, his guru:

When I first met her she had begun to teach in a remarkable combination of ancient wisdom, Brooklyn street smarts, and all-encompassing love. . . . At all times she gave as much of her love to me as I could hold.

At our first meeting I felt an immediate recognition. Although it was never expressed, it felt as though I had known her forever. Something in me knew that she was safe, that I could trust her completely.

Ma has received a special grace. She calls it "the Boon of Kali." It is a gift to let the essence of the Black Mother manifest through her. In this way she guides her children - her students - on their way to themselves. As the Black Mother she frees them in their quest for liberation by helping them to come to awareness and to know compassion for themselves (Braun 1995:45).

Clearly, this description identifies the exceptional gifts of Ma Jaya, and other students reiterate this as well, as we will see presently, but in Weber's charismatic typology, at least for this situation, the ethical and exemplary prophet distinctions are not so clear cut. In fact, given the multicultural impact of various religious and spiritual paths on Americans since the 1800s, Weber's definitions are not very accurate.

Weber's ethical-exemplary distinctions coincide with the differences between Eastern and Western religious traditions, distinguishing the ethical prophet as most characteristic within Judaic, Christian, or Islamic traditions; whereas the exemplary prophet typifies Hindu, Buddhist, or other Eastern traditions. At the turn of the twentieth century, such distinctions may have been appropriate, but even then, Hindu swamis had begun to establish teachings in the United States and influence the

intellectual community (i.e., Vivekananda; see also Melton 1987 *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 1001-1004). The lines between the East and the West, the ethical prophet and the exemplary prophet had already begun to blur. Also, since the 1960s, the growth of travel to and from India, and the influence of telecommunications have presented Americans and other world citizens with a view of many cultures, many religions, none farther away than the turn of a dial or press of a button. Where the Kashi tradition is concerned, the teacher and the teachings represent multiple aspects of various faiths and cultural traditions in an “intercultural” phenomenon. Ma Jaya has said, “I am a Jew who loves Christ, who is a Hindu, who just built a Sikh temple next to her Christ Garden, which is next to her Tibetan Temple, because I’m also a Buddhist. I worship the light of Zoroaster and bow to Mecca” (Matousek 1996:97). And during her spiritual experiences with the Christ, Ma Jaya was told to “teach all ways,” to teach all spiritual paths to those who sought her truth. At Kashi all religious traditions are honored, so discriminating between traditions of the East and the West, even though in a purely ritualistic sense there is greater emphasis on Hindu-based practices, or between Weber’s prophetic types in categorizing the guru, are rather irrelevant, and do not present us with the best possible interpretation.

Ma Jaya resembles the exemplary prophet by her personal example and by directing others toward their own spiritual realization. Wallis (1982:3) explains that the exemplary prophet helps to prescribe a means by which transformations may arise, so that individual disciples may “escape the karmic cycle and attain Nirvana, or Enlightenment, and in so doing acquire powers and abilities beyond what are available to those mortals who remain sunk in maya, in illusion.” As the Guru is seen always in

relation to God and to her students, this clearly fits Ma Jaya, but she expresses ethical prophecy, as well, by her example of caregiving to the sick and dying, and in her teachings, which encourage her students to serve humanity, especially, to serve and care for those with AIDS or other terminal illnesses. Service is an integral part of the spiritual path, one which fits best into the ethical category, and as we will see later, Ma Jaya, as the personification of Mother Kali, may be the vehicle by which the Great Mother in the form of Kali comes to the West, a type of enlightened missionary activity. As deity personified, she is more than a vehicle, however. According to Wallis (1982:2-3), the ethical prophet, as a messianic figure, may be viewed as “a tangible manifestation of God on earth.” and for many this is her role. We will return to this shortly in the section on Kali and Ma Jaya, but essentially, this guru fits both of Weber’s prophet types, and in being the focus of an ashram that has managed to sustain itself in the capitalist world, to grow, and to offer services to local, national, and other communities, Ma Jaya may be the combined exemplary-ethical prototype.

It is helpful to recognize that the greatest bond in the community is that which exists between guru and chela at an individual level and that the community itself and its rituals are secondary to this relationship. Historically, the Indian guru’s authority was greater-than-parental authority in teaching and molding the student’s life.

In his cross-cultural study, Thanaraj identifies the principle aspects of the guru concept in his model of Saiva Siddhanta. The guru:

1. denotes a fully human being, male or female;
2. is always understood in relation to God. It is a theological concept;
3. is always linked to the process of salvation; the guru has reached a higher level in the salvation process; and

4. basically functions to remove impurities that bind the soul. S/he helps the soul escape samsara [rebirth] (Thangaraj 1994:47-48).

Worship of the guru and meditation upon him or her occurs because the guru is understood to be, in the Tamil case, the God Sivam in human form. The guru “indwells” the disciples, and the disciples live for the guru in surrender of the self (Thangaraj 1994:50). Because salvation can only be found and recognized by the soul through the human person, the guru becomes the teacher of the individual for the purpose of liberating the soul. What the guru embodies, since God is Formless, is God’s divine grace and in this example, the guru is not identified with any particular caste or lineage. The guru’s humanity is never denied, and it is the disciple who recognizes the guru to be functioning as God to him or her. What the guru does, in this instance, for the student is more important than who or what the guru is (Thangaraj 1994:52-57). The personal stories of the chelas at Kashi mirror a number of these aspects, for example, Kali’s divine grace acting in and through Ma Jaya, and Thangaraj’s model finds much agreement with the Guru of Kashi Ashram.

Griffiths (1982:24) notes that life on an ashram, generally speaking, focuses not on the “common prayer of the liturgy,” as is the case with Christian monastics, but rather on “the personal prayer of each member”, who came to share the “experience of God, the experience of Guru.” In this sharing the concept of charisma does present us with other important features that pertain to Kashi and to Ma Jaya, and Wallis (1982:2) has stated that the authority of a religious leader has to be reinforced in terms of his or her exceptional gifts or powers, and that he or she must be responsible for sustaining the community and individual commitments. The best examples of these

aspects of charisma, meaning, authority and responsibility and their effectiveness, are apparent in the stories of the chelas that describe their relationships with Ma Jaya.

PERSONAL STORIES

“No loving mother (and no good teacher) will sit idly by, seeing her children suffer. She comes and shows them a better way. But if the children persist in blindly creating more pain for themselves, she can get tough to set them straight.”

“The spiritual journey is just this awakening from our own blindness. And just how children know that Mama loves them even though she may be frowning for a moment, so we too have to know the unlimited love that underlies the cleansing, liberating action of the Mother.”

“A good teacher - whether male or female - is such a mother. A true feeling of love and compassion must reach out and act. True compassion removes the obstacles to loving.”

“In this way Ma has brought Kali to the West. She has brought a boundless love, a great intensity, and a ruthless commitment to Truth to her chelas, her students, and all those who have simply come to love her over the years. In her ability to free those she loves from falseness and pretense, Ma has passed on the magnificent blessing of the Dark Goddess” (Braun 1995:46).

“I really had a lot of unworthiness about myself. I went on a retreat, on a weekend retreat and went through a lot of stuff. I’m a real shy person. I met her [Ma] initially coming away from it thinking that she was like the ultimate therapist, because I was comparing my experience with primal and my therapist. What I saw was [that] Ma had a different version of how to clear up that stuff and it was more effective. I could just tell [by] my judgments of the people that were with her. I liked who they were and how they felt. It’s about being real, being honest as you can be about yourself and other people. It’s very important what we do. Initially with Ma, we didn’t think about service; we thought about liberation. [In the] early parts of being with Ma, [that] was the fix yourself part. I felt somewhere that I would be liberated. I wanted to be a better person. Liberation is sort of like primal therapy. It’s sort of like a dream in a way: maybe it’s real, maybe it’s not real, I don’t even want to figure out if it’s real. I just want to live more in the moment” (A. R.).

“The moment I came to Ma, I realized that all those years at Esalen that I had strived to get rid of my pain were almost wasted. I came in depressed. I left depressed. But when I met Ma, my depression lifted and I realized it was because, at last, I had a spiritual connection. And the ego could not kill the ego, which is what I had been trying to do at Esalen. As soon as I made the spiritual connection, somewhere deep inside and it was through grace (I felt that all the love that I received was an act of grace) that my pain began to

lift. I felt I had been fed through the heart for the first time. There was nothing in the world that fed my deepest needs.”

“Sometimes I’d thought of leaving [Kashi] because I thought I wanted something different outside, and each time I would go out, it would be that same emptiness. I thought that here [at Kashi] was the greatest truth and the greatest fulfillment - it’s just a place of peace.”

“Ma, who is divinity in her godliness, comes through a mind that is so large and so encompassing, [she] follows God, literally with all her heart. Ma’s a truly great soul. She’s very spiritual. She’s been called “the Mother Teresa of the West.” I follow her because of her Great Heart. When you come into Ma’s presence, she being who she is, you feel who she is and you feel your simplicity in the presence of her Heart” (I. O.).

“**Ma came to Boulder** and I was absolutely terrified. She kind of sauntered into the room, just real casual like nothing was happening, says ‘Hello’ to me and I was absolutely paralyzed. Couldn’t say a word. She was just so relaxed. I didn’t have to meet her in a big auditorium. I remember when she walked in she looked at me and I saw these sparks come out of her eyes, but it was very fast, and later that night I was remembering some things that happened, because she went on to have a whole darshan with everyone. I remember I saw that spark come out of her eyes and it just slowed down and [I] looked into the spark, went into her eyes, and it opened up. It was the whole night sky full of stars. It was incredible.”

“I think the core of us who have been here this long have been with Ma many lifetimes. She and Baba [Neem Karoli] are the core of our experience and I am here because of Ma” (Q. D.).

“She [Ma] said, ‘Well, you should come with me and live in one of my houses.’ [And] as I said, if God is real, then what I should be doing is working on merging with God and clearly, I have a connection with Ma which I didn’t feel with any of these other spiritual teacher I met. . . . You have lots and lots of teachers, but only one guru. I certainly had read this: you have a guru, then you have a lineage, you have a satguru , whether your guru is Christ, or guru could be the Holy Spirit. Your guru could be Mohammed. Those people, those are entities who are not in the flesh, but they could still be your guru, or your guru could be someone in the flesh, which is a lot nicer, they say, because you can actually have the flesh to go to, to talk to, get advice. It is better to have someone in flesh, depending on what your tradition is, [and] clearly for me I saw that my connection was with Ma.”

“Ma talks about this a lot, [and] it is very true, [that] there is a honeymoon thing in the beginning stages of someone’s being on a spiritual path. Depending on who the person is, miracles can abound. There are all sorts of things that are very exciting. A lot of people never see miracles, just never see them. I did. I also have experiences in meditation that are

exciting. I see things. Things happen. I've never been bored in this teaching."

"I went to Europe and I sat in the Sistine Chapel. I was just sitting because I always wanted to go and sit there. Almost anywhere there is something. You can sit there and feel something, what the essence is."

"There have been miracles along the way. The part that she wants to do is the healing of the heart and the mending . . . [People] came in with such pain [at the retreat] and they came out so much freer. Healing of the heart, that's a big deal. I do know that there are clearly enlightened beings around who can do things, because Ma is one of them. She is not the only one, certainly. There are others out there who do good things, but she happens to be my guru, and I'm here with her and that's good for me" (P. R.).

"Several months later [after the phone call at Hilda's], my friend heard about retreats out at Montauk and Ma was coming there and teaching. Ma had just opened her classes to the public. I had arranged to pick up my friend from work and I was getting ready and that's when I heard this voice in my head that I recognized from that one phone conversation. 'I'm not going to be there . . . But you should go anyway. It will be very important.' I didn't question it. It just felt right. So we went out there and it was great that I was there. I ran into people that were so familiar to me that I felt like I had known them forever, and I found out later that's what happens when you meet people who are with the same guru."

“I went home and the next weekend was the same thing. I drove out by myself and there was the same high level of expectation. Ma walks in through the door and at first sight I had all these different awarenesses that amazed me. The first one was that I knew I had been with her from lifetimes before. I knew she had been waiting for me in this lifetime and somehow to be ready for this meeting. The other one was that she wasn’t going to talk to me for three months. She actually did say one sentence to me and that was it for three months. She sat down and taught and I thought, this is the way Christ would have taught in the temple. This has got to be the same kind of thing. And I knew that they [Ma and Christ] were kindred spirits, if not more.”

“I remember this one man who was visiting and had lots of arrogance in the way he was speaking to Ma about his wife. She said: ‘You fucking asshole. How can you be so fucking arrogant? Who do you think you are?’ And I thought, oh my God, how wonderful. A spiritual person who is not trapped in a mold. It was straight from the streets, straight from the heart, totally right. I thought, how fabulous – a holy person who is really holy. As Ma was leaving, I encountered her in the hall and she did say one thing to me: ‘What’s your name?’ I looked at her and said, ‘I really need a new one,’ which was a metaphor for the life that I was ready to embark on, a whole new existence. She got a big charge out of that and went on” (O. W.).

“We were the second group to come down [to Florida]. Ma used to fly every Friday up to New York to give darshan for all the people living up in New York and that became tough for her. Then she got really ill and everybody who wanted to stay in Florida [she said] could stay with her. Plenty of jobs in Florida.”

“[Then] there was a period of time where I just felt I had no use here. I wanted to leave my body and Baba didn’t want me to leave. One day [Ma] is giving darshan and she was sitting on her tucket. She looked at me and said, ‘You want to leave your body don’t you?’ I said, ‘Yes, Ma.’ She said, ‘No way am I going to let you go. Maybe when I get to be ninety, I might consider it.’ I’m [thinking], when she’s ninety, I’m going to be one hundred and ten. Oh my God. She nearly fell off the tucket, she laughed so hard. She read my mind and she just laughed so hard. Once I knew I was [P.J.], then I had use. I didn’t have to do anything. I just have to be here and many times Ram Dass wanted me to do things and Ma would look at him [and say], ‘He’s not here for you; he’s here for me’ and that was it. No more discussion.”

“I truly have a family now. I never had a real family. They were always apart and we never really had much time together. Being here, all these kids, our children. It’s a general feeling throughout of a family. It’s just beautiful and this is all Ma’s doing. She never had a family either, but she is making sure that she has a great big one this time and I’m very grateful to her for that” (P.J.).

“I’m here at Kashi because of Ma. That is the only reason, *the* reason.

She’s my whole life. She is helping me go where I need to go. She is trying to show me the way and help to do things, *not* doing for me, helping me find my way.”

“With Ma, who is constantly stirring up life so that you have to meet yourself in different situations, relationships, challenges, you’re constantly consuming life, moment-to-moment things, living in the moment. Living is going towards death and Ma’s teaching us how to live by teaching us how to die, as far as the ego is concerned. And then we learn how to live more, we learn how to die more, and we share.”

“I’m with Ma and Ma’s my everything, but I am more able to think for myself than ever before. I am more able to feel for myself than ever before. And I am able to do for myself more than ever before.”

“Ma constantly pushes out in the world, constantly makes challenges for us out in the world; not to promote ourselves but to learn about ourselves and to serve, to share, and to deal with other people like we deal with ourselves. I stand up on my own and I can do more for other people. That’s what Ma is about to me. That’s what I’m about to me” (P. W.).

“I came down in ’80, but the kids had been here since ’79. The school was just being formed. They never went to public schools. The River School was because of our kids. There was no way I was going to have them polarized in the southern community, into either being black or white. If you

have one drop, you may as well forget you had white anything. You're just black, no matter what, and I don't think most black people feel that way. It's highly insulting. But it's what is! I knew there was no way that we felt it was healthy to send our children to public school."

"Ma is the only reason that I am here and in Florida. If you think I want to spend my days, when I could be in a cosmopolitan, multicultural atmosphere that was extremely creative or at least, had a lot of creative people in it, that I would choose to spend my life doing this – unless this were better than that – there's just no way. [But] with Ma and me, there's a depth. I know some teachers tell you to meditate. It's all on a mental level. But with Ma, it's a bigger slice of things. If you had to take your existence and if you saw your existence on a horizontal plane and you took a slice through it in a moment, on a vertical plane, there is something from here to there, even though they are infinite in both directions. Part of my slice in looking at my levels is being aware of and living in my levels, and Ma's that way, but only more" (X. A.).

"**Ma** was really concerned about my family moving down because we're a mixed family and she was concerned about the children. We were 12, 9, and 6, and she was worried about us going to the public school system and bumping into a lot of prejudice. We really never had to deal with that living in New York. There were enough qualified people to start a school. [They] pushed for college and helped us so that we were eligible for scholarships. It

was the beginning of the school, a college-prep school and it was only ashram students at that time.”

“I went to college when I was nineteen. Everybody knew that I was different. People would come up to me [and say], ‘You know, there’s something different about you. What is this?’ Not relating to college, but some people, when we’re on trips with Ma, have actually walked up and said, ‘What does your group have? I want it.’ I was always surprised by their awareness of something that’s different. But in college I took the responsibility [that] I represent the ashram very seriously. I never pushed the ashram in people’s faces. I would invite them to my home and darshan and to meet Ma if they wanted to. And some people did. They might feel a connection here. My friends from different countries, like from the Caribbean and England, would come and say, ‘Oh, this is nice. This is cool.’ And that was that. It was the American people who [would say], ‘Uuuuuuuuhh. This is weird.’ And ‘Eeeeeooooo. You didn’t have a prom? You’ve never been to a pep rally?’ And it happened across the boards.”

“When I was about twenty, I remember going through a very difficult period. Then when I was twenty-three, it really hit me full-force. ‘Is this what I want to do with my life?’ I remember having a physical pain in my chest. I couldn’t breathe. In hindsight, Ma has said or heard that when you’re not where you are [meant to be] or doing what you’re meant to do, you will have pain, whether it’s physical or a pain of the heart (anguish type of thing). I realize[d] that’s what it was -- that type of pain -- while I was

thinking of myself not being here [at Kashi]. It so went against my heart and my soul, inside of me, that I felt it. So, I made the decision [that] I definitely don't want to leave here. I know I have an incredible foundation that I am building my life on. There are no cracks in it. It's not going to decay. It's there for me to build. I graduated and made the decision that I'd rather be a teacher and not have money, but be really happy."

"[When my husband and I] wanted to get married, we told Ma and she was amazed and excited. She basically helped plan out the entire wedding. There were over one hundred people in my wedding party, because I was in the school and my students and former students wanted to be in it. Everybody got together and did so much. It was like a fairy tale. And we wanted to try for a baby right off. [When] I thought I was pregnant we told Ma, 'We're having a baby!' and she was so excited. Because Ma has really grown up my family all together, all of us together, in lots of ways, she's my mom in different things, [and] she's a Grandma Guru – half's the grandma; half's the guru. Sometimes I look back at my life and it just seems like yesterday when I was twelve, but in other ways, all this [growth of the ashram] has been created since that time when I first met Ma" (Y. W.).

"As I look back, and I didn't realize this until probably '76 during some retreats at Montauk, that what I was missing in life, at least as I viewed [it] at that time, was the Mother. Ma teaches about the Mother, the Goddess, and she comes in many forms, any form you need her. God is formless,

omniscient, omnipotent. God's love is like a father's love. God's love is like a mother's love, and that's what I learned, the concept of God the Mother. The Mother can be in Mother Earth or a beloved spouse or it means form. Ma has taught and brought us to this concept of the Mother and Hinduism. Hinduism has lots of form: Shiva as a baby, the Mother, Ganesha, Hanuman, these are all forms. They are all Mother."

"Right now Ma emphasizes service and I've always had this passionate caring for social justice, but not [with] a lot of personal contact. She has helped deepen that. She has helped us learn about death, a big forbidden topic in the West, but more should be said about it. There are two experiences which we all share, two traumatic experiences: one is we are born; the other is we all die. We have been serving people and caring for them and helping to ease that time when every person deserves that kind of caring. At the same time, we've been greatly enriched ourselves."

"If you talk about what has happened at Kashi, it would take a book to chronicle the last twenty years. Because the nature of reality has changed, and that's one thing about Ma – things are never dull – things are always changing. We have gone through so many phases, Tae Kwon Do, horses, being single sadhus, now many of us have families. We were hippies and I guess we're still hippies in a way, but we have to focus on jobs, making money, taking care of business. To take care of the Mother, that's our job, [too]. She's our precious charge to take care of and to help her care for humanity. That's why she is here."

“Being on a spiritual path, [and] it sounds pedantic, but one of the rules is you’ve got to put the spiritual element first. As with the Christ, that has to be first. It’s the same. You put everything else first [and] it’s not going to work out. If you look for a spouse, a career, it won’t work out. If you look for God first then the other things will work out, maybe not the way you expect, but they work out. [And] Ma has taught us there are many paths. We don’t have a book. There’s not one path, but we are about tolerance, and certainly, Ma has broadened my perspective in this area. I was concerned with social justice but I wouldn’t have had the contact and awareness of other views, say [of] the gay [and] lesbian community, except for living here and find[ing] out these are just people, my brothers and sisters. Yeah, I’m in love with the Goddess.”

“Ma is my guru. The guru is here to help the chela. Sometimes you say, ‘Ma, why now? Why Brooklyn?’ Ma said there are so many different cultures there. ‘Why here?’ – because she is needed” (B. O.).

“After two and one-half months [at Kashi], I went back to Hollywood. My career was still moving forward. I would periodically come down and visit. In the meantime I had another teacher, Gurumayi, Siddha Yoga, and ended up going to India. Siddha Yoga is not so much an alternate community as an international ashram. I didn’t see Ma for a period of eleven years. I met Swami Muktananda in 1974 in California, but I didn’t delve into it very much at the time. In 1978 this whole thing happened with the diet

and Ma comes into my life, [but] I had a whole career and was extremely successful. What was scary was, on the one hand, I had this career which was very ego-building, and on the other hand, I was with the Black Goddess who was stripping the ego in a very nice way. They were two very far extremes.”

“When I first got here in '78, my first time with Ma, she said, ‘Go sit in one of the temples and I’ll take you in.’ And I sat down to meditate and in about a handful of seconds, I suddenly had a filmic as in looking at a film, a filmic image of Christ. Right here to my left, all in white. I knew it was Christ. I didn’t believe in Christ. I didn’t even know there was such a [real] person as Christ. I thought he was a mythical character. I didn’t get the whole thing. He was Jewish and supposedly we [Jews] killed him. And suddenly I’m meditating on Christ in the moment. I fell in love with Christ and it was because of Ma’s connection. She brought him into my meditation.”

“Everyday with Ma is an incredible experience and I am absolutely in love with her, and this is the key reason why I did end up moving back here. It’s a community of those who share the truth or share the love for God or share whatever – love for the guru, love for service. We work very hard, but I love it. I thrive on it. One of the things that needed to come to rest for me to come here was that I was ready to come here and commit myself to it completely for the rest of my life. I don’t know that I can say ‘forever,’ but I

can say at this point that it's most likely I'll be here the rest of this lifetime"
(G. O.).

