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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ  
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SHAKTI, THE SPIRITUAL SCIENCE OF DNA

Susan Jean Palmer

A Thesis

in the

Department of Religion

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• Susan Jean Palmer 1976

ABSTRACT

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SHAKTI, THE SPIRITUAL SCIENCE OF DNA

Shakti was a religious movement that existed in Montreal from April to December, 1973. It was one of a series of religious movements planned, carried out, and closed down by a central religious organisation in Crestline, California. Their founder and director is Eugene Jeffrey Gold, the son of H.L. Gold, a well-known science fiction writer and editor in New York in the 30's and 40's. The religious movements have been established since 1968 under different names, in different cities of North American and Canada, and offer a wide, constantly shifting range of ideas, aims and techniques. They all share the common features of eclecticism, humour, a great variety of techniques, built-in obsolescence, and a strong scientific and theatrical flavour. Underlying these movements is a core philosophy of reincarnation, spiritual evolution, and a shamanistic search for power, knowledge and conscious control over the soul's destiny.

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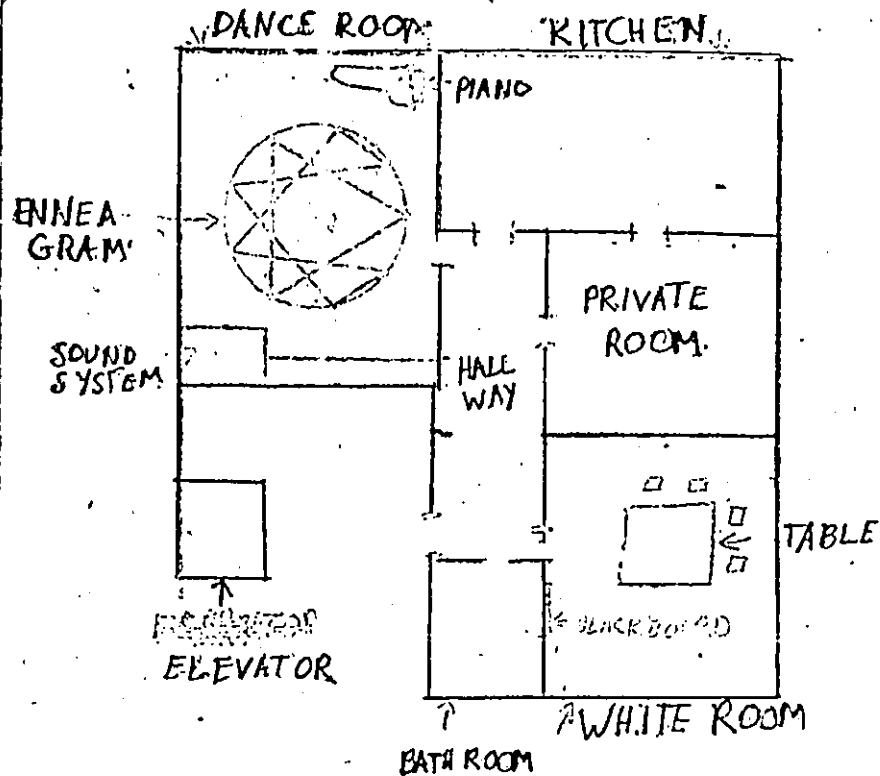
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MAP OF SHAKTI CENTRE IN MONTREAL

rue de Notre Dame



This map of the Shakti centre shows the allocation of space, an important feature in the Shakti Course. The Private room was forbidden territory except for core members; they slept there. The large room was used for meditation and movements. Students waited in the hall in silence and sometimes in darkness before they were ushered into a class. The white room was padded with carpets and cushions for Storytelling, and barren but for a table, chairs and blackboard for Intellectual Work. Students were permitted to enter the kitchen for the dishwashing meditation (washing dishes behind the back) and to help prepare the lunch on Sundays.

INTRODUCTION

In August 1973 I began to work on a research project for the Department of Religion of Sir George Williams University. The project was subsidized by the Ministry of Education of Quebec and four graduate students were chosen to study the new religious movements in the greater Montreal area. I began to look around over the summer for an interesting group. Having been a member of the Sivananda Yoga Society for four years, I felt like studying something different, and the Jesus movement did not appeal to me. I heard about Shakti from a friend who had attended a demonstration of their movements at Vehicule Art Gallery in June. His description of the movements intrigued me. I had always been attracted to groups who offered some kind of physical exercise, and this was something other than Yoga, or Tai Chi. My friend described the period following the demonstration, in which the Shakti members responded to questions with cryptic elusive answers, such as "You have to know in order to Know." They had repeatedly invited the audience to their center in Old Montreal. Reading their pamphlet my friend had picked up, I was struck by a different tone from the usual gushing sanctimonious style of new religious literature. It contained a geometrical diagram, a few evocative statements and no information about the origins or beliefs of the group. I thought I detected



something of a Gurdjieviaan flavour about the pamphlet, having recently read P.D. Ouspensky's In Search of the Miraculous, and Fritz Peter's Boyhood With Gurdjieff.

I paid my visit to the centre in July. It was situated in a top floor apartment of an old office building on rue de Notre Dame. I was ushered into a large bare room with a polished hardware floor on which was traced a geometrical design, a nine-pointed star in a circle. A baby grand piano, a low table bearing Shakti literature, and a closet in which was placed a record player, were the only furniture. The woman who admitted me, whose name was Lea, left me there for ten minutes after putting on a record of piano music which I later identified as the music for the movements, a record put out by the Crestline Centre and bearing a close resemblance to the music of Satie Bartok and de Hartmann. She then returned and explained that they offered "work" for the three centres. My suspicion as to the Gurdjieff influences was confirmed. I then signed up for the movement course, was given The Shakti Handbook, and left.

I attended a few movement classes<sup>1</sup>, a storytelling session<sup>2</sup>, and then on July 17 the guru himself came to town to conduct a weekend workshop<sup>3</sup>. The membership of the

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1. See Appendix, p. 157

2. See Appendix, p. 151

3. See Appendix, p. 145

Shakti centre and the program of work changed quite a few times, and I continued to visit the centre as a student until December 1973, when it closed down and moved to Vancouver. After this I continued to learn about the Shakti through reports of fellow students who visited Crestline and Vancouver, through talking to core members who had left the movement, and through reading their latest literature.

I encountered three major problems in the process of trying to present a coherent picture of the group. The first is the location. Shakti is centred in California whereas my contact has been exclusively with the Montreal centre. The second is the extent of my involvement with the group. I was an active student in the Shakti course for five months in 1973 and my contacts before and since that period have been tenuous. Therefore it must be understood that my perspective is that of a participant on the outer fringes of the movement. The third problem is that of approach, or methodology, particularly acute in this instance, since the unusual nature of the group made the inevitable conflict between the aims and realities of the group and the researcher, and of course between the participant and observer roles of the said researcher, more dramatic than those usually encountered in the field of study.

I refer to such features as the secrecy of the group, their emphasis on experiential knowledge which led to a kind

of anti-intellectual intellectualism. Their methods designed to breakdown preconditioned ideas and jolt people out of conventional rational thought patterns made it difficult to interview them or collect information concerning their history and organization. When I announced my intention of writing a paper on them, they were amused and decided to mislead and confuse me, sending me off on wild goose chases and false scents, with the intention of undermining my academic stance in the hope that I would eventually realize the futility of trying to explain a spiritual phenomenon in rational terms. Since one of their techniques is a role-playing game<sup>4</sup>, I was expected to stick to and play out my role as the solemn bumbling academic researcher and at the same time to be detached from my role, the aim of the game being to realize "You're a soul, not a role." When I swerved from the role, I was reprimanded, the idea being that the less one identifies with a role, the more flawlessly one is able to play it. This is the one and only instance I have encountered in which the science of religion and the doing of religion became one and the same thing. The fact that role playing was part of their spiritual training program, allowed me to regard my research as a religious exercise in separating soul from ego, or in their language Being from Personality.

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4 See Appendix, p. 162

## CHAPTER I

THE ORGANISATIONA. The Geography

According to the back cover of the 1973 Shakti magazine there were twenty centres in California which provided introduction lecture courses in Shakti, besides the Tucson, Boston, New York, Denver, Montreal and Vancouver centres. However it seems likely that many of these centres never became active. From the accounts of Shakti members in the Montreal centre, the New York, Boston and Toronto centres appeared to be very active and visits were exchanged between the different centres.

The group is based in Crestline California. The founder, E.J. Gold, lives on his three hundred acre estate of pine forest and several old houses, with his wife, child and Core Group, his friends, followers and associates. The printing press is located there and all the literature is composed and sent out from Crestline. Most of the important conventions and workshops and other projects handled by the group take place there.

The second centre in size and importance is situated on Vancouver Island in a hunting lodge, used as a communal living and working area, presided over by Sheikh Yassan Dede and his wife.

The Crestline Ashram is registered in the State of California under the name of the IDHBB, or the Institute for the Development of the Harmonious Human Being, which appears to be the organisation's earliest name and is still in use as a postal address, and publishing company. The Ashram itself was built in 1921. The organisation itself appears to have been in existence at least since 1970. Lennie, one of the oldest members of the Core Group, has been an instructor since 1970, two years after he began his training with Babaji according to the Shakti Handbook. The earliest writings or Memos of E.J. Gold in the magazine date back to 1970. Therefore it might be assumed that E.J. Gold "came out" as a guru around 1968, at which time he would have been in his late twenties, and he may have moved into the Crestline estate at that time.