“There was a point, when I was nineteen, at which I thought, oh God, is this what I want? I have lived here basically my whole life. I don't really know any different, but I do. I did know what was out there. It took me maybe a few months of going back and forth and trying to figure out what I was going to do. Then it came to a head and I really decided I'm going to make the decision: Is this or is this not what I am going to do[with my life]? If I'm going to do it, I'm here and I'm going to do it all the way or I'm not. I decided to stay and that's when I made the adult decision. I'm not here because my parents live here anymore. I'm here because I want to be here. [I] haven't looked back since then.”

“What makes it interesting for me [is] I don't *have* to be one way. Just because I live on the ashram I don't have to be Hindu. I don't have to be Catholic. I can be all of them. I can pray to Christ one day and I can pray to Buddha [an]other day and I can pray to Hanuman the next, and in my mind there really isn't a better or lesser [one]. The rest of it comes from Ma or whatever you feel.”

“When I start thinking of the future, I don't really think of a job as much as I think of what I want myself to be, who I want to be, rather than what my job will be. To me a job pays your rent and takes you through the day. I try to think of maybe [being] a better person in the future or not necessarily a

better person, but able to be more who I am or who I want to be, [like] help other people, help with retreats, help take care of Ma, take care of the ashram, which is really the same” (Y. P.).

“I [have] always acknowledged that this was my family and I loved Ma passionately, but I definitely wanted to see the world. I wanted to get out there, but when I got to college, I lived up in Orlando for a couple of years. I got to travel to Los Angeles, to New Mexico, around the country, and I changed. I saw other people’s lives. I made a lot of close friends at college and they were just lacking something. I couldn’t understand what was their goal or their focus. To me, my goal, my spirituality, is such a part of me I can’t imagine going to bed every night and not just thinking about Ma or Baba [Neem Karoli] or meditating or something, or having Ma or having someone to teach me, guide me and help me in where to go.”

“After I got out for awhile and saw the world, I just wanted to be here so much more. I guess I took for granted how much I learned here, how much I was taught: being with people dying, serving, being detached. Some of my friends would just breakdown in the hospital. [But] I knew how to deal with it. I talked to that person, the family. I took it for granted, I guess. It opened my eyes a lot. I decided this is my home. I love what we do. I love serving. I love being on the spiritual path.”

“I went to a Catholic school. I never felt a strong connection to that. I loved all the ceremonies, the stories about Jesus, but I didn’t feel a personal

connection, even though I do love Jesus very much. I think I felt scared of God. A lot of my friends who are Catholic felt this sort of fear. They were given this fear of religion, [to] be afraid of God. But every religion can be personal to you. You have to find it, find what you want, know that you have that connection.”

“Always in the back of my mind I have this strong devotion, [I think about] sannyass, like a monk or a priest, on a path to God and that’s your main purpose in life – not marriage or sex or any of that stuff, material wealth or anything like that – it’s just very simple, direct and very devoted. Ma has suggested that I consider this path, that I become a teacher, a source for other people to look to about religion and spirituality. That’s kind of torn inside of me. Part of me feels [I want] to do that, that part of me has such a love of God, that’s all I want to do. The other part of me is thinking about material wealth, having a husband, and celibate as I am . . . [and] I would just love to educate teenagers about safe sex. I was really active with the River Fund and in college with AIDS Awareness, meeting some of the people who have no idea, say teenagers, who continue to put themselves at risk. It’s still very strong inside me to do that kind of work. There are so many kids and teenagers and babies out there that I’d love to be with, to help and teach or whatever. However, I don’t feel I need to have my own. I just feel such a strong connection [with] so many kids that could be my own” (H. O.).

“I woke up feeling like Ma or that experience of going to see her in Santa Monica, maybe that meditation and that breathing, had done something to me. I continued my life, started meditating more, going to yoga classes around LA. My friend who had told me about Ma would invite me now and then to a group meeting, meditation or something. I was a little scared. I think it was just the reality of it was scary to me. I kept trying to lessen the experience or say just, ‘Yeah, Ma is obviously neat.’ I had my astrological chart done by a student of Muktananda. He told me I was at a crossroads in my life. He invited me to some Muktananda things and I said, ‘Have you ever heard of Ma?’ At that time she was known as Joya. Apparently he had been there when Muktananda met Ma and she was something else. She uses crude language, kind of outspoken, really loud. For some reason everything he was saying about her was making me realize I wanted to defend her, like ‘Hey, so what.’ It [his approach] wasn’t as close to me as someone I knew calling me and just casually saying come if you want. Nobody was trying to get me to do anything. It was all my choice, my responsibility, to make this happen if I wanted to.”

“I was still playing with the same group, our music was going well. We decided to get a house together so we could practice in the house. We went to look at this one house that was totally empty, but on the floor someone had left a copy of *Be Here Now* by Ram Dass. I picked [it] up and started looking through and reading about Neem Karoli Baba who is Ma’s guru and it just felt like I was home. I moved into the house with the band. We came

home one day and someone had broken into the house and taken little things, jewelry, things that had belonged to me. My car was breaking down, I got laid off from a job and I was destitute. I was changing. I just wasn't fitting into my life anymore.”

“When I did see Ma again, she had been to India and showed slides of her trip. We were all in this house up in Topango Canyon. One of the guys introduced me to Ma and sitting in front of Ma, [s]he just looked right through me and said [something to the effect of] ‘Why don't you grow up? It's time. You're a woman.’ She was seeing who I was, showing it to me in a magnifying glass. [S]omewhere I felt her love but I also felt she didn't like me. I think it was that I wasn't liking myself. Ma works with each person, with what they need, and who they are. She led a meditation and I opened my eyes and she is looking at me, looking right at me. It was this connection, I think, that was the moment when I knew Ma was [my] guru. [S]he's a teacher, she's good, street smart, wonderful, compassionate. [A]ll the mind stuff, the doubts went away.”

“After that point I started going to retreats. She was killing me continually, like, ‘What are you going to do with your life?’ I remember Billy, Ma's first chela, was at those retreats and I could feel he had a wealth of inner peace. He was a great man. He was very matter of fact. He said [that] moving to Kashi or choosing this life, and acknowledging yourself as Ma's chela is no picnic. It's hard work. It's commitment.”

“I got a personal invitation to come to Kashi and arrived early on the morning on Ma’s birthday. That was when I first set foot on the ashram. At the time it consisted of two houses [and] a pond surrounded by sand, some palmettos, palm trees, and a little wooden Hanuman Temple. My parents came to visit in the early days and saw the way we lived, which was crazy. All we wanted was to be at our guru’s feet. We wanted to make this place happen somehow. It was our dream to make that vision a reality, [but it] was a little hard for parents to come and see this place and believe that our vision was going to make it. It took time, but now they have retired here. They live two blocks away. They come over [and] Ma calls my father ‘her bishop.’ She has him say grace at every Easter dinner, Christmas and things like that. They don’t come to darshan very often but they are spiritually very active in service and still do a lot. They see how crowded we are and that Ma is doing great things. I guess about a month ago, I was at hockey and skating around before the game and Ma was skating around. I passed her and she says, ‘You have a good life’ and I said, ‘I have a great life.’ I realized that I really do and I’m very grateful” (G.G.).

“**I came in August**, the day after Ma’s grandson was born. I helped to raise him. I was one of the teachers at the nursery school. I couldn’t believe somebody would trust me. They trusted me and I had to trust them. Ma just let me become who I am and that’s what’s amazing about Ma. She let me love myself.”

“When that thing happened with Jim Jones, Jonestown, I remember my father got really scared and called me and Ma had called us all into Dattatreya Temple. Ma was crying and told us, ‘The worst thing that you could ever do is to kill yourself.’ And I remember the words staying in me because I always, you know, [thought about suicide]. Then she said we were go[ing] to Disney World to celebrate life, and I remember thinking, ‘God, this is how you do this.’ Ma is always in her own way celebrating life instead of sitting and grieving. All of a sudden you realize that life is a celebration [and] even in death you have to celebrate.”

“This last year on the ashram has been a really important year because I changed more. Have to keep growing. My stepmother died, my father died, and it was just so hard, because as they got older they got more closed. When I said, ‘I’m going to come up and visit you,’ [they would say] ‘Who’s going to take care of you? Who’s going to cook for you?’ I cook meals for one hundred and twenty, but they couldn’t take that [kind of] change. Now my sister [has] moved down here and she lives five minutes away. When my stepmother did die, Ma only said that one of the amazing things about me was [that] I always forgave. People said I [shouldn’t] say anything about my stepmother if I [couldn’t] say anything nice about her. People would get so crazy when I talk[ed] about her. It was OK, but in the end, she realized a lot. At her funeral everybody was crying and I was just glad she had died – she had diabetes and really went through [suffered] a lot. Ma said you can always forgive but don’t forget and I love that.”

“I’m trying to use my simplicity in myself and living more communally and making it better. That’s actually up to me [to do]; it’s not up to the other person. It’s really up to me and I have to change, not the community change, and if there are things I don’t like, then I have to bring [them] to the person, work with [them]. That’s what Ma taught me this year. If I want to make it [life] better all around, then look at it and make it better for other people, not just me. I want to get to that place, not what I wanted to do but [what] I can do. My sister surprised me, because she said [the people at Kashi] are my family. My sister totally honored it. I feel I’m very fortunate in my life [and] I remember when my stepmother was dying and she said [that when I] was a little girl, [I knew] success is individual and I love[d] service -- just didn’t know quite how to do it” (O.R.).

“This person I wanted to be with, not my husband now, [but] a prior husband, moved down to Florida [after] we got close in California. I moved to Florida later than most and I think part of that was I had to move to Florida to be with Ma. I couldn’t move to Florida to be with [someone else] or just with a group of people that I liked. It wasn’t that casual. If you’re in connection with Ma and if you’re not on a path to God, you’re not going to stay here, no matter how much you like everybody else.”

“The first impressions of Ma I had really didn’t have to do with religion, because of the way she works with people and the issues that she works with. What you’re seeing is service. It’s not until you know her or you just

happen to stumble in on a Hindu celebration that you understand the religion behind the act [service]. The actions are so real and right on target that you can accept the religion, the Eastern religions. She doesn't have any limits. She accepts all religions. I think our religion is like taking the vows of a priest or a nun. My life is dedicated to God. I'm lucky enough to have a guru in the flesh who is going to help me on that path. Most of Western society doesn't have a guru helping on their path."

"[T]here's a time that I had to deal with be[ing] away from Kashi. I was really sick. I had breast cancer and I had treatments here with an oncologist and I elected for a bone marrow transplant in Tampa. I was in a hospital for five weeks and then I was in an apartment for another month in Tampa. When I came home, I was in isolation for three months and only family could come in and [go] out of the apartment. I had to reach for something else and it really cemented my bond with Ma. I mean, I [could] feel she was pouring it [love] on me out there. The experience of a guru sort of transcends time and space. I'm sure she was with me. She was taking care of me. I could feel people praying for me. I could think of the ashram and feel everyone. It's hard to put into words, [but] I really felt taken care of" (R.A.).

"When I saw her at Sedona again, this time she look[ed] through everybody's eyes and we would look into her eyes and it was really wonderful to be there. Still, it's not a head trip. Last April I went to see her again, to the retreat, and after that I was on the road to LA to be with Ma

and I followed her for about six months all over the country. I couldn't stand to be away from her. I came during Durga Puja and I asked her if I could move here."

"I'm sure I can't do this any justice, but when people fall in love with the guru, they fall in love with her Great Heart. I think most people who [have] connected with someone like Ma are searching. I've been very spiritual my whole life and have been totally connected with God. When I met Ma, it was that feeling of meeting my own heart. I just couldn't bear to be away from her. The falling in love aspect of this guru-chela relationship just gets deeper and deeper, more profound everyday. She's not a guru that sits up on a pedestal, not that, I don't assume, any of them [gurus], really [do]. She's down here with us in the trenches and she says over and over that she would never ask anybody to do something that she had never done herself. She's done it all. She's a totally open heart and I think it's confusing at times because she's such a warrior. I really have not had a role model in my life. I certainly haven't had a strong woman and this is really good. I've got somebody to look to as a constant role model."

"[This] is not an easy teaching. The loss of the ego is the last thing that any of us wants to lose. It's all that separates us from reality, so I came here, not meaning to move here. There [was] no way I was going to move south or to Florida or a hick town, any of that, but I was here. You know, where do I get falatas? I am a real estate appraiser and that [means] working with the locals on a day to day basis. Just being around people who believe that

gunning down deer is a good idea . . . rifle racks, jacked up trucks . . . I really had to deal with Sebastian, Florida.”

“But I remained pretty much focused on what I was coming for, wanting to be with Ma, want[ing] to be of service. I realized this was like heaven to me, because when you help someone, I believe, the gift is really for you, and people used to say, ‘Why do you do this?’ It’s for me. I’m not this great kind of person. It just makes me [feel] so good to be here, to be of service. I find every time I get closer to someone, like the people at the River House or the people that I’m serving at the hospitals, [they] are mine, as far as I’m concerned. [One] was in pretty bad shape and I spent hours with him, making sure he was OK. It’s really easy to fall in love with them. We all need so much love.”

“[At Kashi] we have something so few people in this world [have]. Just sitting down and saying [to someone], I understand your pain. It is natural. I think, culturally, it’s taught that we deny our feelings. [A]t Kashi, people just serve and serve and they have no ego about it. They just do it” (G.O.).

“I brought the family down. Ma had given me my name and I’m here because Ma is here. I love my life flowing along with hers. I love helping her to do the things that she has done, which is important – to take care of people who are spit upon and frowned upon – and that matches up with something in my own makeup. The outcasts. My parents would tell that I was caring like that, caring toward other people since I was little.”

“If Ma was alive and elsewhere, I would be there, wherever that was. I wouldn’t care if that was New York or the mountains or another country. Anywhere, a solid waste facility, I would not care. And if Ma was not in her body anymore, maybe I would figure . . . it is hard to say . . . I would have to see in the moment. I love this place. I am really in love with this place.”

“[And] what is good [about Kashi] is that around you are people who are committed to the same thing, to fulfilling their spiritual lives, to service in some form. You have support around you in this little village. It’s very hard when people try to lead a spiritual life within a nuclear family out in the world. There are so many things pulling this way and that way, getting in the way, overpowering with loudness. Here with Ma there are not a lot of other things pulling in different directions. You have a chance to ask Ma to help, if you are having a difficult time coping. You can say, ‘Please, help me with this’ and she will help you with it. She directs you to your own resources.”

“What Ma’s doing and what we are trying to do to be helpful to her in what she is doing, is going to be tremendously important for the world. Tremendously. I feel that” (A. F.).

MYSTICISM AND YOGA

Wallis’ premise of the guru’s charismatic authority and responsibility for continued commitment are clearly evident in the chela’s stories. In this scenario Ma Jaya’s avid supporters, her students, follow her for numerous reasons, some mystical,

some practical, all devotional. But as one chela related, it is difficult to explain the loving relationship between guru and chela. Historically, this “intensely personal form of love for a personal God, ‘with attributes’ (*saguna*), such as Rama or Krishna” are found in the poets of bhakti and other devotees (Eck 1982:85). Others worshipped a God of every name, but a limitless God, one far beyond names or “distortions of ‘religion’” (Eck 1982:85).

In a personal communication, Andreas Braun explained that the matter of “being in love” with the Guru is “the simple way of expression for Americans. And it’s bhakti [devotion], which is often also expressed in very personal terms in India.” Loving is the “right way of saying it” (11/20/96). May Jaya writes in “And You Will Know Love”:

Love is saying God is everything
And knowing you are part of that God
...
Love is the heart of the Mother
that takes away the loneliness
of the human condition
...
Love never begins and never ends
But goes on
lifetime after lifetime
starting again where you left off
(Bhagavati 1995:28)

Similarly, the emphasis on service, following Ma’s example, and meeting other’s needs, among other things, shifts the focus from “indulgence in pain or self-pity – but only for those who are strong enough to serve from fullness, not codependency” (11/20/96). The level of commitment is strong, regardless of the

specific reasons for it. The guru is, after all, as one chela says, “the archetype of the presence of wisdom and compassion among us” (Braun 1995:1).

Place chela and guru in the same place at the same time
darshan is formed
It does not matter what is said
only what is heard
Darshan is food for the chela’s soul
The meaning of darshan
is the blessing of the Guru
You receive the blessing for you and you alone
It becomes very intimate (Bhagavati 1995:64-65).

Many of the experiences of the chelas can be understood as mystical or spiritual episodes and here, too, it is difficult for the “scholar-mind” to interpret these events. Steven Gelberg has written that “[s]ome scholars, including Bryon Wilson . . . assert that it is difficult to rate religious success or failure because ‘what religions promise [in experiential or salvific terms] is incapable of empirical verification. Of course, spiritual states of consciousness do not easily lend themselves to social-scientific measurement, but their are ‘internal’ means of assessing spiritual progress. Religious texts have been quite graphic in their descriptions of ultimate spiritual states, as well as various progressive stages along the way” (Gelberg 1987:202).

Several chelas suggested to me that the only way to begin to understand this, short of experiencing it personally, was to hear the stories *about* the experiences themselves. The experiences, for some a state of ecstasy, are “beyond time and space in a place where speech isn’t” (A. F.). Harding writes that with mysticism, everyday people cannot comprehend it, because they are on a different level of understanding, a level not deep enough to grasp the subtlety of spirit (Harding 1993:20) and Ken

Wilber notes that the dilemma is indeed linguistic because the experience is boundless. not restricted by time or space, whereas language itself is nothing but boundaries.

So the mystic must be content with pointing and showing a way whereby we may all experience unity consciousness for ourselves. In this sense, the mystic path is a purely experiential one. The mystic asks you to believe nothing on blind faith, to accept no authority but that of your own understanding and experience. He asks you only to try a few experiments in awareness, to look closely at your present state of existence, and to try to see your self and your world as clearly as you possibly can. Don't think, just look! (Wilber 1985:55-56).

Anthony Wallace (1966:152) posits that the mystical experience stems from an individual's sense of dissatisfaction with his or her secular identity and that the "path to salvation" necessitates an "abandonment of the old self." Perhaps this dissatisfaction has other causes as well, but taking on a new identity, for whatever reason(s), is often accompanied by a change of name or ritual initiation of some kind.

Citing Underhill's classic *Mysticism* (1911), Wallace recounts the five universal stages of the "mystic way": 1. *awakening* of the self to an awareness of Divine Reality, which usually manifests with a sudden experience and feelings of joy; 2. *purgation*, the recognition of the distinction between God and the human being, a painful experience followed by an attempt to rid oneself of the obstacles that create the distinction and bar the way; 3. *illumination*, the self becomes transcendent, detaching from things of profane existence by any number of contemplative means. Others, such as artists and seers, not only mystics, may experience this stage, which is not yet union with the Divine, but an appreciation and joy of the Divine Presence; 4. "*the dark night of the soul*", the most terrible of the mystical experiences in which the self undergoes a "mystic death" or "pain" (i.e., Sri Ramakrishna). The formerly

illuminated consciousness suffers from the desolation and absence of the Divine Presence. The ego or “will” at this point must be humbled, purified, and the instinct for happiness “killed,” a stage of “spiritual crucifixion,” disillusionment. The soul feels abandoned by God. Only complete, ego-less surrender can effect the final step; 5. *Union with the Divine*, the ultimate goal of the mystical search for God. Wallace (1966:153-155) writes: “Here the self becomes one with the Illumination. This is the end to which previous oscillations of consciousness have tended. It is a state of purely spiritual life, characterized by joy, enhanced powers, intense certitude.” He continues: “Union is the goal of the mystical life: the permanent establishment of life upon transcendent levels of reality of which ecstasies give a foretaste to the soul . . . one last step may be sought in oriental mysticism: the total annihilation or reabsorption of the individual soul in the Infinite” (Wallace 1966:155).

Rather than withdrawing from the world, the enlightened mystic may return to “do good works” in the world (Wallace 1966:155), and clearly this description fits the chela’s stories of the person and the work of Ma Jaya, as much so as the explanations of the mystical path itself fit the chela’s own mystical experiences, whether these are in relation to interaction with Ma Jaya or a result of meditative or other activities. In some cases such experiences are triggered by certain plants or foods, as seen in G. O.’s spontaneous meditation after being on a particular natural health foods diet. Very often mystical experiences, union with the Divine Presence, may be sought and gained through various types of yoga practices. It was at first through the vehicle of yoga breathing exercises that Ma Jaya received visions of world saviors and holy people,

who guided her along her spiritual path. For the chelas, she serves as the same vehicle of transcendence, another expression of her charismatic authority.

You need not live your life
without the candle of awareness
That is what guru is all about -
bringing awareness
where there was only darkness
light into blackness
Do not spend your life
listening to your ego
Feed your souls
not your minds (Bhagavati 1995:117).

God resides within and as Eliade (1969:76-79) states, union with the Divine is no mere product of imagination. In samadhi, the state of “union, totality, absorption in . . . conjunction”, “[i]llusion and imagination are thus wholly done away with”.

The practice of breathing and other yogas, first introduced to Americans by Vivekananda and Yogananda in the latter part of the 1800s and following, show a definite cultural continuity through the present time, and as Shamdasani points out in Jung, yoga contains two ideas common to Indian philosophy and religion, that is, “reincarnation and the quest for emancipation from samsara” (i.e., the cycle of existence, rebirth; Jung 1966:xxi). Yoga provided a means of attaining “salvation, oneness” (Jung 1966:xxi) and generally the term identifies “any ascetic technique and any method of meditation” (Eliade 1969:4).

One such yoga, that of Kundalini Yoga, which continues to be prevalent among Tantric schools and is applied in one form or another at Kashi, was of great interest to Carl Jung. While it is not possible to discuss this in-depth here, as it would

require more space and expertise than are available to this author, an attempt will be made to hit the high points of this tradition.

Kundalini Yoga views the human body as a microcosm of the universe. Within the body, a series of centers or chakras are linked by channels at different places within the body, but these are not so much physiological places as they are subtle or mystical representations. The yogi or yogini, referring here to male or female practitioners of yoga, concentrates on these various chakras, visualizes them, recognizing the correlation between his or her own body and universals, such as the sun, moon, rivers, etc. The Kundalini is seen as a coiled serpent living at the base of the spine at the lowest chakra. Originally, these chakras were understood to be Tantric goddesses, presiding deities within the body. Kundalini is the seat or “microcosmic manifestation of the primordial Energy or Shakti. It is the Universal Power” (Jung 1996:xxiv-xxv). When the serpent is awakened through awareness, meditation, and yoga, she travels up the chakras to the “topmost chakra [the Chitakash or Brahma-randra where] the blissful union of Shiva [male principle] and Shakti [female principle] occurs” (Jung 1996:xxv). In other words, the ultimate union of human and Divine is effected.