#### B. The Master

Mr. Gold, known also as the Beast, and Babaji al-Washi, the sufi master and currently as Jeff, is an American Jew in his middle thirties who was born and raised in New York City. His father, H.L. Gold, once editor of a science fiction magazine Galaxy, belonged to an esoteric spiritual group composed of science fiction writers. They met every Sunday in a large storage tank in New York City that had been converted by one of the writers into a self-regulating

tropical forest complete with plant, insect and bird life and running water. H.L. Gold brought his son, then in his early teens, regularly. Therefore, Jeff was exposed to religious ideas at an early age and in his book, The Avatar's Handbook, describes himself as always having been on a constant outlook for masters, clues and spiritual adventure.

E.J. Gold travelled around Turkey as a young man and apparently learned "The nine obligatory movements" which later became a part of the Shakti course, from a group of dervishes he met there. From stories circulated among his students, and references in his writings, he appears to have been involved in Gurdjieff, Theosophy and Magic Groups. The exact nature of his training and experience is not generally known and in fact is considered irrelevant data by his followers, who claim a spiritual master needs no credentials; he is recognized by his peers and known by the fruit of his labours. Alternatively, no training program or "path" can guarantee enlightenment for its followers.

He has been married twice, and presently lives with his wife "Cybele" and two daughters in Crestline.

The only time I met Mr. Gold was on the occasion of his visit to Montreal, in the role of sufi master, Babaji al-Washi. Not being in a position to evaluate his spiritual gifts I was impressed by his personality and presence. His

tendency to fat and his shaven head combine to give him an ominous, fleshy, whale-like appearance, bringing to mind the Leviathan. He has dark eyes, regular features and a clear complexion. In a different context I would have assumed him to be a truck driver, construction worker or possibly a Hell's Angel. His personality is aggressive, uninhibited, dynamic, humorous, verging on hostility. He is a brilliant speaker, an excellent story teller, mimic and mime who specializes in the unexpected, the paradoxical, the anti-climactic statement, titillating and mystifying his audience. He can be very funny. He described de Hartmann's music as "Mozart played by Arab terrorists". He is a master of one-up-manship. His method is to shock, to jolt, to disorient, to challenge, and he constantly intimidates or "grosses-out" his more recent students. His aim seems to be to break down preconditioned attitudes and categories and his methods are described by his closest students as "the quick way of head-bashing and ego squashing". A member of Core Group described him as belonging to the tradition of Zen and Sufi masters who beat and shock their disciples into enlightenment.

### C. The History

E.J. Gold entered the lives of four people who were to become some of his closest disciples in July 1972 at the

Cowachin Centre for Gestalt Learning on Vancouver Island. They were attending the session as students and are called Abe, Dave, Lucy, and Bill. Mr. Gold appeared and announced that they didn't understand their reasons for being there, that they were doing the right things for the wrong reasons and only when Gestalt was applied towards a spiritual goal was it meaningful. They accepted him as their spiritual master and followed him to Crestline where he had a group of followers with whom he had been working for two years. They commenced workshops using Gestalt exercises and bio-cybernetics as spiritual training.

In November, 1972, Randy<sup>5</sup> one of Gold's recent disciples, his wife Sadie and Bill were sent to Montreal to open a restaurant, plant and occult bookshop called Cowachin, hoping to attract people interested in spiritual work. They didn't advertise and their hints to customers were so subtle that no one picked up on them. They then set up a bio-feed back course and re-named the place Le Jardin Electronique. After training fifteen students in bio-cybernetics, they tried to interest them in learning about the "Soft Machine";

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5 Randy was a highly respected Gestalt therapist in Vancouver since 1966. He met Mr. Gold in L.A. in 1971, having just completed his Primal Scream therapy which left him unsatisfied and unconvinced. He wandered into a café, over heard Gold talking at the next table and remained there all night in conversation, under going a total conversion to Gold's spiritual point of view.



the body and its nervous system. The students went away puzzled. The three core members left and were replaced by Abe, Dave and Lucy, who began to issue subtle cryptic pamphlets and posters. Lenore and Barry had just left the Divine Light Mission and were becoming interested in Gurdjieff. They were impressed by the movements and wished to learn them. They found the people at Le Jardin Electronique evasive and appointments kept getting cancelled. Finally, it was arranged for them to meet at the restaurant one evening. Lenore described Dave and Abe as cold and non-affective in their manner. Lucy sat in a corner without speaking a word all evening and impressed Lenore as a poor overweight mute, probably on drugs, whom they had taken in off the street. Eventually she got to know Lucy as a strong, aggressive, "broad" who was in charge of the centre and worked as a full-time waitress to maintain it. Abe and Dave asked the 3 friends to sit down, gave them a pencil and paper and said "Lucy here will tell you a story with her hands. Write down the story as you understand it from her gestures." Lucy launched into a hand mime, which reinforced their impression of her as a mute. They were told to read their stories aloud, each of which was totally different, to which Abe and Dave made no response. They then took turns reading E.J. Gold's story, "The Carousel that Ate Little Children" after which the meeting broke up.

They were intrigued and fascinated by this experience and kept calling to arrange a movement class. The people at the centre responded coldly, putting them off. Then they called the three friends inviting them to a weekend workshop. This lasted from a Friday evening to Sunday evening and involved intensive work with speeded up sleep, eating, working cycles.

Lenore's description of the activities of this weekend gives me a good idea of the beliefs, aims and techniques of the group at the time. The work combines Gestalt therapy, meditation, Gurdjieff's self-remembering exercises, and role playing, all with the apparent aim of allowing one to watch the ego reacting to different situations and to become detached from it. Upon arriving they were led into a separate room and told to "wait in here until your guru tells you what to do." Lenore sat still in the centre of the floor and began noticing a lot of lollipops, half-hidden among plants and under cushions and decided that she was meant to eat them. All three saw the situation as a test to which they must find the right answer, but they were never told whether or not they had responded correctly. Then the three were put in a room together, to play "sand-box games" or behave like two-year olds. Then they were put on a speeded up sleep, eat, work cycle in which they experienced two days in 12 hours. Finally at 3 a.m. Saturday, they had their

first movement class after which they ate a huge meal and were instructed to wash up by means of the robot exercise, in which one person plays the robot, the other the director who must give his robot step by step, specific directions to perform some task. After 3 hours, the dishes were only half done and they were each given a plant and told "this plant is your guru and will teach you plantness". Next they were each given an object and told it represented a whole universe and they must hold it and rotate it slowly and learn all they could about its history, function, etc. by meditating upon it. Lenore's object was a rolled piece of sand paper that under close scrutiny began to look like a planet with mounds and valleys.

After this workshop they met regularly and 2 new students Jbrg and Andy, joined them. On Tuesday evening they read from Quspensky and had discussions which were taped and played back. Lenore described these sessions as "cold and constipated". On Thursday evening they had story-telling; reading, relating, improvising or miming stories. On Saturday they did the movements and the students were given a lot of practical work like sewing, distributing pamphlets, making posters.

One Sunday at 5 a.m. the students received a phone call inviting them to attend a cocktail party commencing in 2 hours, at the centre. Lenore and Lea put on evening

dresses and make-up and arrived at 7 a.m. to find a full scale cocktail party in progress at the centre complete with a band, catering service etc. When it ended everyone went to the Ritz Carleton for breakfast, still dressed in their tuxedos and evening gowns.

At this point Dave and Abe were seeing Lea and Lenore constantly and took them out on dates, drinking and to films. Lenore described it as a weird relationship because she never knew if they were doing these things for ordinary reasons or as spiritual exercises. Abe, Dave and Lucy were in constant communication with Crestline at this period and received orders to do a "Turn-off". The next time the 5 students came to the centre, the three core group members were seated at a table looking very stern. Abe and Dave were wearing black trousers, black turtlenecks and dark glasses. Lucy was dressed completely in white. They announced "We are not your friends. You don't know what friends are. Someday you might know, if you are lucky. From now on there will be no more dropping in. Don't call us. We might call you."

This upset the students considerably, particularly Lea who by this time was hopelessly in love with Dave and they realized how deeply they had become emotionally attached to the people at the centre and dependent upon the activity it provided.

However, after a week had elapsed they were called to work at the centre and the birth of Shakti was announced. By this time the group had moved from St. Denis to Old Montreal.

It was announced that Gold who was now to be called Babaji al-Washi had founded a school of spiritual training called Shakti, The Spiritual Science of DNA. The students were to merge with the core group in order to set up and run the school. They were to meet every night for an intensive study program of the Shakti literature: Lenore said when she first saw it, it "freaked her out" and even the core group seemed puzzled by it. They stopped their workshops and personal training and gave public demonstrations of the movements, did street work in handing out pamphlets and putting up posters.

Lucy left once the school opened up. They set up a six-week course and had 2 groups meeting once a week, a French group of 6 and an English group of 7, to do the "intellectual work", or reading aloud from the Shakti literature and discussing it. On Sundays they all met together to learn the movements, at the end of the course al-Washi arrived to direct a week-end workshop, which I attended. A detailed description of part of the session is contained in my field report of July 17th<sup>6</sup>. When he arrived on Friday

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix, p. 145 .

evening approximately 50 students were gathered to hear him. In his opening speech he announced that they were to stop the "intellectual work" since they were turning into "a high-school debating club" and to work only on the movements for a year and then to come back to him for further instructions. The result of this was that the centre lost all their new students who had been more interested in the intellectual work than in the movements. al-Washi's wife Cybele, known at the time as Mataji, was there and when he left for a walk, blasted the people in the centre for wasting his time, saying they couldn't recognize a spiritual master and didn't know how to make use of him efficiently. The following morning 15 people from the New York centre arrived to be shown into a room, told to lie on the floor and listen to a Tiny Tim album for 2 hours. In the afternoon they did "mime and mirror exercises", readings from the Autobiography of God, an interminably picaresque novel in a philosophic vein by E.J. Gold, and then had a movement class. They stood in a circle waiting to begin and al-Washi bounced into the room wearing only a "dhoti" and a turban with a glittery, sequined dollar sign on the front, and led the dance.