Jung (1996:xxvi) felt the symbolism of this particular yoga suggested the symptomology found in certain of his patients and that what they were actually experiencing was an awakening of the Kundalini, not some type of pathology. Granted, Jung’s view was not popular in his day among his colleagues, but the modern response of the medical profession to similar states which are “fixed” biochemically may show the relevance of Jung’s stance, “the psychogenic and symbiotic significance of such states” (Jung 1996:xxvi-xxvii). Further, he considered the entire “inner

process to which yoga gave rise as universal, and the particular methods employed to achieve them as culturally specific . . . He claimed that important parallels with yoga have come to light” (i.e., analytical psychology; Jung 1996:xxix).² Though Jung warned Westerners against the dangers of yoga, as did others (i.e., Dasgupta, Eliade, Keyserling, et al), he believed the West would develop its own yoga based on Christianity (Jung 1996:xxx). We may recall that Ma Jaya’s first vision was not of an Indian saint, but of Jesus the Christ, the familiar savior of Christians who comprise the largest segment of the American religious population.

A distinct cultural specificity of Indian yoga was not to be; it found its way into American multi-culture where it blended with contemporary religious, spiritual, and popular currents and helped to give rise to NRMs of the 1960s and following. As noted in Chapter 1, it has been around so long that some folks are not even aware of its origin.

A recent flyer from a well-respected local clinic that was included in *The Daily Oklahoman* (12/9/96)³, contained a section on stress management. The Behavioral Medicine Department of the clinic outlined a stress-defense strategy that applied a simple five minute breathing exercise, inhaling and exhaling with eyes closed, and reciting “I” on inhalation, “AM” on exhalation. The purpose, the flyer indicated, was to quiet the mind and restore energy while at work or elsewhere. Undoubtedly, this Eastern-based practice, a meditation technique common in yoga, is one more example of globalization in the self-help arena, of “interculturalization.”

² Shamdasani suggests the following for additional sources: R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience and the Birds of Paradise*, London 1985; Lee Sannella, *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence?* Lower Lake, California, 1992.

Ken Wilber writes of the yogic concept of the Self:

Tat tvam asi, the Hindus say. ‘You are That. Your real Self is identical to the ultimate Energy of which all things in the universe are a manifestation.’

The real Self has been given dozens of different names by various mystical and metaphysical traditions throughout mankind’s history. It has been known as the Divine Son, al-insan al-Kamil, Adam-Kadmon, ruarch adonai, Nous, Pneuma, Purusha, Tathagatagarbha, Universal Man, the Host, the Brahman-Atman, I AMness. And from a slightly different angle, it is actually synonymous with the Dharma-dhatu, the Void, Suchness, and the God-head. All of these words are simply symbols of the real word of no-boundary (Wilber 1985:54).

Two meditation and yoga pamphlets written by Ma Jaya in 1994 help to direct chelas in their practice. In *Nine Meditations* she provides exercises for quieting the mind, conquering anxiety, removing obstacles, overcoming grief, etc., saying:

Meditation is that which silences your mind, and it’s very simple to silence the mind. But when meditation brings into your heart your place in life and gathers into the wind any thought of loneliness and fear, then indeed you are meditating (Bhagavati 1994:1)

Max Weber (1958:163) states that in contemplation the Quaker message says: “God only speaks in the soul when the creature is silent.” Here, we may find an interfaith parallel. Indeed, for Kashi, this interfaith, intercultural understanding is very apparent, as is the practice of yoga. Kashi, as a refuge from bigotry and hatred in the world, embraces all spiritual traditions.

Breathe in and out with deep awareness of the breath.
The Buddhists call this “mindfulness.”
The Hindus call it “the river of the now.”
The Sikhs call it “the living Guru, the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.”
The Jews call it “the wisdom of the Torah.”
The Muslims call it “facing Mecca in the moment.”
...
The Christians call it “the living Christ.”
My teacher Swami calls it the Chidikash.”

³ The Daily Oklahoman is the primary newspaper in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

...
Breathe in all the great religions.
Breathe out God (Bhagavati, *Breathe and Dance with the Gods*, 1994:17-18).

BRAHMACHARYA LIFE

Traditional Indian society placed great emphasis on ritual activities in daily life and the working together of the extended family unit. Family was the center of life both socially and religiously (Stackhouse 1984:202-203). But this life was also directed by a strict caste system. Unlike many Hindu deities which at least in part reinforced the castes, the primary God of Kashi in India, Lord Shiva, is caste-less, beyond castes, in that his role and identity defy the typical ashrama or “stages of life.” He is identified with yogis, meditation, death, and the cremation grounds (Eck 1982:97-100). The Mother Kali also transcends caste distinctions. Essentially, caste-free role models already existed in Hindu culture.

The caste system did not migrate with the gurus and teachers into American culture, as did other interests in “things Indian”, like “vegetarianism, yoga, meditation, Mahatma Gandhi, and concepts such as karma and reincarnation” (Gelberg 1987:189). But the typical Indian stages of life, the Brahmacharya life, were adopted by several NRMs, including Kashi in Florida. The lifestyle, per se, predated the founding of Neem Karoli Baba Kashi Ashram, and was evident in the numerous “houses” or mini-ashrams headed by Ma Jaya in the early 1970s. Most likely, each American ashram under various teachers had its own variations which best fit the tradition and circumstances of the particular groups, but the shared lifestyle created bonds between

disciples and served, as Gelberg has said, as an important factor in maintaining group solidarity and commitment (Gelberg 1987:195), though it was certainly not the only factor.

According to Diana Eck (1982:100), the classic ashrama stages for Hindu males in India included that of: 1. the chela or celibate student, 2. the householder, 3. the retired forest-dweller, and 4. the wandering renunciant. Among monastics and ascetics, the fourth group may be represented by the sannyasi, a world- and family-renunciant who's purpose is to seek God and to do so without the constraints of householder life and other commitments. However, as this lifestyle came to American shores, alternatives to the rigid Hindu ashrama occurred, changing to meet different needs and social contexts.

One of Ma Jay's chela's has explained the lifestyle pattern that is utilized at Kashi (P. R.). The chela or student stage is indicative of the unmarried and celibate follower. This chela status is maintained throughout life, even when the individual moves to the householder stage. One is always a chela, a student in relation to the guru. At the householder stage, a married couple may forego celibacy to have children, but once childbearing is no longer a consideration for whatever reasons, celibacy is reinstated. The "wandering renunciant" stage is not practiced at Kashi. One remains on the ashram and in contact with the community for as long as an individual desires, and with Ma Jaya's emphasis on service to humanity, total withdrawal from the "outside world" is practically impossible, regardless of the devotee's stage in life. The chelas are encouraged to care for the sick and dying at hospices and elsewhere, and to interact with the world-at-large. Basically, as one

young mother explained, at Kashi the vows one takes are not unlike those of the Christian nuns and monks in that, despite one's life-stage, one is dedicated to God and guru and service (R. A.). At the same time, Kashi is not monastic because of its work and service to humanity both on the grounds and out in the world (P. R.).

The sannayasin category does exist at Kashi, but not in relation to wandering renunciation of the world. Another chela explained that to become sannyass, a devotee never marries and dedicates his or her life to God, serving as a teacher, in a way, as a resource person for others who want to learn about Kashi's spiritual path or gain greater insights into God-realization (H.O.). The sannyasi is especially dedicated to serving the guru and the commitment is taken for life.

In conjunction with a number of activities celebrating Ma Jaya's 56th birthday, May 26, 1996, I attended an installation of sannyassins at Kashi, a first-time-ever event to take place outside of India, as I was told (P. R.). Three men were taken into what I have called, for want of knowing the proper name, the Order of Kali Tantra. They were identified as sadhus. All three had been in this teaching and with Ma Jaya for many years.

Ma Jaya outlined in her teaching that night what the vows of this new life included: 1. lifelong celibacy, each sadhu was now married to Kali; 2. preserving the body as the essence of God; 3. pledging of lifelong service to humanity, as represented by Hanuman, the God of Service; 4. pledging to protect AIDS sufferers, gays, and lesbians, and all people who suffer; 5. assuming the non-judgmental stance that accepts all people without reservation; 6. pledging to feed everyone; and 7. caring for others. Certain components of these vows were already present in Kashi's

Brahmacharya life, but they were reiterated and “codified”, as it were, in ritual. Ma Jaya explained that one major distinction between the Indian installation rituals and those of Kashi’s are that the former are private matters; the latter are open to the community. These monks would not be required to give up family ties or life on the ashram. One sadhu, in fact, is a husband, grandfather, and school teacher, and he will not be required to renounce any of these roles.

Briefly, the installation involved singing and chanting; the participation of family members and teachers; preparation for the taking of the vows; shaving the heads of the men; immersion (three times), “bathing” in the Ganga (the pond) in a ritual cleansing; lying prone at Ma Jaya’s feet and being covered with ash, perhaps symbolic of Kali, death, and rebirth; being robed in orange, the traditional color for Indian holy orders; and receiving new spiritual names and mantras from the guru. This very brief description cannot do justice to the ritual event, its grandeur, and significance to the guru, chelas, other participants, and non-ashram observers, the last of which were many, but it is presented here as an example of one aspect of the Brahmacharya life at Kashi.

Other features of Brahmacharya life are important. One student said that the lifestyle requires the turning off of additions, whether they are sexual, chemical, or whatever (I. O.) For outsiders, the celibacy issue is a confusing one, yet the purpose of it, as I was informed, has both spiritual and practical implications. Celibacy is not the denial of sexuality, “any natural sexuality” (A. F.), but sexuality does not represent the entirety of any individual and it can be used as a tool for oppression and gender discrimination, two attitudes in society that are highly undesirable. In striving for

union with God, the desired state of non-duality includes “sexuality” in the sense that it encompasses all of the seven chakras, a reference to the spiritual centers of Kundalini Yoga noted earlier (A. F.). Yet sexuality may also prevent real loving relationships, devoid of competition for partners, from occurring and therefore put obstacles in the way of spiritual practice and its success. Further, celibacy in profane life may parallel the non-duality of the Formless God at the divine level.

When living communally, I was told, celibacy helps to eliminate jealousy (P. R.) and build a strong supportive community (Q. D.). The problem of sexually transmitted diseases strengthens the argument for celibacy, and even with the teenagers at Kashi, when hormones flair, there seems to be no problem with teen sex. Along with parental guidance, each teenager has a relationship with the guru and she talks frankly with them (Q. D.).

None of this is to suggest, however, that this lifestyle is an easy one. Each chela interviewed stated how difficult the teaching was and that personality clashes and other typical social interactions did create tension. Living communally, problems could not be ignored for any length of time and resolutions were sought fairly promptly to waylay long term group and interpersonal disunity. Compassion toward others is one key to success, as are commitment and service. Still, sometimes it can be a struggle, says one devotee, requiring assertiveness, a toughening-up process (A. R.).

Three other features of Brahmacharya life at Kashi need mentioning and they are: vegetarianism, the drug-free environment, and non-violence. Adopting vegetarianism at the “houses” or min-ashrams in the pre-Florida ashram days, the emphasis was placed on a healthy diet that would improve life and spirituality. This

nutritional base was established at Kashi and today the cuisine is varied and abundant. No one ever goes hungry. Residents meet for the evening meal at Laxman House and the vegetarian diet, according to medical sources, helps to prevent certain types of cancer. Religiously, vegetarianism has another purpose; eating meat is considered a major offense. One teenage chela related his childhood adventure in sneaking off to McDonalds to procure for himself and his stay-behind cohorts, classic 29 cent hamburgers and that the challenge was not so much for the burger as it was to complete the task. Naturally, he got caught, attempted to lie his way out of it, dug himself in even deeper, and was disciplined by being prohibited from attending darshans and by being assigned to kitchen duty for six months (H. Q.). A great deal more is entailed in the story than can be given here, especially, how, as a child, he put himself at risk on a major highway, but he has had no desire to eat meat since then and he learned how to cook in the process.

Providing a safe and drug-free environment is another part of the lifestyle. No drugs of any kind are permitted, whether tobacco products, alcohol, or “recreational” drugs. Unlike the period of the sixties and seventies when the drug culture glorified the use of chemical substances, such as LSD, these drugs have been prohibited at Kashi. They are thought to be neither healthy nor desirable and often lead to violence, another taboo activity.

Following the example of the ancient Upanisadic texts and Eastern philosophies in general, ahimsa or non-violence is encouraged. Abuse of others is not tolerated, one chela stated (A. F.). Occasionally at the school, non-ashram children become involved in teasing and misbehaviors that are first privately disciplined by

teachers explaining the proper behavior, but if the misbehaviors persist, public correction results, so that others may benefit. School children are taught by everyone on the ashram to observe the rules (A. F.) and an overriding social theme that has spiritual ramifications as well as practical ones, not that the two are seen in opposition, is always trying not to hurt others (Q. D.).

In Ma Jaya's 1995 teaching on forgiveness, she writes:

Love your enemies, but you don't have to go near them. All right, they hurt you. I won't go down to that level and swim in that filth and dirt and spend my life with non-forgiveness. I, myself, want to be forgiven for anything I have done that intentionally or unintentionally hurt anyone.

So it goes, on and on. Free yourself. Be real. Be passionate. Be abundant. Forgiveness is a form of the greatest love. But "I forgive me" is an unbelievable mantra.

And when you begin to forgive yourself, look at your day. Lie down at night and look at what you accomplished during that one day and say, "Have I lied? Have I hurt anybody? Have I lived this day fully?"

If you say, "I shouldn't have done that," then take that "shouldn't have done" and place it on a breakfast plate. Remember it the next day and eat it. Make sure you don't do it again (Bhagavati 1995:1.2.95).

CHAPTER 4

FOUNDATIONS

ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITIONS

Jonathan Friedman, as noted earlier, describes the “revolt of the middle classes” in the 1960s and following as a search for meaning, for the “primordial ties” of the “pre-capitalist past” and he goes on to say that these ties may be understood as a “way of life organized exclusively by direct personal relations where the social world and the cosmos are inextricably fused in a single structure of meaning. It is this ‘authentic’ culture that we have presumably lost in our civilized desolation.’ What is more, this culture is the expression of real human needs: for a meaningfully organized existence, a set of coherent values of personal relations” (Friedman 1989:55). He further suggests that this desire for meaning and “authentic” culture may appear as a “longing” for the development of a local community, autonomy, and so on. Capitalism in a sense had negated culture, which entails “face-to-face, communal, [and] symbolically dominated life” of more traditional societies (Friedman 1989:55-56). Kashi is indicative of such a culture, such a community, where life and the meaning of life go hand-in-hand.

A number of the chela’s stories reflect that earlier search for meaning, for something deeper, or something beyond material satisfactions, and more than a few expressed dissatisfaction with their familial religious traditions. They were hypocritical or created a fear of God or were devoid of God the Mother. They lacked something

or had no immediate relevance for some of the chelas in their early twenties and thirties.

Griffiths (1982:25) states that religion of whatever variety “has to hold to the fundamental truth in its own tradition and at the same time to allow that tradition to grow, as it is exposed to other aspects of the truth.” Without such growth religions may stagnate and their number of adherents dwindle. On the other hand, some constancy of tradition is essential, though it may fail to attract and hold younger generations with changing needs. This scenario may well depict the situation common to many in the counterculture, for they sought meaning in life in alternative directions. The times presented them with paradoxes that seemingly could not be easily resolved by mainline denominations and they were increasingly exposed to “intercultural” influences. Many, like Ma Jaya, had been raised in urban centers, in intercultural environments.

Moreover, Western or European theology had refined the notion that its theology was *universal*, a purely triumphalist religious approach, comparable to the concept of ethnocentrism in cultural anthropology.¹ By this Western benchmark other theologies were measured, and most often the non-Western theologies failed to measure up as “normative” (Thangaraj 1994:21). Counterculturists, however, were finding that this tenet was inaccurate, not a true reflection of their experience, and that

¹ Understood from the religious studies perspective, triumphalism represents the belief that one’s own religion is the *only* religion, that it contains the *only* truth and other traditions are viewed as corrupt, aberrant. It denies the existence and possibility of other paths to God and is the opposite of essentialism, which states all paths are equally good, all paths lead to the same universal truth. Ethnocentrism in anthropology is understood similarly, that one’s own culture and cultural interpretations are the *only* “true” interpretations. All others are corrupt, aberrant. Both terms and the attitudes they espouse are evidence of the drive to show the inferiority of other people as a means

the Eastern religious currents were actually beginning to provide that something that was lost or missing, that sense of a singular structure of meaning, and purpose in life.

Citing Maslow on the link between self-actualization and meaning, Wilber (1985:119-120) explains that “meaning is found, not in outward actions or possessions, but in the inner radiant currents of your own being, and in the release and relationship of these currents to the world, to friends, to humanity at large, and to infinity itself.” Such an interpretation is clearly non-materialistic and would not find favor among many Westerners used to identifying with the rewards of hard, non-stop work, accumulation of wealth, or of friends in positions of power as the goal in life. These different goals being communicated, in one sense, evidenced varying culture types.

Culture in the form of communication types, Morris (1987:218) suggests in citing Bloch (1977 *Man*), has two aspects: one expressed universal and practical ideas of time and cognition; the other expressed a ritualized knowledge of a timeless or static order. In most cases people live in the former, yet the latter, seen in sacred stories and ritual reenactments, had a long Indo-European linguistic history. Myths, Harding (1993:91) explains, are sacred stories of deities; rituals are symbolic acts that describe and reenact the mystic relationship between human beings and these deities. Indo-European languages, branching from the Sanskrit root (Harding 1987:54), developed early explanations which helped to cement meaning mythologically and integrate it into daily life. One example from the Tantric tradition will suffice.

of advancing one's own superiority. The triumphalist position is often found in sacred texts as a means of promoting a particular religious tradition over others religions.

It is said that Sanskrit was the Great Mother's invention. Kali "created the magic letters of the Sanskrit alphabet . . . the letters were magic because they stood for primordial creative energy expressed in sound – Kali's mantras brought into being the very things whose names She spoke for the first time, in her holy language. In short, Kali's worshippers originated the doctrine of the Logos or creative Word, which Christians later adopted and pretended it was their own idea" (Harding 1993:54-55).

Numerous variations of myths abound with diverse explanations, and the world view or general perspective of believers is a vital aspect for general comprehension. According to Griffiths (1982:26), the emphasis on God and transcendence between Eastern and Western perspectives differs. For instance, he states, that in the Hebrew tradition believers "start from the transcendence of God and gradually discover his immanence; the Hindu starts from the immanence and reaches towards his transcendence." Hebrews and Christians conceived of God as "Person," but linguistically, "Person" is an analogy. God exceeds personality and language speaking of God can only point to a reality that is essentially nameless, a reality that is experienced (Griffiths 1982:27).

Despite the direction of transcendence-immanence, the written Word in the form of sacred texts, Weber (1963:xxxvii-xxxviii) says, indicates the stability of a religious tradition. At first the oral tradition may be emphasized to protect a group's exclusiveness, but with a tradition's growth and longevity, sacred texts, though subject to editing and the interpretive process, show a tradition's formalized status. Sacred texts further provide a basis of teachings for expansion of the tradition by priests or other religious specialists.

Where texts and traditions in India are concerned, Diana Eck has provided us with an excellent history. She states that the development of sacred texts were preceded by the rise of the great gods in India, texts such as the Brahmanas, the Epics, etc. (Eck 1982:61-69). The Great Goddess, who is of most interest in this study, became prominent in the eleventh century and especially in Tantrism, a spiritual practice or path focusing on the female energy or Shakti. The energy, earlier described in the yoga section, was represented by female deities, particularly those of nature and nurture (Eck 1982:72-73). The Tantras asserted the greatest form of the Godhead personified was that of supreme energy, the feminine principle (Harding 1993:158). By 1350 the Kashi Kanda text was included with those of other sacred literature (Eck 1982:82). We will discuss the Great Mother and Shakti in more detail presently, but in India, she had many names for her many manifestations – Kali, Durga, Devi, Uma, Laksmi, Sati, Annapurna, Parvati, and others. Bhakti, “devotion,” and classical Sanskrit literature spread and as a result poetry in the vernacular became popular. Some mystics and authors of this poetry, “poets of bhakti,” wrote devotional treatises of an extremely personal nature, “an intensely personal form of love for a personal God” (Eck 1982:85).²

The varieties of Gods and poetic styles were abundant, worth concentrated study, and by 1904 Hindu University was founded by Mohan Mataviya with the support of British Theosophist, Annie Besant of 1893 World Parliament of Religions fame (Eck 1982:91). From this point forward, East and West effectively shared ideas, communicated spiritual alternatives, and impacted one another’s cultures, though not

² One may equate here the expression of love for the guru discussed earlier as a parallel.

quite equally. Nineteenth century Christian missionaries spread the Gospel among residents of Banaras, but Hindus were not receptive to it at this point. Several problems with Christianity could not be solved. Hindus were not impressed with the idea that Jesus was the “center of the world.” Emphasis on the blood of Christ was also repugnant to them, but Christian exclusivity was the most difficult notion (Eck 1982:92), since Hindus embraced an understanding of religious paths that were tolerant and accepting, and ultimately led to the same end, an idea radically different from Christianity.

In India there continues to be a harmony between forms of worship and deities, a religious tolerance, a non-prejudice. Individual choice is respected and without the pressure to accept this or that particular path (Harding 1993:147). Griffiths (1982:22-23) writes that the Christian and Muslim “logic to convert all others to their faith” was viewed as an “obstacle to their acceptance,” a “spirit of intolerance” foreign to Indian belief and practice, since no such notion existed in Oriental religions. So, rather than adopting Christianity en masse as the nineteenth century missionaries would have preferred, Hindus took their music, philosophies, yoga, and more to Europe and America where they were honored (Eck 1982:93). Religious tolerance and the idea of oneness appealed to some Westerners, as well as the understanding that God alone was worth pursuing as one’s goal in life (Harding 1993:147, 214; Griffiths 1982:22). The Indian poetic tradition came to the West with its devotion and passion.

In India some of the Goddess’ greatest devotees put their hearts into their work. Kali’s minstrel, Ramprasad, wrote many songs to Kali, expressing the finest form of love for the Mother was that of a child’s love. Kamalakanta, also in the 1770s

wrote of Kali, as did Raja Ramakrishna in the eighteenth century. The most well known to Kali devotees may be Sri Ramakrishna (b. 1836), the great Bengali saint, whose life story by Christopher Isherwood, remains popular. Other writer-devotees are Bamakhepa and Sri Sarada Devi, consort and follower of Ramakrishna (Harding 1993; Hixon 1994). Vivekananda, too, may be counted in this list, and in the United States the poet-daughter of the River, Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati, the Great Mother's River Child (Bhagavati 1994, 1995). Ma Jaya had been to India, bathed in the Ganges River, and experienced Kali directly. She wrote her love for the Mother and other gods, especially Hanuman, in her devotional poetry, and she included her love for her own students, an innovation that may be unusual in the Indian tradition.

Songs and devotional poetry represent experience, existential inquiry, and may be seen as "scriptural manifestation" (Hixon 1994:xiii). They are meant to be read aloud and studied. When read aloud in a group the effect is like chanting, which, Hixon (1994:xiii) says, enables Kali's "teaching to be absorbed more directly by the entire being." In principle, the effect is an oral tradition and in this environment an old saying seems applicable: "True religion isn't taught; it's caught. . . It seeps in as in osmosis, and one doesn't need to do anything but be there" (Harding 1993:130).

Myths in poetic or other forms have their origin in the articulation of a singular reality, a pre-capitalist reality in which humanity is not divided from nature or divided in consciousness. Griffiths (1982:30-31) relates that this is especially crucial in our current time, since "[n]ever before has man felt so isolated, alone in a vast, impersonal universe obeying mechanical laws, shut up in his own individual consciousness divided both from nature and God . . . [And about language, he states] It is an illusion to think

that scientific language is 'true' and poetic language is 'untrue' . . . Poetry, or the language of symbolism, is nearer to reality but Truth itself can only be known by a pure intuition which is beyond all language."

Intuition and the poetic experience with its mythological roots emphasized the entire cycle of life, including death. This personal awareness was of special interest to Carl Jung, who thought myths were the evidence of universal archetypes and a true representation of Reality, truer than other symbolic forms he encountered (Wilber 1977:258). Accepting this awareness, essentially of the transcendent, was to begin to live life mythologically or as transpersonal psychology explains, ". . . to grasp the transcendent, to see it alive in oneself, in one's life, in one's work, friends and environment . . .to live mythologically means to begin to open oneself to an expansive world of no-boundary" (Wilber 1985:126-27). For Jung, the experience of an awareness of the totality of life may be seen in the account of his travel companion, McCormick. The Indian Goddess had an impact on Jung.

As we would go through temples of Kali, which were numerous at almost every Hindu city . . . the color red was associated with destructiveness. Concurrently in Calcutta Jung began to have a series of dreams in which the color red was stressed. It wasn't long before dysentery overcame Dr. Jung and I had to take him to the English hospital in Calcutta . . . A more lasting effect of the impression of the destructiveness of Kali was the emotional foundation it gave him for the conviction that evil was not a negative thing but a positive thing . . . The influence of that experience in India, to my mind, was very great on Jung in his later years (Jung 1996:xxviii).

Jung was experiencing an awareness of non-duality, of the necessity of life and death in the greater picture, and of the role of the Goddess Kali in that universal

process. For Jung, the bridge, the connection, had been through yoga to psychology, and his India experience emotionally internalized this knowledge for him. He experienced “living mythologically,” one might say. As Balch (1982:61) suggests, systematization entails integrating diverse beliefs into a meaningful whole by realizing the relationship among significant events, beliefs, and personal experience. Jung’s experience is an example of such systemization.

At Kashi an experience and awareness such as Jung’s would find its realization in Ma Jaya, who, as Guru and archetype of wisdom, has integrated all of life’s aspects, including “the dark or shadow aspect” into a singular reality. Life and death are inseparable parts of that reality. The same is true for the Goddess Kali, who is understood as being all-inclusive. Braun (1995:2-3) states that the guru is “One,” containing peaceful and wrathful aspects which represent duality; together these represent non-duality. He says that when Ma Jaya speaks as the Black Mother, she “brings Kali tangibly into the material plane” and that to merge with the Guru’s transcendent aspect is to experience liberation or the state of no-self. In short, Kali may be experienced directly. Some of the chelas stories given earlier suggest this direct contact and students feel a “connection” with her and her Guru, Neem Karoli Baba.

It was not until recently that Ma Jaya’s spiritual teachings on Kali and many other subjects began to be published. Until 1993 most of her teachings were oral, as one chela related, her manner of teaching was like Christ’s teaching in the temple. Ma Jaya’s teachings take place during darshan, though she may respond in writing to requests or questions from her students and others. A prolific writer, she has kept

journals of her teachings and experiences which are now being published at Kashi by Ganga Press and Jaya Press, and by the Kashi Foundation.

During a recent interview, she spoke about writing, especially writing down her teachings on detachment and the Chitakash, teachings she received from Neem Karoli Baba and Swami Nityananda (Matousek 1996:94). This second teaching relates to the mystical and meditative practice of yogis and yoginis, male and female devotees, that enables them to merge with God, to experience God within. This merging occurs in the highest chakra, the Chitakash or Brahmastrand, noted the section on Kundalini Yoga.

Ma Jaya writes in the poetic Indian style, her first book, *The River*, being an example of that tradition and later works, such as *I, the Mother* and *Bones and Ash* following a like pattern. Pamphlets with a non-poetic style of teaching from darshan are available. Other unpublished manuscripts, *Cave of the Ashen One* and *The Silence* have yet to go to print. Very briefly, the first relates Ma Jaya's experience with Kali, the Ashen One, and the River Ganga, while the second deals with removing despair and fear, with death of the ego and surrender to God or emptiness, but we will have to wait for their upcoming releases of these books to read more fully what the poet has to say.

Once again, the written texts and tracts, as Weber says, indicate a stable religious tradition and after twenty years, Kashi has reached that point. The difference the written texts may make will be to facilitate expansion of the tradition beyond the intimate ashram circle or the associated mini-ashrams around the country, and for those unable to experience darshan or the guru personally, this may be the next best

thing. The teachings in written form make proselytizing efforts easier. If that should be the desire, and the texts themselves may serve as the focus of meditation.

One chela related how he could never read very much at one sitting.

Sometimes a word or phrase would so inspire him that he would reflect on it, meditate on it, become lost in its profound message, and in a while, set the book aside. The insight of the moment, however long it lasted, far surpassed a cursory reading (A. F.).

Interpreting the oral teachings for visitors at darshan or retreats is often the task of knowledgeable chelas, and the same chelas may interpret for newcomers the meaning of their personal experiences with Ma Jaya. One young woman explained this was an aspect of life at the ashram she especially liked, helping people when they might be confused about a teaching or troubled in some other way about their life (Y. P.). Directing people to their own resources is the objective, but that objective may for some include reading the teachings in Ma Jaya's books, the newsletter, or watching some of the videos available from the Kashi Foundation office. In *The Silence* Ma Jaya says:

I want to write it all down for the ones who sit at the feet of their own god: the Christ, Allah, Zoroaster, Shiva, Mother Kali, or any god or goddess who brings the seeker comfort. If it is all taken as a fairy tale or truth, so what? Even a fairy tale can hold little secrets of life (Bhagavati, *The Silence: A Journal*. Unpublished manuscript [8]; by permission).

THE TEACHINGS

In the beginning there was only the River
that lived high in the heavens
Humanity needed her waters to live
Humanity needed her waters to die
She was sent by the gods with all her
arrogance to leap to the earth
Her power was too strong for the land
So Lord Shiva was asked to stand
She came rambling toward the sacred land
Into his hair did she flow
Shiva laughed and laughed
She tried to shake loose – Shiva paid her
no heed
Then the River relaxed and the Lord Shankara
tried to shake her loose
The two together became consorts
The two together became the world
(Bhagavati *The River* 1994:34).

In the above myth interpreted by Ma Jaya in *The River*, one finds a version of creation mythology comparable to others in the poetic Indian tradition. Hinduism, wherever it is practiced, generally accepts a variety of interpretations of myths as much as it accepts multiple spiritual paths to God. Kashi was founded on this premise of tolerance, acceptance, and love, incorporating Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, and other religions. Ma Jaya is clearly not a triumphalist, saying “If you sit before a holy person who says his or her way is the *only* way, *run!* There is no way you should stay there, because we’re all the same. Every holy person has a shtick, whether it’s the wine, or hitting you on the head with a peacock feather, or staring into your eyes. It’s all shtick and it’s all good” (italics mine; Matousek 1996:148). And “If you can’t see God in everyone, you can’t see God at all” (Bhagavati n.d. Video: “On the Spiritual Path”).

Taking to heart Christ's message to her to "teach all ways," Ma Jaya's universality comes across loud and clear, but to try to encapsulate her decades of teachings into the small space available here is practically impossible. However, an attempt will be made to at least touch on some of the dominant themes.

"I have never followed a formal path of religion," Ma Jaya writes. "I have always followed the path of spirituality, which connects all religions as one. Spirituality is the essence of religion, which man tends to forget in his search for Truth. . . I have never followed the laws of karma nor have I bowed to yesterday's teaching. I teach that living in the moment allows all karmic qualities to bow to the feet of 'now.' . . I do not believe in the concepts of liberation, realization, enlightenment and all the words attached to Guru. I simply believe that I have earned the right to choose to live and breathe again on earth" (Bhagavati, *The Heart of God*, Kashi Foundation, Inc., 1.28.94). In her response to my question concerning prophecy, Ma Jaya says:

When I spoke about prophecy, I meant that all prophecy as well as destiny can be changed. If everything was written and prophesied before the beginning of time about each and every one of us, what need would there be for spirituality and teachers? A person would just wake up in the morning and just do what they have to do. Unfortunately there is so much darkness in the world that gets between human beings and their potential. This is what I meant about not believing in prophecy . . . anything can be changed with awareness (Bhagavati 11/8/96).

Awareness is a constant theme running throughout Ma Jaya's teachings, as is the emphasis on forgiveness, noted earlier, and kindness. Awareness is rather like a backbone to which everything else is attached directly or indirectly, and in a brochure

titled “Kindness,” Ma Jaya’s message is closely identified with service, perhaps the greatest emphasis in all her teachings – serving humanity. She writes on both:

God is not dead. And if you don’t believe in God, that’s okay too. But one thing must be believed in on this Ashram and be worshipped. You must be in awe of this thing. And this thing is Kindness.

So simple this word: Kindness. It stops time. To touch the brow of an ailing human being in pain who is suffering, Time must say: I wait. I, who wait for no one, wait to join your moment in your kindness. Kindness is not a thing of Earth anymore. People have forgotten how.

...

No, I don’t know too much nor do I profess to know too much, but I do know I’ve seen bent-over people stand straight with the touch of Kindness. But you cannot be kind to others if you are not, in the stillness of your own heart, kind to yourself. Enjoy Kindness of self-love. Wipe out unworthiness by simply being kind to yourself.

For here is a moment we sit together, all together, in my temple, in the presence of Christ, in the presence of all the Gods and all the Goddesses.

In this one moment be kind to yourself, and all else will follow (Bhagavati, 1994 “Kindness.” Kashi Foundation).

Self-kindness, self-love is perhaps the first step in these teachings and possibly the last. It begins and ends with the self (X.A.). The lack of awareness or realization of self-worth, we may recall from one chela’s story, was typical of followers in the early days of the teachings (A.R., P.R. et al), but it is an integral part of the dilemma of the human condition. Braun (1995:12) relates that the old paradigm with its basis in “motive for profit” has alienated and dehumanized people, and endangered the environment. It has failed to eliminate violence, engender compassion, provide for the needy, or reduce pain and suffering. Rather than dwell on the past with its pain and suffering and injustice, or overly fret about what the future holds, Ma Jaya teaches to

be aware of “living in the moment,” living in the present and living it to its fullest (P.R.).

Living in the moment is a motif not uncommon to Eastern and Western spiritual teachings alike, and during the sixties and seventies it was found in teachings of other gurus and swamis in America.³ In one sense living in the moment is a kind of unconditional and spontaneous awareness of one’s self, one’s environment, of others, their actions and behaviors, and of making the most of each occurrence that life presents in that moment, like a child does. Ma Jaya writes:

A child has all the traits of a sadhu, a holy man, a priest, a rabbi, a minister -- without the stigma of religion. A child loves simply, in a way that is refreshing and new, without looking to find out who loves him back, as he runs into the next moment.

...

The perfection of each human being is the very moment she or he is in. Much of my spiritual life has been spent explaining that the heart of God is no different from man’s, and that all one has to do is break open his own awareness in the place of the heart (Bhagavati 1994 *The Heart of God*. Kashi Foundation, Inc.).

An awareness of each individual’s worth, building up self-esteem that has been worn down by past experiences in life, is accentuated at Kashi, knowing the value of each human being. “In the quiet place of man’s being,” Ma Jaya states, “there is no room for ‘sins,’ only ‘errors,’ which can be corrected. When man allows the dark side of his being to overcome that which is all light, he is shadowed by his own disbelief; his consciousness understands only the mind and ignores the soul” (Bhagavati 1994 *The Heart of God*. Kashi Foundation, Inc.). And as one chela said during an interview, “[W]hen you’re a child, you’re automatically awake and very aware of God. . . . [W]ith my spirituality, I like it to be simple and straight, like a direct light instead

of a filtered-out, scattered-out light. Keep it simple. . . remember how it was to be a child” (Y.W.). One may draw a parallel here with the kingdom movement of Jesus in the Gospels and the same stress on children and their awareness. Such an awareness may also be compared with the transpersonal psychology idea of “living mythologically.”

Along with acceptance of each human being and compassion towards those who suffer in life for whatever reasons, Ma Jaya responded to the call of her Guru, Neem Karoli Baba, to “feed everyone,”⁴ a spiritual feeding (Bhagavati n.d. Video: “On the Spiritual Path”). The active call to serve those who suffer, those with AIDS, a one-on-one service to others, is one aspect of Ma Jaya which is quite different from other teachers. “She is down in the trenches,” one student relates, doing it, serving, not just talking about doing it (G.O.). Another student explains that “. . . within the Hindu tradition, Ma is very much a rebel because she adds service to their traditional thing [that] you focus on God as the mirror of the self or you detach yourself from things of the world. Well, if the major focus is to detach oneself, they are not serving humanity. They may do something for the poor, but not for the needy. Ma is way beyond that, so that’s an example within the Hindu tradition that she may be something of an anomaly. We have Hindu scholars and spiritual teachers who come here and visit. Each one of these says admiring things about her or ‘I can’t do what you do’ and she takes them on her rounds” (P.R.). Ma Jaya writes:

³ For example, Muktananda, Rudrananda, Ram Dass, et al.

⁴ Baba Neem Karoli’s message to “feed everyone” or “feed people” was a message his disciple Baba Ram Dass, a well known author and psychologist, also put forth, as was Baba’s teaching to “serve people” as a way to come to know God (Internet: Eric and Sally Taylor. Video. Ram Dass. A Change of Heart).

To slumber on this Earth
when there is such a need to serve
is a truly sad thing (Bhagavati 1995:99).

If you can give your heart only once
the path of service and love
becomes so simple (Bhagavati 1995:98).

In our strength of being together
we will confound the world
with our love of service
True is the promise of Hanuman
to teach those
who vow to love
all who need love (Bhagavati 1995:99).

At Kashi, Ma Jaya, following the example of the God Hanuman who shed tears over humanity's suffering and of the Christ in his care of society's pariahs in his day, dedicates herself to serve and love others and encourages her chelas to do the same. This path of service and sharing is especially clear in Kashi's outreach to AIDS patients, to the dying, and to children. Ma Jaya says "there are no 'throw-away people'" (the River Fund brochure), and in 1990 established the River Fund to help finance Kashi's charitable work. More will be said about this non-profit organization presently, but one of its great endeavors has been to help support the River House, a residence for the terminally ill which provides constant care and a compassionate environment for the dying. Many of Ma Jaya's students volunteer here, coordinating patient needs with staff and licensed physicians or caring for the ill, meeting their needs in a variety of ways. The children, too, visit the River House to lend their support, cheer up the sick, and help make the resident's last days more joyful.

While at Kashi, I attended two memorial services for River House residents who had died, and the memorials expressed how service to the dying and to the dead, and to their family members and friends is carried out. Each memorial was personalized to fit the circumstances and needs of the individuals, with small altars erected with photographs, keepsakes, flowers, and candles, and teachings by Ma Jaya were interspersed throughout the eulogies and songs. One especially seemed poignant, since the deceased had died of AIDS and apparently had been a target of prejudice in his life. Ma Jaya spoke about not judging others or being prejudiced, and that Kashi was about tolerance, about caring for others without fear (7/9/96). Both memorials concluded with the ashes of the deceased being poured into the Ganga, the pond, which at Kashi in Florida parallels the River Ganges in its symbolic function as recipient of the dead and the source of all life. Both bodies of water are considered holy.

Ma Jaya teaches about death and the care of the dying, as is evident above, but death has two meanings: physical death or the termination of life and breath, and the death of the ego, or “living death,” About the latter:

If you die
when you are alive
you are free of the senses
the desire to want all things
for only the top layer of pleasure
disappears in a haze of smoke

A man free
is a form of God
not distant
but here
in the now (Bhagavati 1995:19).

Teachings about the death of the ego are common in the Indian traditions and at the most simple level, the ego represents selfish desires, egocentric drives of the individual for power and material gain. Braun (1995:72) writes that “[t]he ego is at the core of all the selfish pursuits that fragment our world. The ego’s foremost desire is to uphold the illusion of its existence. . . The ego easily takes over spiritual pursuit.” Recalling Weber on ascetic Protestantism, we may find a comparison here with the collective ego. Ascetic Protestantism helped to produce a system of belief compatible with and supportive of capitalism and individualism. In fact, it helped to bring about the rise of capitalism as a world economy from the medieval period onward.

At its extreme, a collective, materialist, and egocentric drive has produced many of the world’s problems: prejudice, racism, abuse, political and social oppression, unequal food distribution, damage to the environment, wars, and so on. In all fairness, however, capitalism has also helped to produce benefits to society, for example, wonder drugs that save lives and improve the quality of life, charitable organizations that try to meet human needs, etc. Nonetheless, in an attempt to reverse the destructive influence of the collective ego, individuals may choose to practice disciplines that strip the ego of unhealthy aspects and promote selflessness that elicits concern for others and a desire for access to God. The process begins with each individual person or self and may gradually spread to others, to groups, but the teaching, which has a variety of methods, is extremely difficult, requiring years of concentrated effort. One chela mentioned that to lead a spiritual life with such necessary and concentrated effort is all but impossible on “the outside,” since distractions and demands of society and life thwart one’s practice. Without a

supportive community of like-minded aspirants, it becomes more difficult still (A.F.). To this end, Braun (1995:72) explains, “[t]o subdue the ego we need help. We need to reach out to a power greater than ourselves. We need to find an ally who can dissolve our self-imposed limitations, which, by definition, we are unable to perceive . . . we have to open our lives up to grace.”

That grace may come in the form of a guru, one who has learned the path of God and experienced it first hand. At the guru’s feet or by the guru’s special grace or gift, the chela may learn the way to overcome his or her ego and its destructive and illusory influences. As the role model, the guru directs the student’s effort, since s/he has already “been there, done that.” Ma Jaya writes:

I have only one path to teach
and that path is love

I use love as a razor
to scrape away the scars
left over from ego’s wars
against the heart (Bhagavati 1995:26).

One chela in an interview explained:

[T]his place is about death. Kashi in India is a City of Light, City of Death. People want their bodies cremated and put in the Ganga there at Kashi. So, it’s holy – the passing on to your next existence. Americans don’t view death in the same way as the Eastern philosophies, the Eastern religions do. . . And [Kashi here is] about death, but death of the ego, which is so much more difficult, more powerful than a physical death. And it’s so extensive. . . [I]t [the ego] doesn’t want to let go. . . Ego’s hanging-on tight saying, ‘You need this, you need this!’ when really, I don’t, I don’t . . . And it’s a struggle (O.W.).

Death of the ego is about detachment, another traditional theme in the teachings. In “Spiritual Life (2): Questions and Answers,” Ma Jaya writes about

attachment and detachment, though the latter is usually only learned of as a result of the former, “the rules of possessiveness, . . . [the] *me*, *mine*, and *I*, thus taking on the pain of the one you are attached to as well as your own pain of possessiveness. [But] [y]ou’ve become detached when you have so much love for yourself that it’s O.K. . . This is called unconditional love: you give away your abundance of love and don’t look back to see who is taking it or not” (Bhagavati 1994 Kashi Foundation, Inc.).

Also significant is the realization of God within, one basis of an individual’s recognition of his or her own self-worth. Seva or selfless service, such as in the care of the River House residents, is an external and interpersonal representation of the God within reaching outward; meditation, breathing, and yoga are steps toward achieving an internal and personal realization of God within. Ma Jaya has written extensively about both and both are essential parts of the spiritual life at Kashi.

In *Spiritual Life* pamphlets, *Breathe and Dance with the Gods*, and *Nine Meditations*, Ma Jaya helps to direct readers toward their awareness of God within, and she relates in *The Heart of God* that her teaching is one of “pure Shakti,” that “[I]f one worships Shakti, one indeed must worship Shiva. The important part of service, spirituality, and indeed any path is that the aspirant must know that he holds inside himself the starkness, the strength of the male, and the warm heart of detachment, the female” (Bhagavati 1994 Kashi Foundation, Inc.). Containing both Shiva and Shakti, all opposites in unison, the aspirant may experience non-duality, or as transpersonal psychology might refer to it, “unity consciousness.”

In this and other teachings the love of the Mother for the child or the chela and vice versa is emphasized. Braun states that love is the core of all relationship and that

the Mother is the essence of love. As infants the greatest connection is with the mother who gives birth to and nurtures the child (Braun 1995:48), and this first-of-all human relationships is the basis for others. The mother represents home, safety, comfort. The Goddess, the Great Mother, represents this same love, home, safety, comfort at a cosmogonic level and may be expressed in any number of forms. At Kashi, Ma Jaya personifies the Mother in her care for all her students and in helping them to fulfill their spiritual potential. She has a special gift called “the Boon of Kali,” a gift that the Black Mother Kali manifests through her, as Braun says, and it is an essence of love, a grace and compassion, a means of overcoming life’s obstacles. Through these Ma Jaya has “brought Kali to the West” (Braun 1995:45). The manner of removing pain or obstacles, we may recall from Matousek, Ma Jaya has referred to as “shtick,” that is, that which brings a worshipper comfort. Her “shtick is “staring into someone’s eyes” and the boon is gratefully received by the chelas and those who seek out Ma Jaya. But it may be the source of this gift, the Black Mother Kali, that poses a problem in the American context, and not the gift itself, though it is or can be a frightening experience, I am told.

We find in this teaching one of the greatest dilemmas for Westerners, the general population, whose exposure to the Goddess Kali has been primarily through “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom” or an episode in “Highlander.” Kali is not perceived of as a loving, nurturing Mother Goddess; rather, she is perceived of as a horrific figure of destructiveness and unlike Dr. Jung, many Americans do not understand how a deity may encompass both creative and destructive aspects or forces to any truly positive end. Westerners have a penchant for good or happy endings.