On Sunday they played The Survival Game, in which everyone sat around a table and in turn confessed what they needed to survive. At the beginning answers like "girl",

"love", "food", "were given but towards the end it got frivolous; "a cup of coffee in the morning", "I need to be attractive" to which al-Washi replied, "You poor woman, you must have a hard time."

After the workshop it took a few weeks to recruit new students to resume the 6-week course. Only 3 students remained from the previous one; Sarah, Pam and Jan. Sarah moved into the centre and joined the core group, who were now Lenore and Barry and Bill who had remained to direct the centre. Lea and Dave went to Toronto to run a Shakti centre there and Abe went to Crestline for further training in bio-feed-back. Pam and Jan signed up to repeat the 6-week course. The new students were myself, Dick, Marie and Andy. We met Wednesday evenings for intellectual work and on Sundays for meditation and the movements. At the end of the course we began the Pre-assignments which involved a new set of movements, meditation and the Robot exercise. Shakti training program is described in detail in 3 field reports.

At our last meeting of December 5, 1973, Bill read a letter from Crestline. It announced a meeting on Nov. 29, of the previous week between spiritual masters including Baba Ram Dass, Carlos Castaneda, Idries Shah, Oscar Ichazo the head of Arica, Rimpoche of the Tail of the Tiger, the Gurdjieff Foundations and various sufi masters. They called themselves the Second Council of Nicaea, because they were

facing the same situation as the first council and the same souls attended both. The import of the meeting was that a second Dark Age, if not the end of the world was imminent, that there was nothing that they could do on the material (political, social?) plane, but that centres or monasteries could be established to survive the disaster and maintain spiritual traditions. The leaders felt they should stop recruiting new members and close down schools for self development and instead train existing members and encourage them to work in the world rather than inside a particular religious group. There was talk of merging and going underground. This meeting suggests an ecumenical movement among new religious groups and a tendency towards anonymity and reintegration into society.

A separate memo entitled "De-briefing the School Game" was read out which formally closed down Shakti as an "external school", claiming there was no time left to find self-realization and inviting people to join in "The Work", upon inquiry as to its nature, core groups replied, "When you are ready for 'The Work' you will know what 'The Work' is." An invitation to a Christmas party in Crestline was issued to all Shakti students.

When I returned from my vacation in January 1974, Dick and I met with Jan and Pam who gave us an account of Christmas in Crestline. Upon arriving at the Shakti estate



they found and entered a large building in the middle of a pine forest full of perhaps 300 people occupied with various kinds of work. They were told this was a concentration camp and that they couldn't leave without the guard's permission and must find their own work to do. The "guards" carried toy machine guns. The room was surrounded by a balcony and stairs leading to a second floor and they were told that "Herr Commandant" lived up there and would soon appear. The prisoners were engaged in cooking, cleaning, playing music, carving and building a doll's house. Only the minimum amount of food or sleep was permitted. "Passes" were issued for bathroom privileges. At the end of the 3rd day al-Washi descended in Nazi uniform with his "officers" and they performed a slapstick comedy act on the stairs which everyone found hysterically funny. Then they were told it was their turn and one at a time the students had to get up and entertain the company for 5 minutes. Most people simply froze up and were unable to rise to the occasion. Then someone threw \$100 in single dollar notes off the balcony and al-Washi announced that the money was for beer and they were going to have a beer bash. A party ensued that developed into a drunken orgy. Many people found this an oppressive contrast to the previous days of austerity and were shocked by the sexual activity of some of the "officers".

The next morning they were summoned to al-Washi's house on the same grounds. There he unfolded his master plan before them. He considered that the United States was spiritually lost and dead and wished to set up centres of spiritual energy first in Vancouver and later in Mexico. These places were chosen as being strategic spots on a chart of the earth's nerve centres or "chakras". They were told to set up a commune in the hunting lodge owned by Shakti on Vancouver Island and to use their own initiative to find ways of communicating spiritual energy. Everyone left Crestline that day and most of them went to Vancouver. The centre there was directed by Randy, known as Sheikh Yassen Dede, the same man who had opened the Cowachin Centre in Montreal.

They established a commune of about 200 people and engaged actively in work. They set up a soup kitchen in the city, a crafts co-op, made and gave out free clothes and furniture; formed a Church of Shakti with devotional services. Bill, Dave and Abe, inspired by the film on the life of St. Francis became "monks", wore Franciscan robes and shaved their heads.

In February Randy discovered a new guru, a man named Monte who ran a company called Solar Graphics, and left Jeff Gold's organisation to work for him. At that date I relied totally on conflicting rumours about the group. Apparently most people left the lodge and moved into the city into their

own apartments. Bill found a job in electronics and moved in with a girl friend. Dave set up a carpentry workshop and continued to make furniture and give it away. Lenore returned to Montreal to be with her children. Sarah left the organization completely, and Barry returned to Montreal to work in the family drapery business. Their last contact from Crestline was a letter from J. Gold stating "from now on you must be your own guru?"

In the spring J. Gold started a new organisation called Wudshalo (which means "I love you" in Ethiopian), which advertised itself as a martial art in order to attract housewives or other people not immediately interested in joining spiritual groups. It featured ancient Ethiopian dance (identical to the movements in Shakti) and gradually introduced the students to spiritual ideas. Chris, Bill's brother, was summoned to Crestline to be trained in Wudshalo! This organisation set up centres in the large cities of California and in Vancouver. Students win belts for completing different levels of training in dance and biofeedback. As of autumn 1975, Gold is to be called "Mother" by his students and has launched yet a new venture. His wife Cybele, (nee Karen or Mataji) recently gave birth to a second child and wrote a guide to natural childbirth. The Golds are offering a course in Crestline for couples. The woman is taught natural childbirth techniques -- symbolically giving birth to her own soul; and the man is taught death techniques -- how to

die, and undergoes a symbolic death. The reading for this course is Mother's new manual, The American Book of the Dead.

Much of this descriptive material is taken from an interview with Lenore, which took place after the demise of Shakti, on her return to Montreal from Vancouver. She had just left the group, and therefore was more open and more critical about the group than she would have been otherwise. The rest of the material is the result of my own observation as a participant, deductions based on the literature, and hearsay.

#### D. The Finance

Where the central organisation gets their money, and how they handle it is a mystery to me. I can quote various rumours or recount stories showing their attitudes to economic matters, but as a fringe member I did not have access to this sort of information about the group.

However, from my interviews with Lenore, the financial basis of the Montreal centre is known to me, and it seems fair to assume that the other Shakti centres in North America are run on a similar pattern. The local core members find jobs to pay for the rent of the centres, which they also live in. Lucy worked full-time as a waitress to support Le Jardin Electronique, which she also ran. At the time I was involved in Shakti, out of the four core group

members at the centre, Bill worked for an electronics company Barry worked as a labourer at the docks, and Sarah worked as a secretary. Lenore, the fourth member, received welfare cheques and did most of the housekeeping and administrative work at the centre.

The Shakti courses themselves were hardly self-supporting. The six (6) week Introductory course cost \$12. The Pre-Assignments course cost \$30 for 6 weeks, but we spent a minimum of 8 hours a week at the centre and ate lunch there on Sundays.

When the Shakti centre was suddenly abandoned at Christmas when the core members failed to return from Vancouver, the landlord effected a seizure of their audio-visual equipment, and other valuable goods, so that they would be forced to pay the next three months rent and a fine for leaving without notice. Bill, still in Vancouver, insisted that the members pay the debt, and that the Shakti equipment be returned. Lenore, Barry and Sarah worked for months to pay it off and Dick, who had only joined Shakti a month before donated \$1,000 towards it. This incident illustrates the extent to which members are prepared to accept the financial burdens of the organisation.

The Crestline Ashram appears to have money, owning a three hundred acre estate, a printing press, audio-visual and biofeedback equipment. Since Gold's father was a

famous journalist and science fiction writer/editor, it is possible that some of his money might be inherited. Jan and Pam, on returning from their Christmas visit to Vancouver, remarked on the lavish spending that went on at the centre there. For example, a few members had the impulse to make a film and within one day had bought all the necessary equipment. There were rumours of rich patrons in California donating to the organisation. However, to sum up, the information on this aspect of the organisation is simply not available to me, so that the source of Shakti's revenues remains a mystery.

#### E. The Social Structure

The members of the organisation can be divided into separate groups or levels according to their seniority, influence and involvement. I have distinguished between four different hierarchical levels. The first is the master himself, E.J. Gold, the founder, director and charismatic figurehead of the group. Next to him is Core Group, a small circle of his oldest disciples, friends and family who form the central administration of the movement. Next in importance are the local core members, those who have joined Shakti through the work of Core Group, rather than as direct disciples of Gold. In Vancouver this would include the members of the hunting lodge commune, and in

Montreal Lea, Lenore, Barry and Sarah fall under this category. They are all Montreal residents who encountered the organisation in its local guise as Le Jardin Electronique and later, Shakti. They survived the beginners or novices stage and became sufficiently involved to live in the centre, undertake the teaching and administrative work demanded by the organisation, and essentially to make it the central focus of their lives. The fourth group, forming the outermost circle of the movement are the new members, the beginners, the students. In Le Jardin Electronique period it included Lea, Lenore, and Barry, who worked for the centre and underwent their rigorous training program. In the Shakti stage it included myself, Jan, Pam and Dick and perhaps 300 others who dropped out, who were enrolled briefly as students in the "school" of Shakti.