The concept of duality has so conditioned most Americans that to comprehend an all-inclusive, singular god or goddess is just extremely difficult. A deity either creates or destroys, represents good or evil, is positive or negative, but not all of the above, and that is that. On the other hand, to see life and death, creation and destruction, good god and bad devil, in such black and white terms is unrealistic, illusory, from the Eastern philosophical perspective, and one story from India in the following quote may help to clarify the matter.

The ordinary Western mind perceives of Kali as hideous and absurd, forgetting that some of the symbols of Western faiths have the same effect on the Hindu. While Christians believe that God is all good and the devil is all bad, Hindus believe in only one Universal Power which is beyond good and bad. To explain this concept, they give the example of fire. *The same fire that cooks one's food can burn down one's house. Still, can one call fire good or bad?*

Kali is the full picture of the Universal Power. She is Mother, the Benign, and Mother, the Terrible. She creates and nourishes and she kills and destroys. By Her magic we see good and bad, but in reality there is neither. This whole world and all we see is the play of Maya, the veiling power of the Divine Mother. God is beyond the pair of opposites which constitute this relative existence (italics mine, Harding 1993:39).

GODDESSES, MOTHER KALI, AND MA JAYA

For a very long time, science has confirmed that the oldest, realistic figurines made by human beings were that of a human female head and torso from the Upper Paleolithic Period (i.e., Venus of Willendorf, Grimal 1965; Wallace 1966:232). These ancient innovations are believed to be artifacts of the worship of the Great Mother in antiquity and throughout the circum-Mediterranean world, worship of the Mother Goddess in cultic activities showed great historical continuity (Citing Levy, Wallace

1966:253). The Goddess was ever-present in antiquity and not until the last few millennia has her presence been so diminished. “Contrary to ancient history,” Harding (1993:76) states, “in which we find that nearly every phase and activity of life was holy, modern people have moved God to a far-away place called heaven.” The Goddess has been re-moved even farther.

Throughout antiquity religious cults of Egypt, Babylonia, Greece and Rome, Africa, India, and North America had goddesses and goddess worship in their religious traditions, and only Judaism, Christianity, and Islam clearly lacked a feminine deity (Haskins 1993:44). For example, Haskins explains:

The Virgin Mary, though celebrated as the Mother of God by Christians and particularly by Catholics, has never been regarded as divine; in fact Catholics are particularly careful to stress her very non-divinity and inferior human and feminine status, and her essential exclusion from the masculine godhead (Haskins 1993:44).

Mary was viewed as a “humble handmaid of the Lord” and much later in the evolution of Christianity, her identity as “‘the Queen of Heaven,’ a title already given to the pre-Christian goddess Istar [Jer.7:18], ‘God-bearer’ . . . ‘mother of God’ and ‘divine Wisdom’ [were] attributes [of Mary] which derived from the church’s conflicts during the early centuries in establishing both the divinity and humanity of Christ” (Haskins 1993:44). Mary’s election to queen status was for purposes other than her own unique value. But Mary and other women played important roles in the Gnostic traditions of the early centuries and the Gnostics clearly provided an alternative path to growing patriarchal orthodoxy.

Gnostic currents were also very much a part of Theosophy in the United States and Europe in the 1800s, an anti-materialist tradition, as Ellwood and Partin (1988:73-

80) explain, that, besides others, served as a “new vessel for ancient wisdom.” This pro-feminine wisdom from antiquity helped to fuel and legitimate the women’s movement in the West and with the arrival of East Indian religious traditions this movement was enriched.

Thangaraj (1994:30) writes that the growing woman’s movement world-over is beginning to enable women to enhance their own humanity “and liberate them from gender discrimination and oppression,” and the modern feminist influence is being felt in the West (Kearney 1995:560), where it was initiated. While some argue that the significance of the women’s movement in the global perspective fails to account for local identities, resistance, and conditions (Greval and Kaplan in Kearney 1995:560), it is obvious that the issues surrounding women’s needs and beliefs are becoming more apparent. With this awareness, it is likely that an increase in appreciation of Goddess worship would arise and that it presents a challenge to patriarchal society.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the women’s movement helped to rejuvenate Celtic and Goddess religions, such as Wicca, and to begin to reinstate these ancient but newly-renovated beliefs into the counterculture in America and elsewhere. The relationship was reciprocal with political, social, and religious influences, etc., all impacting one another. It was and is a global phenomenon. Alternative healing practices of Eastern- and African-based traditions began their evolution into the mainstream as well, and a general interest in non-traditional religious forms could be seen and felt. The Goddess was making a comeback and American women, at least, were discovering themselves as fully human beings in a sociopolitical sense.

Yet, beginning to realize women's equal rights and their societal contributions is a far-cry from overcoming Western-centric notions of reality, particularly the prevalence of a duality – the “either-ors” – and adopting a god or goddess that is all-encompassing, all-inclusive, that is beyond good and bad, divine and evil, beautiful and terrible, like the Black Mother Kali. Harding writes:

Kali, the Divine Mother, has been largely misunderstood in the West. As a result people have labeled her as something evil rather than a source of joy. Up close, the concept of Kali is no more startling than the Christian practice of partaking of Christ's body and drinking his blood during communion” (Harding 1993:xi).

Kali contains the universe in its totality, the unity of opposites – creation, preservation, and destruction – and at the Dakshineswar Temple near Calcutta, she is called Ma Bhavatarini, “the Savior of the World.” She is “the terror of destruction with the reassurance of motherly tenderness” (Harding 1993:xxxii, 44). As world savior, she fulfills all of the needs and desires of her children and withholds nothing, if the devotee prays sincerely to her, but her truest place of worship is a cremation ground. A worshipper of the Mother who comes to such a place may be said to be one who has “burnt away all worldly desires and seeks nothing but union with her. This kind of devotee fears nothing and knows no aversion” (Harding 1993:37). In India Kashi is the Mahashmashana or “great cremation ground,” and to die there insures one will not be reborn in samsara (Eck 1982:32-33). It is a place devoid of dichotomies, it is the sacred place of the God Shiva, and of Mother Kali. Death and the cremation grounds are indispensable to Kali, but outside of the cremation ground, she is also seen as protector, benign in nature.

Westerners, as one chela said, have very different ideas about death, and we may add, let alone cremation grounds. American culture with its ideal that “you can never be too rich, too thin, or too beautiful,” in one sense denies the reality of the human condition -- human suffering, sickness, old age, and death -- and seldom prepares people individually to cope with these eventualities. Despite Christian and other explanations of eternal life, we may again see the influence of the dualistic and materialist world-view on American culture, rather than a universalistic and non-materialistic one. Further, one finds the Western concept of time to be linear, as opposed to the Eastern concept of time as cyclic, both of which lend themselves to individual perceptions of life beginning at birth and ending at death, or birth and death as part of a larger, constantly re-cycling process in which the individual reincarnates. Both views have been present in American culture since at least the 1800s, but the former remains the dominant of the two, though during the 1960s and following, the latter became more acceptable, and currently, it is, if not yet common, not uncommon either.

The name “Kali” comes from “kala,” meaning “time,” and the Black Goddess is said to be Time, the power of time, which ultimately consumes all that is, and it is because she devours time that her color is a bluish black. She absorbs all impurities and purities alike. Harding (1993:41, 59) writes that Kali causes change and “[a]ll beings and all things must yield to her in the end – our desires and hopes, our family, romantic ties, our friends, possessions and hard-earned success in business. As the eternal, indifferent Time she confronts man with his pitiful finite attachments, swallows them up, and produces them again in a different form, in a different time.” Kali

represents the final “yuga” or age, the Kali Yuga, in the Hindu time cycles, which we are in at present, and swallows the cycles whole, as well as regenerating new ones (Harding 1993:60).⁵ Hixon writes:

The Warrior Goddess [Kali] strikes fear into minds and hearts only if they cling to the intellectual or emotional limits. Her garland of skulls attests to freedom from every conventional or existential limit, including the apparently ultimate limits of birth and death” (Hixon 1994:8).

Ma Jaya writes that “Kali answers only to love:”

Her children do not judge time
by the awakened sun
or the sleeping moon
Time ceases to be
and all becomes
the moment of human contact
with the divinity of timeless consciousness
(Bhagavati 1995:108).

An expression of Mother Kali as Time and Change and the impact of living in the moment may be seen in the ever-changing life at Kashi. During the summer, I noticed that changes in scheduling of events or activities occurred repeatedly and seemingly unpredictably. Naturally, certain events were rescheduled due to weather, a death at The River House, or unexpected crises outside the ashram. However, I wondered if this constant change in other areas was a social reflection of Kali’s manifestation of time and change at a profane level. It appeared to promote living in the present and in anticipation of change. Moreover, since Ma Jaya is viewed as a

⁵ Each cycle or Mahayuga is divided into four ages and each cycle represents a day in the life of Brahma, the morning brings creation, the night its dissolution (Harding 1993:60). Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* explains the various approaches the religions of humankind, from archaic to modern, have taken in situating themselves in relation to the cosmos and history, and in

personification of Mother Kali, and therefore, of Time and Change, and she acts unpredictably as well. I thought that there might be a relationship there.

Contacting Andreas Braun (11/20/96) about this behavior he responded, “[a]lthough Ma doesn’t explain why she acts so unpredictably, it is clear to me that it has to do with: 1) her changing needs in the service of others, 2) her personality, and especially, 3) her activity of breaking up stagnancy and attachment to routine in awakening her chelas. In turn the third habit has a negative influence on the administration, growth and business of the ashram, but her ability to keep us at a certain alert edge is generally (but not always) appreciated.” One learns quickly to “go with the flow” at Kashi, and to understand that much of life revolves around Ma Jaya, her work on behalf of those in need and her efforts directed toward her students in their spiritual development.

As the ultimate teacher of Truth, Braun (1995:7) states, the guru is about transformation, “realizing our always already present ultimate freedom. If we at all admit the existence of higher states of consciousness, of the non-dual Mind, then we have to leave room for the possibility of someone living in such liberated awareness and representing this state to us in all the purity that this entails.” Ma Jaya represents this liberated awareness.

Her personality, as noted earlier, is not what one would expect of a guru, but her humor, wit, bawdy language, unpredictability, and playfulness, and her ability to help others ease their troubled lives, especially at the retreat and on her rounds, is quite apparent. Even her personality appears to reflect something of the Goddess Kali.

explicating re-creation. On the Hindu time cycles and Kali Yuga, see Eliade 1954:113-118, 131,

Sri Ramakrishna describes Kālī in his poetry in many ways, but the following is worth noting here.

The Divine Mother is always playful and sportive. This universe is her play. She is self-willed and must always have her own way. She is full of bliss. She gives freedom only to one out of a hundred thousand (Harding 1993:86).

Lex Hixon, who was initiated into the Divine Mother tradition in India in 1960, writes of the applicability of the Mother for today's global society. The ancient, living tradition of the Goddess, "provide[s] much-needed resources for the nontraditional, secular culture called the modern world. Mother Reality remains tender, playful, open, creative, unconventional, and indefinable. She is fundamentally the open space beyond religion, which I call timeless awareness. She stands always outside frameworks. Yet her unitive wisdom also presents a way to harmonize genuine religious and cultural traditions, which advance rival claims. Mother loves all her children equally" (Hixon 1994:xii). Clearly, Hixon's description parallels the Kashi tradition, the teachings of Ma Jaya, and the Guru herself.

DEVOTION AND RITUAL

A godly aspirant is an adept in meditation on the Divine Mother at the centers of the mystic consciousness and experiences Her in them and the universe. He [the aspirant] transcends the plane of duality and distinction and partakes of Her supreme undifferentiated consciousness and delight. He dissolves his mind, eradicates his ego, and annuls the world of phenomenal appearances. He harmonizes and synthesizes duality and distinction in unity, and attains fulfillment (siddhi). He acquires the integral knowledge and the intuitive experience (Harding 1993:75).

As a major foundation of Kashi's spiritual focus, worship of the gods and goddesses, particularly of the Mother Kali, Harding's explanation of Kali worship is helpful in this discussion. In the previous quote the achievement of such an awareness through meditation would seem most difficult, and Harding (1993:89) suggests "few people are capable of praying with such intensity as to convert it into meditation." For this reason and others, worship, an external ritualistic form and internal mental mode of adoration, become means toward realizing the "soul's relationship with God." Seva, work done in service to God, is also worship, and the worship process is one of dedicating and offering one's life in its entirety to God (Harding 1993:89). The chela's stories make this point evident.

The relationship of the soul to God, according to Swami Bhajananda in Harding, has four elements present in worship, and these are: *sacrifice*, *adoration*, *sacredness* and *cult* (Harding 1993:90). Sacrifice means giving without anticipating anything in return; adoration entails love and reverence, such as in chanting the names of God (kirtan or group singing; mantras, the personal chants given by a guru); sacredness indicates that everything associated with worship is holy (the worshiper, the place of worship, the articles used in worship, etc.); and cult refers to the relationship of the worshipper to the god or goddess (Harding 1993:90-91). Harding elaborates that:

a worshiper of Kali has some attributes of Kali in him or her, and likewise, a worshiper of Shiva, has Shiva's attributes. Otherwise, he or she wouldn't feel attracted toward that particular deity. This is the rationale behind the concept of *ishta devata* (Chosen Deity) – the God one loves the most, naturally and without being told to do so. Cult expresses itself in two ways: myth and ritual. While myths are sacred stories about Gods and Goddesses, ritual is a symbolic

act which expresses a mystic relationship between man and Deity.

Like music and dance, ritual, too, springs spontaneously from a deeper layer of consciousness where man touches the divine harmony of the rhythms of life (Harding 1993:91).

The above reference to attributes and the idea of a Chosen Deity at Kashi may be identified with the theme of *the connection* that the chelas frequently use, having a connection with Ma Jaya and with saints and deities, as well as fellow spiritual seekers in the same tradition. The connection is felt, experienced, and in the case of more than one chela, something that seems right, something unquestionable. In the story of one chela who for more than a year had read and heard about Kali, he was drawn to Ma Jaya by that connection with the Goddess (A.F.). Another chela found that what he had lacked in his life was the awareness and love of the Great Mother, and this was discovered through Ma Jaya (B.O.). Still, another young woman was drawn to Ma Jaya because she is a warrior with a great heart (G.O.). In Harding's terms it might be said that these individuals share attributes, a connection, with the Goddess and with their Guru.

Collective worship at Kashi figures around two primary rituals, kirtan or group chanting and darshan or sharing with the Guru. The former introduces the latter, though kirtan may occur without darshan. Such was the case in August just prior to my return to Oklahoma.

Ma Jaya was away from the ashram giving retreats and a few chelas gathered one evening expecting to have regular kirtan. When the group as a whole did not materialize, the chelas began an impromptu kirtan with less-than-expert musical abilities, but with all the heart and devotion needed to the accomplish worship of the

Gods and Goddesses, many of whom were named in various chants. Considerable laughter ensued with the off-beat rhythms, chinking cymbals, and not-quite-melodic singing. Nonetheless, it was worship and none of the chelas left uninspired or unhappy that evening. As a participant-observer with little knowledge of the chants themselves or the melodies, and adding nothing other than periodic laughter and an appreciation for their effort, the evening, though unconventional, I think, even by Kashi standards, was a highlight. Normally, the musicians and lead singers of kirtan are highly skilled and the chants and music they produce are almost hypnotic in their beauty and appeal to listeners and participants. The impromptu kirtan had a different appeal.

Darshan, however, only occurs when Ma Jaya is present, as is true of darshans in other spiritual traditions, and it centers around her teachings at that moment. Though darshan is a group event, the teachings are individually interpreted by devotees as they are most relevant to them and chelas have said that when Ma Jaya responds to one of them in their own situation, the message is one that can be appreciated by everyone. Everyone learns from the teaching (O.W.). All ages are present for darshan, even though there are special children's darshans in which Ma Jaya, I was told, speaks to the children at their various ages and develops a relationship with each child on the ashram.

At the close of darshan after Ma Jaya had left, I noted especially, a symbolic ritual, arati or arti, in which a lighted lamp is held aloft and passed over the Guru's tucket and is offered in all directions to photographs of saints or other holy objects within Dattatreya Temple. The lamp was passed between chelas for their own offerings and, as Harding (1993:93) recounts, this is an act symbolizing the soul's

surrender to God. The group jointly chanted and pranamed or bowed with hands placed together in respect for the Guru as she left. On several occasions following outdoor darshans and memorial services, Ma Jaya and her entourage would walk passed each temple around the pond, stopping to pay tribute to the deities, the murtis or living deities, within before retiring for the evening. Sometimes prasad or sacramental food blessed by the Guru was eaten or snacks prepared beforehand were consumed as people visited following worship.

While chelas meditate and worship privately as they choose, one of the most impressive group rituals of the summer took place on May 26th, on Ma Jaya's 56th birthday. The evening began with the opening of Ma Jaya's new art gallery which displays her hand painted works of art and a birthday dinner in her honor at Laxman House. Following these events, the three sannyasins mentioned before were installed into the Kali Tantra tradition and the new statue of the God Hanuman, a murti, was dedicated in the Hanuman Temple.

Gathered outside the Hanuman Temple, chelas sat on risers and guests on folding chairs as the ritual proceeded. The new statue, hand crafted and elaborately painted except for the eyes had been placed within the temple itself. I was told that "opening the God's eyes," painting them open or opening them in some other fashion, was an important ritual, since it is this opening which brings the deity "to life," to be a murti, not just a statue. The first thing the God's newly-opened eyes are to see must be perfection, not a puny human. Sometimes a mirror is placed before the God so that it sees itself, perfection, but in this instance, I cannot report what did occur, since the

temple was full of people, Ma Jaya, the new sannyasins, et al, and from outside my view was obstructed.

The fire pit blazed that evening with Shiva's Trident standing nearby and the oil lamp, arti, moved about in purification with people taking on the light and purity by motioning with their hands over their faces and heads. The Hanuman Chalisa was chanted, then the Kali and Durga Kirtans. Conch shells were blown into the black Florida night and Ma Jaya told the story of the God Hanuman. She stated her mission and that of Kashi is "to bring Kali to the West." The chelas responded: "Jai Kali Ma," "Victory to Mother Kali." "Ki Jai," "Glorious Victory."

CHAPTER 5

CONTENTION AND ACCEPTANCE

CONTENTION

The rise of new religious movements during the 1960s, especially those with Asian and East Indian connections, such as the “Moonies,” “Hare Krishnas,” and others, elicited responses in opposition to them, primarily from the parents and friends of young people who joined these groups (Bromley and Shupe 1987:223). Banding together to form the “anticult movement” or ACM in the 1970s, these parents adopted as their movement’s ideological base, a previously espoused explanation from the Korean War years. This ideology, known as the “brainwashing theory,” was used initially to explain how the communists utilized persuasive techniques and coercion to promote defection among US troops (Bromley and Shupe 1987:224). Also known as the “atrocious tale,” ACM members applauded the work of particular individuals, professionals in psychology, mental health, and psychiatry who stated that “cults” were pathological (Ellwood and Partin 1988:285-286).

Applying these the explanations, the ACM publicized the “threat of cults” to young people and society at large, campaigning vigorously against them, initiating legislation and criminal charges, and basically harassing groups with impunity. The sensationalized claims and the “testimonies of ‘experts’,” helped to create a social climate of dissension and controversy surrounding all NRMs (Ellwood and Partin 1988:285-286), but at the heart of the matter, according to Bromley and Shupe in *The*

New Vigilantes (1980), was the fear that such groups threatened parental authority, replaced the biological family with an adopted one headed by a leader who substituted as the parent, and thwarted parental concerns that children prepare for appropriate careers in the world (cited in Ellwood and Partin 1988:286).

It is at this juncture that we find the greatest conflict between NRMs and former members, their parents and friends, and groups supporting these individuals. What seems to be at stake *is* the matter of authority, but understandings about authority vary between cultures, so that distinctions stem from a lack of cultural awareness and a perceived threat to one's own cultural norms. In India, especially in rural areas, parents actively seek out gurus to teach and train their children and because this is a part of the established cultural system, there appears to be no conflict over who has the authority, meaning, parents or gurus. Both have it. While in a teaching with a guru, the guru directs; the chela obeys. That is one way to achieve the realization of life's goal and to this end parents promote the custom.

In the American context, however, parental authority rules supreme or so it seems, at least on the legal front, and the perceived challenge to that authority may produce active resistance to alternative traditions. Even though many of the people who joined NRMs were legal adults, parents, former members, the ACM believed they had been coerced into joining and actively sought to liberate them, whether that was desired by the members or not. At the heart of the matter, as noted in Ellwood and Partin above, was really the issue of authority – who had it, who wanted it, whose legal rights were most important – and of maintaining the American cultural status quo.

NRMs had their supporters, too: the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Council of Churches, and others, but the ACM had the backing of “conservative, sectarian, and fundamentalist Christians” (Ellwood and Partin 1988:285). Hammond writes that part of this conflict centered on the loss of Protestantism’s near-monopoly over American religion. Protestant evangelicalism in the past suggested that “everybody’s God was like everybody else’s,” (Hammond 1987:271), meaning, essentially Protestant by definition, but NRMs provided an alternative to this, a different view of the human being-God relationship. In the cultural scenario above, we find agreement with this loss of denominational Protestant “authority” with that of the perceived threat to parental authority, both struggling to maintain control in a growing intercultural environment.

Berger (1967:111-113) explains that Protestantism served as a “historically decisive prelude to secularization” and we may recall what Weber had to say about the relationship between Protestant Christianity and capitalism. What was actually occurring in Protestantism and in some Jewish sects was the result of secularization that they both had helped to instigate. Nonetheless, the loss of hegemony and the necessity to compete on the religious market was a far-from-popular reality (Hammond 1987:271).

The greatest success of the ACM and its affiliates was their ability to “engender a pervasive fear in the general public by lumping *all* ‘cults’ together so that whatever happened in *any* ‘cult’ is believed to be potential in *every* ‘cult’ ” (Shinn 1987:137). The Jonestown massacre also did more for the ACM than it could have accomplished on its own (Ellwood and Partin 1988:287). In addition the media’s

“unwitting parroting of guilty-by-association stories” had the same effect, to lump all groups together without differentiating between them or between their propensity for violence, abuse, etc. To combine pacifist groups which promote ahimsa or non-violence (i.e., Hindu and Buddhist in general), with groups that promote violence and the stockpiling and use of weapons (i.e., the CSA, Branch Davidians) is absurd, and comparisons based purely on a communal lifestyle, simply because it does not fit the American “nuclear family norm,” which itself has assumed mythic proportions, is inapplicable. The general “cult” label and the intermixing of groups has impinged on First Amendment rights, and as Shinn (1987:138) says, this influence is just now beginning to be felt in terms of legal decisions.

Media interpretations and portrayals of horrific events, such as Jonestown, fueled the fire of controversy and we may recall one chela’s story about her concerned father’s phone call in the wake of that event. Another chela noted how people would inquire if he was associated with Jim Jones’ group (A. R.), which, of course, he was not, yet both examples indicate the social dynamic at the time.