Of course there is no rigid line between the four levels. The fourth group are candidates for the live-in local group, some of whom in turn, joined Core Group. Theoretically, working through the prescribed series of courses should automatically propel the student into the innermost circle. In practice, however, it seems that the process of students becoming teachers is dictated more by the needs of the organisation, than by the individual's need or progress.

There are indications that certain members of Core Group are equal in power and prestige to Gold. The editorial

page of the Shakti magazine suggests that Gold considers his wife an equal:

Babaji al-Washi and Mataji Kalinanda  
founders

Randy (Sheikh Yassan Dede), although he considers Gold his guru, appears to have total autonomy, and independence of decision-making in his directorship of the Vancouver ashram. Rex<sup>8</sup> also is an independent guru with his own following, although he takes part in major events at Crestline.

I have made up the following list of members who are well known in the organisation and put them in the four levels or categories outlined above. I have also indicated the flow between the different levels.

From the following the careers of individuals within the movement, it appears that promotions, shifts in power, flow between levels in the hierarchy as well as dropping-out occurs at times of change, crisis, and upheaval.

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<sup>8</sup> Rex is a writer for Penthouse Magazine, an old friend of Gold's who lives in Crestline. He is often present at big Crestline events, and I have heard accounts from different sources of his obesity, obscenity, outrageous behaviour and sense of humour. Lea met him at the Crestline Christmas Concentration Camp and Beer Bash. They fell in love and she has since immigrated to the States under the guise of his secretary, and they are now living together.



Chart Showing Mobility of Individuals in Shakti Over  
Three Years

| Dates | I<br>The<br>Masters   | II<br>Core<br>Group   | III<br>Local<br>Members  | IV<br>Students  |
|-------|---|---|--|---|
| 1972  | E.J. Gold   | Cybele<br>Rex<br>Randy<br><br>(Crest-<br>line)                    | Abe<br>Dave<br>Bill<br>Lucy<br>(Vancouver-<br>Gestalt<br>Workshop) | Lea<br>Lenore<br>Barry<br>Sarah<br>(Montreal<br>Centre)                             |
| 1973  | Gold<br>Rex<br>Randy<br>Cybele  | Abe<br>Dave<br>Bill<br>Lucy<br><br>(Crest-<br>line &<br>Montreal) | Lea<br>Lenore<br>Barry<br>Sarah<br><br>(Montreal<br>centre)        | Myself<br>Jan<br>Pam<br>Dick<br>Marie<br>Andy<br><br>(Montreal<br>centre)           |
| 1974  | Gold<br>Rex<br>Randy<br>Cybele<br>Abe<br>Bill<br>(Crestline<br>& Vancouver) | Lea<br>(went to<br>live with<br>Rex at<br>Crestline)              | Lenore<br>Barry<br>Sarah<br>(dropped<br>out)                       | all new stu-<br>dents dropped<br>out when<br>Shakti closed<br>down in Mont-<br>real |

One general rule is that when a new project or an expansion of the organisation is undertaken, more demands in terms of work and responsibility are placed on comparatively new members, which draw them deeper into the movement, consequently elevating their status. The founding of a centre in Montreal, Le Jardin Electronique, had this effect on Abe, Dave, Bill, and Lucy. Similarly, the "coming out" of Shakti in Montreal required that former students, Lea, Lenore and Barry become instant full-blown teachers and prosletysers.

It is interesting to note that once the group stopped expanding and began to contract (centres were disbanded and members were recalled to Crestline and Vancouver), people began to drop out. Lenore and Barry complained that after running the Montreal centre for a year, when they moved to Vancouver, they were demoted in rank and treated much like beginning students<sup>9</sup>. This caused resentment and Lenore, Barry and Sarah soon left the group. Thus it can be seen that where change causes new authority patterns to emerge, expansion usually brings promotion in rank, and contraction demotion, which can have a demoralizing effect on the members of the organisation, resulting in attrition.

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<sup>9</sup> See above, p. 26.