Part of that social dynamic may be seen in what one of Ma Jaya’s students had to say about the early days at Kashi:

Early on in the history of Kashi, things were not so good – stuff about cults and all that. We had our share of attacks. There was a point we used to react every time something was said [about] it, but it’s not the same now. I don’t think about unrelenting attacks. We are established and we have too much of a [good] track record in a lot of things.

[O]ne of the things that is really critical to understand is that nobody who is living here is living here without having made conscious choices to be here. Children have choices a lot.

[One] high school graduate this year and his brother moved here with both their parents. I don’t know how old he was

[when they moved here]. Both the parents came here from Rajneesh, that ashram in Fargo. I don't know all the stories. The kids wanted to live here and the whole subject is about choice.

The thing about cults is the way things are done, you may not really have a choice, but having been through a very long process here, *we have choices*. There isn't anybody who has been here who can't tell you major choices they made about continuing to be a part of Kashi (G.R.).

One of the teenagers said:

A lot of people can't understand following another person [like a guru] and it hits their individualism. You get labeled a cult. We have every right to leave at any point in our lives. We're not shackled here. I don't know how anybody could accuse Ma of doing any wrong-doing at all, because she's making a difference in the world and it's definitely in the right direction. By whatever means [people] don't understand, it doesn't give [them] grounds to judge you (H.C.)

Braun (1995:9) writes that "we all have a responsibility to see that our reality is not toxic to anyone else and that it does not suppress or victimize those who do not share our beliefs. We have to understand that our own freedom to believe as we want depends on our ability not only to tolerate, but to accept the beliefs of others."

In reporting on NRMs and religions in general the media does not record events as devotees of religious groups see them nor as scholars would interpret them, but rather they represent the associations of the readership and reflect general trends in society (Tyson 1987:120-122). " 'Facts' are not canonical for the media" and key words or terms focus on "spectacle" and "personality," which influence and alert readers to the "alien" nature of others through "hook" or "lead" trigger-words like "raid," "cult," "victims," and so on (Tyson 1987:123-125).

While some NRMs were constantly in the public eye through media attention, activities of the ACM being reported by the press, and numerous studies by scholars

dealing with the “cult phenomenon,” Kashi seemed to be spared extensive coverage in print. This is not to say it did not receive any attention in terms of controversy, as the chelas indicate and as newspaper articles attest, but that it was certainly very limited compared to other new religious groups. Local newspapers, The Sebastian Sun and Press-Journal, and The Miami Herald in 1989 reported on a dispute between former Kashi devotees and Ma Jaya concerning a custody matter. Whether the former members were associated with the ACM is unknown, but it is an example of the tension that exists between prior group members, parents, and NRMs as related above in the issue over authority and cultural distinctions.

To the residents at Kashi, two articles in The West Palm Beach (Florida) Post, one written in 1992 and one in 1993, were especially troubling. These articles are evidence of the media’s use of trigger-words that, to this reader, raise red flags and illustrate how cultural and religious differences are used to continue to stir up fearfulness in society. Words in the “public’s perception,” such as “guru,” “egomaniacal,” “child-obsessed,” and recording the testimony of a “cult expert,” a retired psychiatrist, tend to elicit fear and disdain.

This reflects what scholars have noted (as above) and knowing this, one must take it with a grain of salt, yet keep in mind that there are genuine concerns on both sides of *any issue* and realize that if the public is to be properly educated to understand those who are different from the “accepted norm” and understand them without demonizing them, it will take more than sensationalized exposes. It will take a degree of willingness to learn on all sides and to go beyond common, preconceived notions of “alien others” and “witch hunts.” It will take “interculturalization,” an awareness of

globalization at work, and a desire to appreciate humanity as a whole without corporately-imposed boundaries. But this is no small feat. Ken Wilber writes:

The witch hunt begins when a person loses track of some trait or tendency in himself which he deems evil, satanic, demonic, or at least unworthy. Actually, this tendency or trait could be the most inconsequential thing imaginable – a bit of human perversity, orneriness, or rascality. All of us have a dark side. But the ‘dark side’ does not mean the ‘bad side’; it means only that we all have a little black heart . . . which, if we are fairly aware and accepting of it, actually adds much to the spice of life. According to the Hebrew tradition, God himself placed this wayward, whimsical, or perverse tendency in all people at the very beginning, presumably to prevent mankind from perishing from boredom.

But the witch hunter believes that he has no little black heart. He assumes to some degree a peculiar air of righteousness. It isn’t that he lacks a little black heart, as he would like to believe and like to have you believe, but that he is extremely uncomfortable with his little black heart. . . [B]ecause he can deny it no longer, he does start to see it. But he sees it in the only way he can – as residing in *other* people.

Sometimes this witch hunt takes on atrocious dimensions – the Nazi persecution of Jews, the Salem witch trials, the Ku Klux Klan scapegoating blacks. Notice, however, that in all such cases the persecutor hates the persecuted for precisely those traits that the persecutor himself displays with a glaring, uncivilized fury. . . [H]e sees in the[m] . . . what he secretly fears he himself might become. He is most uncomfortable with his own . . . minor . . . tendencies, and so he projects them (Wilber 1985:93-94).

Braun (1995:9) suggests that prejudice is “largely unconscious and manifests in the collective opinions created and supported by the press” and here the corporate mentality differs from culture-group to culture-group. One may consider opposition to NMRs as a lack of cultural awareness, a lack of knowledge about the differences in perspectives, world-views, and conventions of various cultures, even when they have become a part of one’s own cultural landscape. Oddly enough, though the United

States is comprised of multiple cultures, there is considerable intolerance of diverse groups, particularly by the now-conservative media.

Roy Wallis compares NRMs in Britain and America with some intriguing and paradoxical results. For one thing, Americans become far more exercised about NRMs than do the British, and Wallis argues that America's highly institutionalized freedom of religion actually creates greater abuse of freedom and greater intolerance of NRMs than in the United Kingdom, which lacks high level regulations as in the United States (Wallis 1988:355-371). Recalling one chela's story about her European and Caribbean friends who thought Kashi was "nice" while their American counterparts thought it was "weird," we may compare culture-group acceptance or rejection of the same phenomenon and find agreement with Wallis' argument. Certainly, the American media has spared no expense in writing about NRMs, but it has also provided the opportunity for supportive writings concerning new religions and their efforts on behalf of society. This is one area in which Kashi has received excellent press and support.

ACCEPTANCE

Kashi has had its share of positive press over the years. A 1987 article in *The Treasure Coast Magazine (Indian River Pictorial)* gave a comprehensive overview of the community, the guru, and service to the community at large. At that time a number of Kashi endeavors helped to encourage a positive repaire with surrounding communities – Thanksgiving and Easter dinners for senior citizens in conjunction with

other community agencies, participating in Christmas and July 4th celebrations, volunteering at local hospices, contributing to the Christian Children's Fund, and throwing a public clambake at "the ranch" for 450 (Borfitz 1987:27, 82). In the early days of Kashi's formation, the name "Kashi Ranch" was used instead of the more controversial but traditional Indian name "ashram," and seemed to make Kashi more acceptable to the larger community, as one chela related (P.O.). This past summer, Kashi's Tae Kwon Do students participated in the July 4th festivities, performing in a city park, and school students had a booth for the school.

The River School is another draw at Kashi that has helped to win overall area acceptance, and while more will be said about it and other organizational structures and services in the following chapter, it is worth noting here that the school's success and good press has had a positive impact on Indian River County. One 1990 article in the Sebastian Sun pictured the school principal, Marie Cirillo, and Dr. Thomas Byrom. Dr. Byrom, along with Ma Jaya, founded the River School, and the article talked about the construction of new classrooms, expanding the facility for more students. It stated, too, that a study of the school by Rutgers University found a "positive and healthy educational and social environment" (Clark 1990). Graduation announcements, articles about River School student's diverse volunteer activities and community service, and the school's participation in D.A.R.E. and its grant awards, all were reported in local newspapers.

May 22, 1996, the River School dedicated a Peace Pole in a public ceremony attended by area residents, parents, students, peace advocates, and friends. Florida State Senator Patsy Kirth gave the keynote message and area ministers from several

churches spoke during the ceremony. The President of the Indian River County NAACP also addressed the group and the Sebastian River High School Choir performed several songs. One chela explained that the Peace Pole project began some thirty years ago in Japan to encourage world peace in the wake of World War II. 100,000 Peace Poles have been erected around the world; 50,000 in the US, but the eighteen foot mahogany pole at Kashi is the only one in Indian River County, and on it, inscribed in thirty-seven languages, is written "May Peace Prevail on Earth" (P.R.).

Many other activities and achievements at Kashi have received local and state recognition and support, as is mentioned by the speakers at the Peace Pole Ceremony, and the Advisory Board of the River Fund, the non-profit, volunteer organization created by Ma Jaya in 1990, is made up of such respected area leaders as Senator Kirth, an administrator of Indian River Community College, a spokesperson for the IRC Sheriff's Department, the President of the Sebastian Chamber of Commerce, the Executive Director of the Sebastian River Medical Hospital, and others (The River Fund Annual Report, Fiscal Year 1995).

To assist in supporting her charitable work, especially with AIDS patients, Ma Jaya has been recognized in print for her artistic ability, and sales of her paintings and plates have brought top dollar. A 1992 Press-Journal article told of the sale of five of Ma Jaya's paintings in a ten-minute period that raised \$20,000 for children with AIDS (Salmon-Heyneman 1992). She has won a growing artistic reputation at national and international levels and her works have appeared in numerous art shows, such as those at the Wrenn Gallery in Martha's Vineyard, Villanova University Art Gallery, Espace

Cardin in Paris, in Rome, and elsewhere (Salmon-Heyneman 1992). But recognition does not stop with her art.

Ma Jaya's outspoken advocacy for AIDS and HIV infected individuals has brought awareness and recognition. In this area she is seen as a pioneer in spreading the message about the epidemic that has taken so many lives and particularly at first that divided society along already existing but not quite so apparent heterosexual-homosexual battle lines. In this area she is meeting needs that other religious leaders and groups have left unmet, due to the social stigmatization surrounding AIDS and the gay community. Advocating compassion and care for the sick and dying, for those abused and stigmatized, has been one of her "battle cries" and she has been instrumental in bringing this message to other religious leaders, as we will see presently.

Supporters in this area, for example, Arlo Guthrie, a student of Ma Jaya's who attended the World Parliament of Religions in 1993, and Ivana Trump have contributed their time, energy, and more to help in fundraising endeavors (Atkins, Press-Journal 1996). Ivana's yacht, docked in Palm Beach, served as the site of the recent event, and here one finds yet another reason for Kashi's acceptance over the years – its acceptance over earlier contention.

Acceptance of this NRM in part comes from its geographic location, despite the fact that some chelas may view the Indian River area as less-than-cosmopolitan. Kashi is part of Florida, and as Bill Peterson in Freeman (1995:26) has said, "Florida is the greatest country in America." Perhaps one of the most, if not *the* most,

accepting states in the union is Florida with its wide-open, no-holds-barred, “frontier spirit.”

Florida is not a single place; it is many places. It is, at once very old and very new. It is a place of passing through and a place of settling down. It is as cosmopolitan as Miami, as easygoing as the Panhandle, and as wild as the Everglades.

...
Florida is bigger than we think. It is more than tourism, it is more than industry, it is more than the wild beauty of nature or the gleaming steel of skyscrapers. Florida is an assortment of cultures, economics and ecosystems. It stretches from the tropics to Georgia, from sandy beaches to the Everglades, from sophisticated cities to farms, ranches and groves (Freeman 1995: Introduction, n.p.)

Florida is like a perennial teenager, always in the process of growing up. First a Spanish territory, she was sold to America in 1819. But America was not sure what to do with her. There were Indian battles, a Civil War, a string of booms and busts. Finally, with the advent of railroads, pesticides, air conditioning and better highways, the Sunshine State assumed its rightful position as the nation’s playground (Freeman 1995:15).

What better place for the Goddess to “play” than “the nation’s playground?”

Ma Jaya (11/8/96) has said that “Kashi itself is eternally young and beginning. It will always be a beginning . . .” and since Florida is like the “perennial teenager, always in the process of growing up,” there seems no better place for Kashi than Florida. Like India, Florida is lush and tropical in places with a riotous profusion of plants and animals that tempt the primitive palate. Mother Kali’s favorite flower, the red hibiscus, grows here. Florida has masses of humanity in its big cities and still retains deserted stretches of beachfront, impenetrable mangrove swamps, and a “River of Grass” like no other on earth. Ernest Lyons writes that “Florida is for amazement, wonder and delight, and for refreshment of the soul” (Freeman 1995:17).

CHAPTER 6

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICE

THE COMMUNITY

The hope of the future would seem to lie with the smaller communities, sometimes associated with a larger community . . . consisting of men and women, married and single, seeking a new style of life which will be in harmony with nature and with the inner law of the Spirit. These communities cross all barriers of race and religion and are the expression of the urge to go beyond the present economic, political, and religious systems and to open a way to the future of man. They can be likened to the monasteries of the Middle Ages, the centers of ferment which would gradually transform society and make possible a new civilization (Griffiths 1982:41).

In the above quote of Bede Griffiths in *The Marriage of East and West* we find elements reminiscent of the Kashi community, its interfaith, tolerant religious message, and its diversity. Griffiths (1982:41) also mentions that many communities are “too much involved in the present industrial system,” and in 1982 this might have seemed an appropriate assessment. Yet, every community must function within the local and the global economy if it is to survive, and to ignore this fact or diminish its significance is unrealistic.

James Richardson (1988:3), citing McCarthy and Zald, discusses the importance of a group’s management of resources in a given environment. The crucial element is what any group of individuals can bring to the community in terms of their talents and abilities to help not only sustain it, but to make it prosper. These abilities are more than just economic; they are personal and collective resources at multiple

levels. Part of the question, then, deals with abilities, the makeup of a group, and with this in mind, the questionnaire responses help to elaborate, at least in part, the diversity of Kashi's residents and their various talents.

The questionnaire sample was compiled from the responses of 49 residents of the summer population at Kashi in 1996, a population which stood at 140. I asked the following eighteen questions:

1. Date of birth
2. Place of birth [city, state, country]
3. Sex
4. Current age
5. Cultural/ethnic background [i.e., Euro-American, Afro-American, Hispanic, etc.]
6. Level of education completed [high school, technical/vocational, some college, college, graduate/professional, other, specify if desired]
7. Place of residence prior to coming to Kashi [city, state, country]
8. Occupation prior to coming to Kashi
9. Income/economic status prior to coming to Kashi
10. Religious background/orientation [i.e., Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Hindu, etc.]
11. Marital status [single, married, divorced, widowed]
12. Number of children; number of grandchildren
13. Age when you moved to Kashi
14. How long have you lived at Kashi [months, years/since 19__]
15. How many of your relatives live at/near Kashi [all, some, none]
16. Current occupation
17. How did you first learn about Ma or Kashi?
18. How did you come to live at Kashi? What brought you?

Though some of the questions may seem ambiguous, I thought they would provide a general profile of the community. Respondents' years of birth ranged from 1914 to 1984. The highest number in terms of a birth-year was 1944 with 8 residents; second highest was 1953 with 4, and from there the spread was fairly even. The place which had the highest number of births represented was the state of New York with 11 residents. Of these, 3 were born in New York City, 3 in Brooklyn, and the others in

smaller towns around the state. California held the second highest position with 6: 2 from Los Angeles, 2 from Riverside, 1 each from San Francisco and Walnut Grove. Pennsylvania was third with 5, and Florida and Wisconsin both had 3. Kansas, New Jersey and the United Kingdom had 2, and places represented by a single resident were Maryland, Oklahoma, Michigan, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Missouri, Oregon, Idaho, New Mexico, Ohio, Texas, Washington D. C., North Carolina and Puerto Rico. 23 states were represented and 2 nations abroad.

Knowing that the community population of 140 consisted of 80 females and 60 males, including 38 children under age 18 (20 boys and 18 girls), I was curious to see how the questionnaire survey compared in terms of the gender ratio. The breakdown, however, was not so close. 32 females and 17 males completed the form. In this instance and as luck would have it, the sample does not accurately depict the total population on the gender question, but anyone who was available and willing to participate in the project was gratefully accepted and no distinctions were specified for participants in any way. I had hoped for a good cross-section as a sample, and in regards to current ages, the sample did provide a broad base: the youngest was 11; the eldest, 81, and other ages represented everything in between.

Cultural/ethnic backgrounds consisted primarily of respondents with European-American ancestry, 41 of the 49. Of these 41, quite a few included specifics, such as Italian, Irish, Welsh, English, French, etc., and mixtures of cultural groups, and Slavic ancestors were identified, too, Russian, Rumanian, Polish, and more mixtures. 3 individuals gave mixed Native American and European backgrounds, 2 listed African

American and European ancestry, and 2 identified their Hispanic roots. 4 respondents left this question unanswered.

The sixth question dealt with the level of education completed and here 2 participants were under 18 years of age and still in junior high and high school. 5 respondents completed high school, 10 had completed some college work, and 32 had graduated from college with baccalaureate degrees. 11 college graduates went on to finish graduate or professional school, holding masters or doctorate degrees, and so on.

Prior to establishing Kashi in Florida, Ma Jaya had a number of houses in New York, Colorado, California, where some of her students lived and several interviewees talked about living in these houses prior to coming to Kashi. The questionnaire asked about the place of residence before coming to Kashi. For some of the younger respondents, this question was not applicable, as they had been born at Kashi or moved there with their parents at a young age, and one respondent left the answer blank. Nonetheless, 10 listed New York City as their prior residence; 4 named Queens, New York; 4 said Berkeley, California; 4 named Boulder, Colorado; and 2 identified Los Angeles. Several non-specifics were given, one each in California, Florida, and Arizona, but other locations included: in New York : Cherry Plain, Forest Hills, and Iliion; in California: Santa Monica, Big Sur, and San Rafael; in Florida: Melbourne and Palm Bay; and Denver, Colorado; Boston, Massachusetts; Roanoke, Virginia; Seattle, Washington; and Manchester, England.

The eighth question asked about occupation prior to Kashi and I expected a wide range of answers for this one. Only one person of the 49 did not respond. For 9

respondents, the question was inapplicable, since they were children at the time. Of the others, 5 were formerly students, 4 were secretaries, 6 were teachers, and 6 were engaged in the social service field, meaning, in social work, psychological or psychiatric counseling or some type of therapy. Other occupations included: nursing, parenting, telecommunications, advertising, programming, the movie industry, theater, art and music, real estate, bookkeeping, journalism, waiting tables, odd jobs, and “drifting” – clearly, a little of everything. Relating to occupation is the question of economic status prior to coming to Kashi. 8 individuals left this question unanswered, but for the rest, 2 cited an upper income level, 28 stated a middle income level, and 11 cited a lower income level.

Question 10 was the one which really intrigued me because it dealt with the religious background or orientation of members of the survey group. Of the 49 respondents, 22 listed Protestant traditions as their religious heritage: 6 Presbyterians, 5 Episcopalians, 3 Lutherans, 2 Baptists, and 1 Unitarian. 9 were Roman Catholics and 9 were Jewish. 4 of the latter gave specifics: 2 noted Reform Judaism and 2 Conservative Judaism. 4 of the respondents grew up at Kashi and mentioned their tradition was mixed. 3 other respondents gave mixed traditions, and 2 said they had no religious background of any kind. One cannot not help but reflect on the decline of the Great Tradition, as Ellwood calls it, of Denominational Protestantism beginning in the 1950s and continuing today, and considering if that decline had an impact on the 22 Protestants in the survey.

Marital status and children were addressed in Questions 11 and 12. 16 respondents stated they are single, 23 married, 8 divorced, and 2 widowed. 27 had

children, of which 4 had grandchildren. The number of children ranged from 4 to 1, with 2 individuals having 4 children, 4 having 3 children, 13 having 2 children, and 8 having 1 child.

To learn how old people were when they moved to Kashi, I asked them to list their ages at arrival. 2 were born at Kashi and 1 arrived at six months old, and from there the range is indicated as follows with the number of respondents of that age in parentheses [age (number of responses)]: age 8(1), 9(1), 12(2), 14(1), 19(1), 21(2), 22(3), 23(1), 24(1), 25(1), 26(1), 27(1), 28(3), 29(2), 30(1), 31(1), 32(3), 33(5), 34(2), 35(4), 36(2), 38(1), 42(2), 52(2), 55(1), and 72(1). Ages 32 through 35 had the highest number of arrivals. Likewise, I asked how long each person has lived at Kashi and the range was from 8 months to the full 20 years. 6 have been at Kashi 20 years, 4 for 19 years, 11 for 18 years, 12 for 17 years, 5 for 16 years, 1 for 15 years, 2 for 14 years, 1 for 11 years, 2 for 8 years, 1 for 7 years, 1 for 4 years, 2 for 2 years and 1 for 8 months. With so many families living at the ashram, Question 15 asked about relatives who might live at or near Kashi and 4 stated that all their relatives did, 31 said some of their relatives did, 13 answered none, and one was not given.

Considering current occupations of the residents of the ashram surveyed, several categories tallied the highest numbers, that of teachers (11) and those in management positions in manufacturing (5). Other occupations included: principal, nursing, editing/publishing, students, business, massage therapy, insurance, real estate, commercial clamming, factory work, cleaning, products design, cook, sales, martial arts instruction, administrative assistance, bookkeeping, and caregiving. One was retired.

Two last questions rounded out the survey: How did you first learn about Ma or Kashi? And How did you come to live at Kashi? What brought you?

Overwhelmingly, except for one not stated, the question was answered that it was Ma Jaya and not the community in Florida that first drew their attention. 11 people learned about her from a friend or friends, 5 from fellow students or classmates, 9 from a spouse, family member or parents, 2 from lecture-seminars given by Ma Jaya, 2 from Hilda Charlton, 1 from Ram Dass, 2 from students of Ma Jaya's, 4 from therapists, 3 from nutritional programs or a health club, 2 from a magazine article or flyer, 1 from an employer's spouse, and 1 ran into Ma Jaya on the beach at Sanibel. And lastly, except for two unanswered questions and the children who had come to Kashi with their parents, everyone else said that Ma Jaya was what brought them to Kashi in Florida. 5 stated that they had come right after Ma Jaya closed her houses, but 2 also said they were founding members. In most cases, respondents said they were invited to come to Kashi by the guru or they asked her to be allowed to move to Kashi. Either way, the reason to come to Kashi was Ma Jaya, and any other factors were secondary. Children who had come to Kashi or been born there, as the interviews recount, talked about wrestling with the issue of their futures, making the adult decision to commit themselves to Kashi or look at other options, and this reflects the matter of choice which the younger generations faced.

One chela talked about Kashi's generations:

I'm pretty much the third generation here on Kashi. The first generation was the people who had renounced everything in life, not everything, [but they] had come to move [into] a spiritual community. The[y] had come from the outside world [and] they [came to] escape and pursue their religious and spiritual desires. A lot of people didn't even do it for that reason. They

were so enamored with Ma, by that experience of Ma, that they made that sacrifice. They were the first group.

The first one's [generation's] children pretty much had to fill all the positions of running an administrative organization, which this is, because there are a lot of things to take care of and there is the business aspect, the spiritual aspect, community relations aspect, the school to run. They were the first group [the second generation] who were educated in that sense . . . now we have our foundation firmly planted, people running the show.

Now my generation come[s] along [the third generation]. What's my role? How do I go from here? I said I had a great desire not to be rich or to be wealthy or follow a material path, but to be successful in whatever I do. I want to be financially stable and secure. I want to be able to support my family. . . . After I go to college for four years, I might come back and live on the ashram. I might go to law school and become a lawyer. I might become a politician. I might study medicine, become a doctor, open up a practice in Vero Beach.

We don't live in [a] monastery, of course. [We're] living a Brahmacharya life. It's interfaith. Everybody has a different background . . . and the spiritual life, living in a community lifestyle, is not for everybody (H. Q.).

Another chela said:

I think that one of the most enforcing aspects of the communal living situation is the children. Because I have children I know they are protected . . . [T]here aren't guns and drugs in their everyday life and that's really important. They are going to have a strong base and their spirituality is really there. They are very spiritual people, the children who live here and that's exciting to think that they are going out in the world and really make a difference (R. A.).

ORGANIZATION AND SERVICE

Administrating and maintaining life for 200 people on 82 acres of land with four large residence houses and an apartment complex, a college preparatory school (Grades Pre-12), business and service organizations, and serving as a retreat center for visitors is a major endeavor in which all of Kashi's residents participate. While some

residents live in houses and duplexes “across the street,” across Roseland Road, those on the grounds pay a monthly fee for room and board and share in the communal meal at Laxman House each evening. Other meals are “on your own” and in each house the kitchen is a favorite spot for cooking and socializing, often over a cup of hot tea, the favorite ashram drink.

Grounds and buildings are maintained by residents and depending on the weather, there always seems to be something new being built or something in the process of renovation. In tropical Florida one either continually prunes the vegetation and maintains the buildings or they overgrow and mildew practically before your eyes. There is great care taken of property, both personal and collective, at Kashi, and a sense of pride permeates the environment. Perhaps it stems from recalling the Florida scrub and sand of twenty years ago and seeing what has been accomplished since then. An expansion project is in the blue print stage for single homes and duplexes on the grounds.

Since most residents are employed elsewhere, ashram work schedules have to accommodate employment schedules, but regardless of one’s job per se, residents find time for whatever needs to be done, and they serve the wider community, individually volunteering in numerous capacities, such as on local boards like the Indian River Substance Abuse Council, the North County Ecumenical Council, and others (Kashi Foundation 1994). We will return to this aspect momentarily.

In 1994 Master Soo Se Cho, a martial arts expert and Ma Jaya’s husband, and Ma Jaya celebrated the opening of Macho Products, Inc., a company that manufactures martial arts equipment and protective training gear. The idea for the company

reportedly was hatched during a card game in which Master Cho was playing (G. O.), and because he had knowledge and expertise regarding self-defense and those areas of the human body most vulnerable to injury, the business was initiated. For some time, it operated from a garage, but fourteen years later the company moved into its 40,000 square foot building in Sebastian. It employs 200 and has become a \$12 million a year operation, selling marital arts equipment, and protective gear to law enforcement agencies for training purposes (Bell 1994:14A). Several Kashi residents I interviewed worked at Macho and the company makes contributions to the River Fund, which was established in 1990 by Ma Jaya as a non-profit, volunteer organization dedicated to the care and support of terminally ill people and their families. Besides Macho, an example of some of the other wider community contributors to the River Fund include: Certified General Contractors, Temple Emanuel, Palm Beach Center for Living, The Chicago Tribune, Perkins Drug Company, Hale's Groves, Hunter Douglas, S.J. Baking Products, Inc., Bagel Factory, just to name a few (The River Fund Annual Report).

The recent River Fund Annual Report records the activities and services it supports or provides, as well as a financial statement. For the fiscal year 1995 total public support and revenue was just slightly more than \$200,000 and total expenses were \$151,142. As an example of Kashi's service, I was able to see how Ma Jaya and the volunteers reach out to the community at large, when in February 1996 I accompanied Ma Jaya on the regular Thursday rounds of three facilities in West Palm Beach, Florida: the Palm Beach County Home, the King David Convalescent Center, and the Connor's Nursery.

During the rounds, patients in these facilities received food and gifts, and the personal attention of the Guru, who had quite a repertoire with many of the patients. By their behavior, one could tell the patients were delighted to see her, and they thrived on her attention and her touch. Decked out in black spandex and jewelry, she moved along the corridors joking with nurses, her voice shattering the quiet and bringing a vibrancy and liveliness that was very different from the everyday hospital routines.

At the county home, the AIDS ward was filled with people in various stages of the disease. There was camaraderie along with the obvious suffering and pain. Ma Jaya's advocacy for these individuals was apparent, as was her concern for the elderly at King David's. The Connor's Nursery, a residential facility for babies with AIDS, for abused/ abandoned children, crack babies and their siblings, gave another glimpse of how Ma Jaya and the Kashi volunteers work with children. In two instances a volunteer feeding a sick baby and another young man playing with older children devoted themselves fully to their charges and appeared to love every minute, but the emphasis is on selfless service or seva, and it is part of the spiritual life of Kashi. Ma Jaya teaches that caring for the sick, the dying, is not about the caregiver; it is about the person in need of care.

Other hospital and hospice regular visitations, two in West Palm Beach and one in Sebastian, occur at Hope House, Emmaus House and Mary's House, all facilities for the care of babies, children or adults with AIDS. These regional institutions are not the only ones Ma Jaya and the volunteers visit and serve. While traveling, regular visits are made to the Terence Cardinal Cooke Health Care Center and Incarnation House in New York; the Los Angeles County Hospital, Rue's House,

Carl Bean Home and three others in Los Angeles; Laguna Honda Hospital, Macmillian Drop In Center and two others in San Francisco; and Cook County Hospital and two other facilities in Chicago. There is also concentrated effort given to the AIDS Quilt project.

The River Fund supports additional agencies and services too numerous to mention here, but the Memorial Boardwalk and the River House are two that need to be noted. In keeping with the primary belief that “ ‘there are no throw-away people’ and that everybody has a story that needs to be heard,” the Memorial Boardwalk was built in 1994 at Kashi, stretching across 300 feet of mangrove swamp that borders the Sebastian River. The boardwalk ends at the river and the boards and benches bear the names of people who have died as personal memorials to them. Many of these have died of AIDS (The River Fund Memorial Boardwalk, the River Fund Annual Report, 10). Some of the dead received memorial services at Kashi, services like the two mentioned earlier (Chapter 4).

The River House was opened 1994 in response to the needs of the dying, people who did not want to spend their last days alone or in a nursing home. Since it opened, more than 30 terminally ill people have lived at the River House with the typical stay being three months. Between 1995 and 1996 all but one of the individuals who came to the River House had AIDS. The care program is coordinated with physicians, nursing agencies, and the professional house manager, and the facility has four beds and a homey environment, where patients receive round-the-clock care and frequent visits from Kashi residents who also care for them. Future plans call for

expansion of the River House to double its capacity and services (Brochures: The River Fund, The River House; Annual Report, 6, 12).

One last institution at Kashi needs to be discussed here and that is the River School. The stories of the chelas tell us why and how the school was founded in 1979 and since those early days, the River School has grown dramatically, going from formerly serving a few ashram children only to serving the community at large.

Operated by the non-profit, interfaith Kashi Foundation, Inc., the River School's Statement of Purpose explains:

Within each child lies the potential for excellence. At the River School we educate the whole child, understanding that each person must achieve a balance of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, and social skills as foundations of living.

Our Objectives

- to nurture the love of learning which is innate in all of us,
- to ensure that each child works as closely to his/her potential as possible,
- to have all our students enter college fully prepared to make the most of the opportunity,
- to give each child the individual attention they deserve,
- to encourage the appreciation of individual and cultural differences and the respect for life.

What we Do

1. Our classes are small. Our teachers adapt their teaching methods to meet the individual needs of children. They create an atmosphere in the classroom which fosters a combination of individual initiative and cooperative effort. Students are encouraged to pursue interests and become deeply involved in what they study.
2. As part of an interfaith community, the River School emphasizes the values of self-respect, excellence, kindness, honesty, responsibility, and cooperation. We have no sectarian curriculum; rather, we honor the spirituality of every person.
3. We emphasize the creative arts across the curriculum, and we encourage the integration of different ways of learning.
4. We involve students of all ages in community service. Service brings increased awareness of others and develops compassion, responsibility, and an sense of community.

5. There is a clear continuity of learning between home and school, and we encourage the parents of our students to be actively involved in River School activities and in the children's learning.
6. We provide a safe environment, physically and emotionally. Violence, bigotry, and destructive peer pressure are not tolerated, nor is substance abuse in any form.
7. We stress the inter-relatedness of life and the need for cooperation and tolerance. We train both staff and children in peer mediation and in conflict resolution techniques.
8. We provide a basic college preparatory academic curriculum in our upper school (The River School 1.11.94).

June 10, 1996, I attended the River School Graduation, Moving Up and Awards Ceremony. The program listed 85 students, a majority of which live in surrounding towns. Awards were given, speeches were made, and Ma Jaya presented each child with a gift, a statue of the God Hanuman, but of most interest to me was the contrast between this ceremony and public school graduations, both large and small, I have attended over the years.

This contrast came with the public recognition of each student by his or her teacher for that student's special talents and contributions, and each child received a big hug from both the teacher and Ma Jaya. The affection displayed, the care towards children by teachers, was something one would not find in public schools, and it was refreshing, self-esteem-building, in my opinion. One day the school's principal introduced me to a young man soon to be college bound. Her pride in him rivaled a parent's pride in a child's success and achievements, and a basic tenet at Kashi, recognizing and celebrating the value of each human being, was evident in both the graduation and the interaction between principal and student.

RECOGNITION AND RETREATS

1993 was a very big year. Everybody at Kashi said so. A letter from the White House had arrived in 1992 commending Ma Jaya for her community service work (Atkins 1992). She had received accolades for her service to humanity, for her art, and numerous good works, but 1993 was the year of the second World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The first parliament had been held a century before, 1893, and it was there that Swami Vivekananda had made headlines, bringing Hinduism to America, and it was at the second parliament that Ma Jaya addressed the assemblage of 400 of the world's religious leaders and some 4,000 visitors (Banks 1993:A-1, A-12).

The parliament lasted eight days and instead of being overwhelming dominated by the “ ‘big three’ – Catholics, Protestants, and Jews,” Parliament Chairman Ramage stated, “[w]e will increasingly be perceived as a multireligious society” (Banks 1993:A-12). The diversity of religious leaders and groups represented was evidence of a “global diaspora.” The metropolitan area of Chicago was a good example, Ramage continued, with 17 Hindu temples, and with more Thai Buddhists than Episcopalians (Banks 1993:A-12). Ma Jaya was noted as saying: “My God is so big in my heart that I can encompass any other religion. . . . I feel, if people had that kind of faith in their God, then they could go into the mosque, they could go into the Hindu temple, they could go in front of the Dalai Lama because they are so sure of their God” (Banks 1993:A-12). She had met with the pope in Rome, giving him a portrait

album of AIDS sufferers, and she spent time with the Dalai Lama during the parliament. Her presence was felt throughout the week.

At the parliament Ma Jaya spoke about AIDS, saying, "I have had hundreds of people with AIDS die in my arms. Millions have died world-wide. One hundred years from now when people look back at this Parliament I want them to remember that this was a horrendous time, and I don't want the people who died to be forgotten" (Mirkin 1993:n. p.). She told the story of Dina, who was raped at age 7, infected, and died at age 9, and she spoke about the death of the ego, about service, and outlined a proposal to the parliament asking religious leaders : "to commit themselves to bringing understanding, love, and spiritual healing to people who have AIDS, their families and their caregivers; to help remove the stigma from the disease and those who have it; to help ease the fear of death and dying by people with AIDS; to work to prevent the further spread of the syndrome; and to support demands for research to find a cure for AIDS and the HIV virus" (Mirkin 1993, n. p.).

In Ma Jaya's commitment to service, to the AIDS cause, to humanity, and to her chelas, I was reminded of what she wrote in my *Nine Meditations*:

Once again you hear the Mother's voice: 'I
love God with all my heart and all my soul,
but I love humanity more.'

Oh, my God, I think, the Mother is whispering
into the wind a sacrilege. Pray no one hears.
Then she says, "I love humanity more than God,
for God does not need my love. He wants me to
love his children (Bhagavati 1994:12).

Part of Ma Jaya's outreach to others comes in the form of intensive retreats held throughout the country. Several chelas said that the best retreats were held at Kashi, weekend intensives that provided a greater depth of experience than a one-day session elsewhere in the country could provide. One brochure stated: "Meet life's challenges with renewed courage and self-esteem. Learn to overcome fear, anger and unworthiness as you devour the ego which can stand in the way of spiritual growth. Find the silence within and bring a deeper awareness to your daily life" (Kashi Ashram). While each retreat is different, I was told, owing to the various groups, etc., the format followed a similar pattern at Kashi with kirtan and darshan in the afternoons. During darshan, retreat participants had an opportunity to bring their needs and questions to Ma Jaya and receive her personal attention. One chela recommended I attend the July retreat to see how Ma Jaya worked with people in this setting, knowing it would be helpful for the dissertation project (P. R.). I signed up.

The weekend of July 12-14, 43 participants including 2 Kashi residents, took part in the intensive retreat. 26 participants came from Florida, 6 from New York, 2 each from California and Illinois, and one each from Canada, Massachusetts, Washington, North Carolina, and Oklahoma. The schedule of events included Friday night darshan; Saturday registration, meditation, orientation, introduction to Tae Kwon Do, walking meditation, lunch, kirtan and darshan and dinner; Sunday arti and meditation, yoga, discussion, walking meditation, and after lunch, kirtan, darshan, closure and dinner. The retreat facilitators were Kashi residents who introduced newcomers to the basics about life at Kashi, about Mother Kali, being with the Guru, etiquette and respect, whatever was important for them to have a successful weekend.

One chela talked about “recovering experience,” keeping the good of the teachings that were most applicable in each person’s experience and incorporating them into one’s own tradition. That, he said, was the way to approach Ma Jaya at afternoon darshan (P. R.). Retreat participants were able to view Ma Jaya’s latest hand-painted plates during the weekend and many were promptly purchased. A new plate series in her collection, the flower plates, Ma Jaya had humorously dubbed “Kaliflowers.”

As participants introduced themselves and told their stories, some had had great traumas in their lives. Several individuals were living with AIDS or HIV, others were caregivers to the sick, others were experiencing major family conflicts. Still others were “friends of friends,” and one fellow identified himself as an “an adventuresome skeptic.” Throughout the weekend participants and chelas interacted comfortably with one another, but the most important interaction for participants came from their experience with the Guru. Interacting with retreat participants, Ma Jaya had a no-nonsense approach, asking pertinent questions, giving logical advise to each, and sharing her special gift with those who came to sit at her feet.

Talking with several retreat participants as they headed home, they said they felt lighter, rejuvenated, ready to go back to their lives and work refreshed. Ma Jaya and the spiritual re-creation had a positive effect on them and her charisma, which I would suggest is her combination of compassion and chutzpah laced with humor and street-speak, brought to mind what one writer said of her:

. . . if the clergy would give their parishioners the kind of attention she does, the people would flock to the churches. The quality of her attention and love is undivided, a rarity in any age. She may be raucous and flamboyant, an unlikely saint who employs an odd jumble of Hindu and Christian terminology, but she is doing more

to help the disenfranchised than almost anyone in sight. Like the Dalai Lama, she says that there is only one religion and it is called 'Kindness' (Lippe 1995:4).

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

During the July retreat, Ma Jaya explained, "I only teach the teachers," and with this saying, I felt that perhaps it related to the sharing of her tradition and teachings with the world at large. I was also interested in the meditative, yoga dynamic that is still for many Westerners unfamiliar territory, despite the fact that it has been part of the American cultural and religious scene since the 1800s and has been studied extensively from several angles: theological, philosophical, psychological, sociological, medical, and so forth. I wondered how, at Kashi, it would be approached with potential students unfamiliar with Eastern practices, as might be helpful for the expanding tradition. Clarifying the matter, Ma Jaya responded:

Kashi itself is eternally young and beginning. It will always be a beginning, even for the meditator who has meditated in the Himalayas, who has stood in solitude in the jungles of India, who has done tapas (austerities) for many, many years still come and start right from the beginning of a new, particular openness. The way we teach here is to gather everyone to our hearts, to our souls and let them go at their own pace – modified, modified. What they do not understand will come to them in the clarity of darshan.

All that is done here is oriented toward the service of humankind – to bring joy to the heart, to have an awakened heart, to bring joy to others first and foremost. Our meditations, our retreats are designed for one to leave here, and yet to never leave here. A heart that is open – in trust, in joy, at the feet of the guru –remains open forever.

I only teach the teachers, for we are all teachers, not just my chelas. Everyone on this beautiful planet can become, to the best of their

ability, a teacher and sharer of divine wisdom. They only need to go deeply into their storehouse, their soul, of all that ever was and all that ever will be. Yes, I would love my chelas to go out with these teachings of service and of taking care of those less fortunate – not just for themselves or others but for humankind, to make the world a better place. There is no greater happiness than putting a smile on someone's suffering face (Bhagavati 11/8/96).

The continuation of teachings and the importance of the individual experience are pertinent to the question that lingers in the back of the mind whenever studying a new religious tradition, that is, the question of how the tradition will fare following its founder's death. Though this question is not foremost, as the emphasis at Kashi is on living in the moment and living it fully rather than being unduly concerned about the future, one chela brought it up during an interview in May, and later several others discussed it when I asked them about it. Some newspaper articles had mentioned the matter of succession.

In his study of a NRM Larry Shinn (1987:125-126) talked about the "transmission of authority from founder to disciples" in the institutional sense and how this may be smooth or rough, particularly in groups established around a guru. Most often continuation is through a succession of gurus, but this need not be the case. In some instances devotees of one guru may seek another when the first passes away, such as occurred with one student of May Jaya's who had formerly studied with Baba Neem Karoli (O. P.). Teacher-disciples might also fulfill this connection, such as was the case in the first century with Jesus' Kingdom movement.

When I inquired about the teaching aspect, a number of chelas said they did not feel called to be spiritual teachers, their gifts lay elsewhere, but others were leaning very much in that direction. It was through the latter, I assumed, that the experiential

dynamic, especially of Ma Jaya, might be continued, passed on to subsequent generations, and one chela said:

I know that Baba's [Neem Karoli] not in his body and I know just from my own experience, he is very, very active, and not any less active than Ma is, and he said himself that he would be more more active if he was not in his body. . . . And I know Swami Nityananda, whom I am very close to and love very much too, is very active and he is very involved. And their goal is the same goal: to help move humanity out of a place of pain and into a place of joy. They have no other function, no other need for existence.

[E]very great soul has come into existence for that purpose [to help humanity]: Lord Jesus, the Buddha, the Ten Gurus of the Sikhs . . . [T]hey have the same generous heart. They're all coming at it from a certain way . . . [T]hey are very humble and generous and kind (A. F.).

In teaching the tradition of the Mother, of the Goddess Kali in the West, Ma

Jaya writes:

In this the Kali Yuga, the word of the Mother should not be hidden inside dusty books on the shelf waiting for the scholar mind to open the pages and become aware that the Mother Goddess does indeed exist.

I, the Mother, say into the wind of consciousness that I, the Mother, belong to any open heart and mind.

. . .
And as the ill wind of the eighties and nineties blows away,
I, Kali, shall climb on the softest clouds and make myself known to the world . . . (Bhagavati 1994:25).

I am the Mother, I am no other.
I shall make my ashram into the home of the wise and the free.
I shall gather my children no matter their religion or creed.
I shall give them all that the great Mahadev gave to me.
I, the Mother – who is no other – shall give them me in Kashi
on the banks of the Ganga (Bhagavati 1994:31).

And in *The Silence: A Journal* the Guru has given a commission to her chelas:

“Your assignment is to find the Bliss of God so that through your example others will see and find the thrill of it all for themselves” (Bhagavati 1993:17, Unpublished manuscript, by permission).

To that end, each chela serves as an example, a role model as it were, to point the way to God, though it will be their own choice as to how that will come to pass. Perhaps, each chela will succeed the Guru in completing his or her commission and continue the tradition of Mother Kali and Ma Jaya. One chela said:

Ma’s the common thread that brought us here, and if it weren’t for Ma, we wouldn’t have this. But if Ma were to leave the body tomorrow, God forbid, I would do everything I could to stay here and [help] run the school. I wouldn’t leave Kashi if Ma wasn’t here. To me, this is home. I believe in what’s here, what Ma has created, what we have all created together. I think it’s a holy place. My Guru has walked here. It’s a holy place (O. W.).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: WHAT MIGHT THE FUTURE HOLD?

Predicting the future of any new religious movement is risky business, given the multiple variables and possibilities. The social sciences have always been far better at explaining events after-the-fact than at prophesying what might come to pass. Yet, by drawing together history and ethnography, we may find indicators that can do a little of both. This may be what Sherry Ortner (1984) suggested anthropology needed to do – unify history and anthropological studies. In one way *Coming to Kashi* has attempted to do just that.

This project endeavors to: understand the historical evolution of the Kashi community from interviewees and questionnaire respondents; learn about the phenomenon of the guru-disciple relationship; consider if previous scholarship, especially Weber's, is applicable here; see what attracts followers to Ma Jaya and why Kashi is their home; and find where Kashi might fit in terms of the big, global picture. Rodney Stark's eight-point model provides a basis for summation as well as a method for assessing Kashi's future, except that, as mentioned before, the model contains no reference pertaining to an ideological base. Ideological additions and the principle questions in my inquiry, which elaborate the personal and historical dynamic, will be incorporated in the model.

Behind Stark's model is the idea that the success of any NRM rests on the ability of a group to "influence behavior, culture, and public policy" (Stark 1987:12).

By this definition, Kashi has succeeded. Its school, for example, has influenced behavior and culture, teaching acceptance of diversity, non-violence, excellence, conflict resolution, respect for others, and so on. Public policy has been influenced by the community's advocacy of AIDS and HIV concerns, and helping the less-fortunate. The River Fund Board of Directors is evidence of Ma Jaya's and Kashi's ability to attract and maintain public support.

With this definition of success established in relation to Kashi, we move on to Stark's major points. He states that NRMs are likely to succeed to the extent they:

1. Retain *cultural continuity* with the conventional faiths of the society in which they appear or originate.

This point pertains to a number of factors: the historic and religious dynamics in America's multicultural environment, from the 1800s and following; the intercultural influences of urban centers and geography; continuity in terms of individuals; and the universal or global appeal of the teachings.

In Chapters 2 and 3 the relationship between the East and the West was demonstrated with the arrival of Hindu swamis, gurus, and teachers from India, following the first World Parliament of Religions in 1893. The environment was conducive to adopting "new" innovations to America's religious landscape because it already contained the seeds of alternative traditions through Spiritualism, Theosophy, and so forth. Of course, these new arrivals were not "new" to India. They represented part of the Great Tradition of Hinduism in Ellwood's terms, though the Tantric tradition was a late comer. They were culturally-continuous, but they had been steadily evolving to meet changing needs in India, and with their introduction to

American culture, they evolved further to make accommodation with their new surroundings and the political economy. They retained the poetic and oral elements, the spiritual, other-worldly, mystical, and meditative aspects that seemed to be missing from conventional American religious traditions, and they introduced the concept of the very personal and reciprocal relationship between the guru and student as a means of achieving spiritual success. Moreover, they found agreement with some factions within the growing scientific community, especially that of psychology (i.e., parapsychology; Carl Jung).

From that point onward, American culture was continually effected by Eastern traditions and the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s was an indication of this cultural continuity. Influenced by the social injustice of the times, increasing dissatisfaction with traditional institutions, and a loss of meaning of life in general, intellectuals and counterculturalists, middle class Americans, turned toward former Eastern imports, now well-entrenched in the multicultural scene.

Cultural continuity with the intercultural environment was felt most strongly in the urban centers. As one chela related: "Sometimes you say, 'Ma, why now? Why here?' I once said, 'Why Brooklyn?' Ma said, 'There are so many different cultures there'" (B. O.). Major cities and their surrounding communities have always been the most favorable to social and religious innovations because of their large populations and varieties of ethnic groups. Ultimately, Kashi was established in Florida, a state with an enormous variety of ethnic groups and religious alternatives, and this is one more example of Kashi's cultural, or rather, intercultural, continuity.

Symbolically, the Ganga at Kashi is sacred in the same way that the Ganges River is sacred in India. Kashi was named for Kashi in India, the city of Banaras. Both bodies of water and the city/ashram occupy sacred space, sacred place. The ashes of the dead are placed in the waters and the dying come to both to pass on to their next existence. It is the ultimate sacrifice of and blessing on the faithful, and Kashi in Florida may be seen as the “Benaras of the West,” though ideologically and functionally, Benaras in India and Kashi in Florida are one and the same, part of the same universal principle.

While each of the chela’s stories are different, unique, they display distinct cultural continuity. Quite a few questionnaire respondents identified their religious roots as originally deriving from denominational Protestantism, Roman Catholicism or Judaism, all conventional faiths in the American context. The appeal of Ma Jaya drew them through friends, previous teachings, or other circumstances to a guru who herself represents a kind of cultural and intercultural continuity, that is, through her American Jewish background, New York roots, life on the edge of poverty, individuality, devotion to the less-fortunate, and her love of God that is unbounded and interfaith. Her writings are culturally continuous with the Indian poetic tradition and are full of universal symbolism and mythology. At the same time the issues she addresses in her teachings are pointed toward appropriate, everyday behaviors, such as acceptance of human diversity, non-violence, kindness, self-love, living fully in each moment, service to others, and so on. These are typical of beliefs based on a universal and essentialist religious perspective as opposed to a triumphalist and rigorously bounded viewpoint. As a role model Ma Jaya is both exemplary and ethical prophet, ascetic and mystical

agent of active social change, and defies Weber's strict demarcation between the East and the West. Ma Jaya and Kashi are "both-and-and," not either-or.

The influence of the feminist movement so prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s may be seen in relation to the reestablishment of Goddess worship, as was the case with the Wicca movement in the United States. Women's needs and striving for fully-human status in the social, political, and economic arenas, and the importance of the mother figure, brought into American consciousness an alternative to worship that had been absent or suppressed since antiquity. From the earliest days of Ma Jaya's teaching, Mother Kali has been a focus of worship and devotion. Only recently I was told about the two new Kali murtis at Kashi. One is a six foot tall, hand-crafted Kali that stands in Ma Jaya's quarters; the other one is in Dattatreya Temple in Kashi House (A. F.). Moreover, Ma Jaya as the Guru represents the Great Mother, caring for her chelas, directing their spiritual endeavors, and serving humanity. She is a powerful feminine role model. Having established Kashi's cultural, intercultural, historic, individual, social, religious, and feminist continuity, we move on to Stark's next point.

2. Maintain a *medium* level of *tension* with the surrounding environment; are deviant, but not too deviant.

This point may best be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, Contention and Acceptance, and Organization and Service. While a more appropriate term than "deviant" might be used, such as anomalous, Stark's words are quoted for accuracy. "Tension" relates to the relationship between a NRM and the community at large which is viewed as normative, having fewer exceptional conventions by comparison. Obviously, a group

with a high level of tension will not survive ultimately, but the significance of a medium level of tension suggests that a group has something different to offer, though not too different, and it has managed to gain some support and backing from members of the political establishment.

The latter is unmistakable in terms of Kashi's many supporters: in state and local government, the medical and business communities, by religious leaders, and others, yet it was not always been so. A higher level of tension existed during Kashi's early days of development than it does now, apparent in the controversy between Ma Jaya, former members, or their families as reported by the local media. Once again, it is important to note that compared to other NRMs, Kashi received limited attention in light of negative press, and in recent years, the ashram's continued service to the community through the school, its work in local hospitals and hospices, and outreach to caregivers, and as an interfaith retreat center, has enhanced regional approval. Macho Products, Inc., has also helped to "grow the economy," as the latest expression suggests. National and international recognition of Ma Jaya's humanitarian work, her art, advocacy in light of the AIDS epidemic, and her role at the second World Parliament have further helped to revitalize local and regional acceptance. Still, there are those who are skeptical and on occasion, make their concerns known. Nonetheless, the level of tension has been declining over the years as the level of success and recognition has been increasing, and Kashi is presently within a medium to lower-medium range in terms of Stark's Point 2.

3. Achieve *effective mobilization*: strong governance and a high level of individual commitment.

Several chapters touch on this point in Stark's model. From the formative pre-ashram days, a degree of effective mobilization occurred with the network of mini-ashrams or houses around the country. The questionnaire sample shows that prior to coming to Kashi, 10 chelas lived in New York City, 4 in Queens, New York, 4 in San Francisco, 4 in Berkeley, 4 in Boulder, Colorado, locations with houses. Even before that the Hindu-based traditions interacted with one another in the United States and spiritual seekers moved around between different teachings until settling on a particular teacher or trying some other route. This is especially clear in a number of chela's personal accounts.

Once in Florida, the number of chelas at the main ashram increased, as Ma Jaya closed the other houses and the community began to grow, making use of member's varied skills and capabilities, and beginning to build the foundation of a community based around the ashram model and subject to the leadership of the guru, the latter being basis of strong governance and direction.

Growth, outreach, retreats, service, and the school necessitated a division of labor and a greater degree of mobilization and institutionalization, which is ongoing. Chelas with business acumen organize various aspects of the running of the ashram. Some organize national retreats, travel plans, speaking engagements for Ma Jaya, or manage finances. Others with good people skills work in public relations. Several are spiritual teachers and work with visitors and newcomers. Ma Jaya also has a number of chelas to assist her with her numerous activities; and the list goes on. The

organizations discussed in Chapter 6 are an excellent example of effective mobilization and strong governance (i.e., the River Fund, Kashi Foundation, the River School, retreats, etc.).

One last part of this point remains, a high level of individual commitment. There is no greater evidence of this commitment than the chela's own stories. The guru-chela relationship itself calls for a degree of commitment to a spiritual path and person, and a willingness to take direction, though devotees are not pressured to remain in the teaching and personal choice, as the chelas have related, is a given. According to interviewees, the matter of choice is a major distinction between Kashi and groups that are referred to as "cults." Individuals make choices for their own futures and in this teaching. Each chela's particular spiritual path is tailored to his or her own needs and capabilities in a reciprocal relationship with Ma Jaya. This individuality allows for considerable leeway and may be an additional reason for the high degree of individual commitment.

Commitment is also apparent in the shared ideological foundation of the Kashi tradition. Chelas are committed to Ma Jaya, first and foremost as their teacher to whom they are devoted, but this commitment would not be so strong if they did not share her interfaith, universal, and holistic perspective. Without a shared knowledge and purpose at individual and communal levels, this community would not have prospered to the degree that it has. Having a strong and supportive community of individuals all going in about the same direction spiritually, encourages commitment to the Guru and to the community as a whole.

4. Can attract and maintain a *normal age and sex structure*.

Stark's fourth point is an important one, since it helps to determine longevity of a community. Historically, those communities which did not produce children or failed to attract new devotees, simply died out (i.e., the Shakers). Because of celibacy at Kashi, concerns might arise with respect to this point. However, as several chelas have said, when a couple wants children, they have them, and Ma Jaya is so devoted to children that the numbers continue to grow. There are 38 children, 18 girls and 20 boys, with ages ranging from toddlers to 18 years old.

From my observation and interaction with residents, I learned that college students are attracted to Ma Jaya and become chelas. For example, I met several students from Harvard who had met her at school while she was on a speaking tour. Since then they have come to make Kashi their home. One young woman and her fiancée are both chelas and may eventually marry and have children. The point here is that Ma Jaya continues to attract new devotees and married couples have babies, so that at present the community is not in any danger of going the way of the Shakers.

To be accurate in assessing the gender ratio at Kashi, relying on the summer population as a whole may be more precise than that of the questionnaire responses. In determining the number of males and females at Kashi, I enlisted the help of one chela who went through the resident list with me. This was important because the spiritual names of the residents are not gender-specific and may combine what would seem to be traditional Hindu male deities names like Shiva with typically female names like Durga. Even in giving her chelas spiritual names, Ma Jaya appears to defy convention.

Kashi's population of 140 during the summer of 1996 had 80 females and 60 males, not as close to the 50/50 ratio as might be preferred. However, the gender of the children under age 18, 20 males to 18 females, indicates that the ratio may be beginning to even out and newcomers, like the college students, appear to represent both genders equally. Finally, age structure is what one would expect of any American community in general – toddlers to the elderly and a slightly higher proportion of people in their 40s. The questionnaire sample revealed the average age of respondents to be 44.24 years, but the sample included individuals aged 11 to 81.

- 5. Occur within *favorable ecology*, which exists when:**
 - a. the religious economy is *relatively unregulated*;**
 - b. conventional faith are *weakened* by secularization or social disruption;**
 - c. it is possible to achieve at least *local success* with a *generation*.**

This fifth point on favorable ecology relates again to the environment in which a NRM exists and one facet of this aspect has already been discussed. Part of this point suggests that the religious economy is relatively unregulated, and here the most obvious example is that of the non-profit status of charitable organizations. What regulations that exist for churches apply equally to Kashi as they do to other non-profits. In Florida non-profits are required to register with the state and file a form (990) with the IRS, which becomes a public document. Churches and other non-profits must comply with laws like any business, but short of this, Kashi's economy is as relatively unregulated, the same as any other church in the state.

The second point on favorable ecology concerns how other area faiths may be weakened due to secularization or social disruption. Here an additional category needs to be included, that of a multicultural environment, which may create disruption.

Multi-culturalism does not necessarily indicate secularization per se; it may rather illustrate how certain locations or states are simply more accepting of diversity and as people flock to these places, their religious traditions come with them. Florida is the prime example. For instance, Miami is considered the new “capital of Latin America.” It has diverse groups which embrace African-based traditions, such as Santeria, Candomble, Haitian Voudon. Tampa has a high Jamaican population, Wicca communities, and Buddhist groups, just to name a few. Florida retains its Jewish sects, and denominational and non-denominational Christian groups.

These multiple traditions and diverse populations can create social disruption and conflict, competition for jobs, and problems as one frequently sees in the Miami area. In the more rural areas of Florida, one finds a different configuration, often a more Southern influence with a higher degree of racial and other prejudices, and fewer ethnic groups. Regardless of the challenges to diverse religious traditions and regional differences in Florida, if a NRM has a chance of succeeding anywhere, it is probably in Florida.

The third point in the favorable ecology category deals with a group’s local success in a generation. Kashi has succeeded locally in several generations. As one teenager related in his history of Kashi’s development in terms of three generations, this point is clearly made. Evolving from a handful of “hippies,” as Ma Jaya calls her first followers, on a few scrubby acres to an 82 acre community of approximately 200 people of all ages in twenty years is success.

6. Maintain dense internal network relations without becoming isolated.

When first arriving at Kashi, one sees how internal networking can work in a communal setting. Daily calls inform residents of changes in scheduling of regular events and other situations that arise from day to day – a recent death at the River House, an illness, changes in Ma Jaya's schedule. Discussed in the section dealing with Goddess Kali, Ma Jaya, time and change, we saw that change itself was the norm. While this situation became a bit of a nuisance for me, admittedly I have not learned to live in the moment and I hoped to complete my fieldwork on time, residents seemed unaffected by it. They knew exactly what caused it and seemed to accept the constant changes without much complaint. Further, I was astounded one day when, after inviting one resident to go to lunch, I stopped by the office about five minutes later and learned the office already knew of my luncheon plans. I was impressed. As one chela told me, in a community like Kashi everybody knows everything about everybody. It is a family, a close-knit, well-connected extended family.

Dense networking, as Stark calls it, does not suggest isolation with regards to Kashi. Working in the community at large through the school, hospitals and other agencies, and keeping up on local news and media events prevents local isolation. Travel and retreats around the country, and communicating with houses and students associated with Kashi throughout the United States and in Europe illustrates national and international networking. Then there are the art exhibits and religious conferences, and so forth, that keep Ma Jaya and Kashi constantly aware and a part what is going on in the world. Besides, one can find Ma Jaya and Kashi on the Net and the Net connects people all over the globe.

7. Resist *secularization*.

When considering the history of Kashi's earliest residents, the chela's stories, at least in part, show the effects of secularization that helped to launch some of them on their spiritual journeys, their search for a teacher and a teaching. Others did not identify such a need or longing at first. Still others came to Kashi as small children with their families or were born into the tradition. Nonetheless, the community itself resists secularization in at least four ways: individual spiritual practice, group ritual, service, and communality.

Each chela dedicates his or her life to the quest for God, the God within, and this is experienced through meditation and yoga. Secondly, this dedication is reinforced ritually through regular group kirtan or chanting and darshan, being in the presence of a Holy Person. Introduced by kirtan, darshan is normally scheduled for Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings. Saturday darshan is open to the public (Retreat Packet).

The teachings of Ma Jaya at darshan are internalized in whatever way is most applicable to each individual. She directs them toward a state of no-self or non-ego, and shares her gift of Kali with them to assist in achieving that goal. As the chelas say, she removes pain and showers them with Shakti, with love. Thirdly, Ma Jaya encourages them to serve others in acts of kindness, which is the principle teaching at Kashi – Kindness, the only religion. Humanitarian concerns and personal service to others express an outward *manifestation* of an inward and spiritual grace, or in the very simplest terms, the total package that is the spiritual life.

Despite everyday work in the world and typical concerns about making a living, raising a family, and so on, secularization is resisted by living in a spiritual community. There is no sense of social anomie as one finds on the “outside.” Being part of an extended family with shared goals and living a Brahmacharya life, helps to dispel the effects of secularization that, in part, brought some of the earliest residents of Kashi to Ma Jaya and the communal lifeway in the first place. One might speculate that having realized something much better, even though it is a difficult life, they would hardly care to return to the impersonal past.

- 8. Adequately *socialize* the young so as to:**
 - a. limit pressures toward secularization;**
 - b. limit “defection.”**

Rodney Stark’s final point in his model for assessing the success of a new religious movement looks at the socialization of youngsters. This point is an extension the previous one on resisting secularization and children and teens at Kashi share in the same four aspects of resistance noted above, that is, in individual spiritual practice, ritual, service, and communality.

Youngsters attend regular kirtan and darshan just as the adults do, but in addition, they have a children’s darshan that is specifically designed to teach them at their level of experience. Moreover, the ashram children attend the River School and while the school is non-sectarian, it promotes the general social attitudes of the ashram, meaning kindness, acceptance of diversity, multiculturalism, non-prejudice, respect for others, conflict resolution, personal responsibility, service, etc. These values in conjunction with communality serve as major factors in resisting secularization, and since each child also has a personal relationship with Ma Jaya, identification of secular

influences would be quickly noted. We may reflect on the story of the teenager in his quest for the 29 cent hamburger to see how such matters might be handled, but a more impressive story comes from a young man who attended a Tae Kwon Do conference. Other than the martial arts aspect of the conference, he found he did not have much in common than his non-ashram counterparts. The other kids did not talk about the same kinds of things that interested him and they were “pretty nasty to each other” (Y. V.). It made him appreciate the ashram even more.

As the stories of the younger chelas indicate, especially in Chapter 3, there comes a time when they wrestle with the direction they need to take in the future, whether or not they want to remain at Kashi. The choice is theirs, and here Stark’s choice of words, “limit defection,” wrangles with this anthropologist because the word “defection” is so value-laden. It no longer seems an appropriate term to use in relation to religious preference.

For example, during the 1960s and 1970s especially, when Christians switched back and forth between denominations, no one called it “defection.” It was simply denomination-switching. At the same time, individuals who became involved in a particular NRM and then opted to switch to another, try a different approach altogether, or turn away from religion, were seen as “defecting.” Granted, Christianity held sway over American culture as the Great Tradition, and the NRMs were considered “upstarts” by them, or more correctly, Little Traditions. Regardless, the principle is the same and today with an ever greater variety of religions to select from, it is imperative that we consider more pertinent terminology. To make the present word

less offensive, I admit that I “defected” from my childhood German Reform Church to the Episcopal Church some years after I married.

For the younger chelas I spoke with, who have chosen to stay at Kashi, their decisions have been based on a variety of reasons as their stories suggest. They stay to be with Ma Jaya who many see as their mother, along with their own mothers. Some want to continue to work toward spiritual goals. Others want to teach at the school or continue to be part of the Kashi family. There are greater concerns than that of material wealth. Each child has had or will have an opportunity to go to college and to travel. They have not been totally isolated from the community at large, but they have been protected from its negative influences of drugs and violence, and as one mother explained, they are very spiritual people. The same mother suggested that I come back in twenty years to talk with them again and see how they turned out. Such an invitation is hard for an anthropologist to refuse.

In concluding the comparison of Stark’s model with Kashi for determining its future success, one finds that all of Stark’s points are covered and the only weak link may be seen in terms of the gender issue. However, as indicated previously, the male/female ratio may be beginning to even out with the higher proportion of boys than girls under age 18 and with the more equal number of traditional college age newcomers. While Kashi’s residents would not measure success in the same way that Rodney Stark theorizes, they would probably not argue with the numbers. Kashi’s prosperity and growth over the last twenty years are undeniable.

Benton Johnson (1987:260) states that the prospects for “commune-based Hindu imports appear modest but promising, provided they improve their public image,

an achievement that need not be difficult.” Benton, researching ISHKON particularly, did not have Kashi as an example to add to his study, and Kashi has greatly improved its image over the years as local newspapers report. Furthermore, Ellwood (1987:245) writes that the prospects for NRMs are good, since as Great Traditions fade, Little Traditions fill the void, specifically in areas weakest in the Great Traditions: family, local community, inward experience, seasonal festivals, charismatic leadership, emphasis on miracles, and a means to approach social change. Of these, Kashi’s residents report that Ma Jaya is the reason to come to Kashi and remain at Kashi. The charismatic Guru has built a family and a community, and delineated how the inward experience may be achieved. She promotes holiday festivals, like Christmas, Durga Puja, and many others, provides leadership and personifies Mother Kali. She realizes that miracles occur, and that through her holistic and universal approach, Kali has come to the West. Ma Jaya has been and continues to be an active agent in social change at multiple levels, and with her students, has taken charge of Kashi’s history.

Some theorists argue that NRMs may be leading to even greater institutionalized individualism and that they are products of secularization (i.e., Hammond 1987:262), but Ellwood (1987:236) states that: “[i]n a world packed with born-again Christians, Muslim fundamentalists, and stubborn churchgoers, it is hard to deny that secularization is, at the least, running behind schedule.”

Rather than seeing NRMs as a product of secularization, one should consider them an outgrowth of globalization, the movement of information, traditions, and people beyond national boundaries and even transnational limits in a multicultural and global process. Here, one must look at the big picture, at space, time, and

classification, as Kearney suggests (1995:549). Kearney (1995:554) reminds us that television and the first telecast war created “a new relationship between global media communication and consciousness” and that with immigrants who arrived from Vietnam and elsewhere, these individuals helped to establish a “peripheralization at the core.” This means that the influx of new culture groups brought to the core or United States the traditions of less politically and economically dominant countries. Kearney uses the following examples: Miami and its Cuban and Latino immigrants, California with its Mexicans and Latinos, New York City with its recent Caribbean influx that added to the already multicultural environment, East Indians who relocated all over the United States, Asians who went everywhere, Senegalese who immigrated to Italy, Algerians to France, Moroccans to Spain, Turks to Germany, West Indians and Sikhs to England (Kearney 1995:554). Global flows, he continues, are equivalent to deterritorialized migrants who become transformed in the transnational spaces they enter (Kearney 1995:554).

So, whether Americans travel to India to study with gurus there or gurus come to the United States to initiate teachings, the effect is the same. The impact is global and unbounded. Cultural variation is introduced and becomes part of the process. Instead of either-or classifications of bounded cultural understandings, the “both-and-and” definitions (Kearney 1995:558) of global process are more appropriate for our Information Age, an age which represents unbounded space par excellence (i.e., the Internet, World Wide Web).

It is within this place of no-boundary and global space that the Kashi tradition best fits. A brochure on Kashi says that it is “a place of worship where anyone can

come who wants to feel the spirit of any religion or God, a place without prejudice or bigotry” (Kashi Foundation 1994). One may call Kashi’s tradition a form of Vedanta or Christianity or Judaism or call it nothing at all. The chelas will tell you it does not really matter. People come to Kashi for Ma Jaya, for peace and harmony that settle in like a humid, sun-drenched canopy over the great live oaks of Florida’s sandy bottom.

There are plans for the 20th Anniversary Retreat this summer with a select 150 guests to be invited. I signed up, but whether I will make the cut is unknown at present. If I do make it, I will drive down that lush, tropical road with the simple sign that says “Kashi,” right by the River School with its neat portables, and I will record the historic event in my notebooks. The chela-teachers will be giving seminars; there will be celebrations and probably Ma Jaya bellowing, “Oh my God, look who’s here!” at visitors in her distinctive Brooklynese. There will be darshan and maybe the conch shells blowing into the black Florida night.

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