I. The History of Shakti

| Name of Organization                             | Date of Birth      | Place   | Techniques   | Local Leaders                    | Theme or Influence   | Name of Guru (Gold) |
|--|--------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| IDHBB<br>Institute of the Harmonious Human Being | 1968<br>or<br>1970 | Crestline   | Mala training<br>Gestalt therapy<br>Biofeedback  | Gold                             | Gurdjiev   | The Beast           |
| Cowachin   | 1972               | Montreal  | Storytelling<br>Gestalt  | Randy                            | Gestalt therapy  | The Beast           |
| Le Jardin Electronique                           | 1972               | Montreal  | Biofeedback<br>Gestalt exercises<br>The movements<br>Gurdjiev readings                         | Lucy<br>Dave<br>Abe              | Biofeedback<br>Gurdjiev  | The Beast           |
| Shakti   | 1973               | Montreal<br>Toronto<br>Vancouver<br>New York<br>California<br>Crestline | Mala training<br>The movements<br>Intellectual Work<br>Meditation                              | Bill<br>Lenore<br>Barry          | Tibetan Buddhism<br>Science-<br>genetics &<br>space travel<br>Gurdjiev | Babaji<br>al-Washi  |
| Anonymous  | 1974               | Vancouver   | Street theatre<br>Sufi & Christian<br>devotional services<br>Survival workshops<br>Social work | Randy<br>Bill<br>Abe<br>Dave     | Sufism<br>Christianity   | Jeff                |
| Wudshalo   | 1974               | Vancouver<br>California   | Martial arts<br>Movements<br>Biofeedback   | Chris                            | The Martial Arts   | Jeff                |
| Anonymous  | 1975               | Crestline   | Natural childbirth<br>Death course   | Jeff<br>Gold &<br>Cybele<br>Gold | Tibetan Buddhism<br>Obstetrics   | Mother              |

F. The Death-Rebirth Cycle of Shakti

It seems necessary at this point to attempt some kind of analysis or elucidation of this rather startling material before continuing. The history of Shakti indicates that the movement is carefully planned and controlled by Gold, while at the same time allowing a large scope for the initiative of Core Group. Five distinct religious groups have emerged from the same central organisation within 4 years; Le Jardin Electronique with its scientific techniques of biofeedback, gestalt and its Gurdjievian philosophy and sufi influenced dance; Shakti with its language of genetics and space travel, its aims of conscious reincarnation and its Gurdjiev-based model of techniques; The Vancouver group with its strong bent towards devotional forms of expression, social work and an apocalyptic philosophy; Wudshalo the martial art school introducing a wide range of techniques, mainly biofeedback training and dance; and finally a new way of presenting Gold's central philosophy of reincarnation -- a course in birth and death.

The inevitable question raised by all this apparent madness is, what is the pattern, direction of it all?

I maintain there is a purpose, a message in the sequence of "lives" this movement has chosen to "reincarnate" its central "spirit". The "lives" follow a pattern of catharsis, similar to the carnival-lent ritual or a death-

rebirth cycle. In the first two "lives", Le Jardin Electronique and Shakti the emphasis is on discipline, the intellect, asceticism. Scientific techniques are used, potential converts and existing students are treated coldly, firmly, even harshly. Personal history is taboo; facial or voice expressions and even bodily gestures are repressed. Students are put through a "school" of rigorous intensive training. Then the end of the world is announced and their "school" is debriefed, packed up, dematerialized and they are left stranded.

The next phase is the carnival after lent. The "ascetic phase" is brought to a climax in the Nazi camp fantasy at Crestline and then let loose in a "Beer Bash" orgy of joke telling, drinking, and sexual activity. This is followed by the Vancouver good samaritan phase, an integration of Christian ethical values, rituals, weddings, and a strong ecstatic sufi influence. Personal and family relationships are emphasized. This leads to a kind of freedom, a movement towards reintegration, into the mainstream of society, and members return to their families, old jobs, or form into couples setting up house together or in some cases, find new (more Christian and less extreme) gurus. Gold sends out word from Crestline; "The pressure is off re the coming Dark Age; Relax and be your own guru." Then Wudshalo is set up, a tight school in the martial art style

which attracts a new flock of students. It appears to be a reissue of the school of Shakti in some respects. A firm barrier is kept between the outer and inner school. In his latest phase Gold is geared towards the couple relationship, the male and female representing the union of the dual forces of death and life. Again a new scientific technique, this time from obstetrics, is adopted and sacralized by becoming a religious metaphor and the individual student acts out that same birth and death cycle that Shakti's external organisation has been practicing for the past 5 years.

Thus the history of Shakti (to call the movement by its 3rd incarnation) can be interpreted as a demonstration, dramatisation, and expression of Gold's philosophy of conscious reincarnation. However it is more than that. It is also a response to external pressures felt by the organisation; the pressures of the ecological and technological crisis and of the competitive relationships between new religious movements, the pressure of segregation from the mainstream of society, the political pressures in America. Just as political demonstrations are described as a means of dramatising dissent, the history of Shakti dramatises spiritual and philosophical dissent in our society. How else can we interpret the setting up of courses in rat pack survival, bomb shelter training, the announcement of an ecumenical decision in new religious movements, and so

on? Shakti acted out a catharsis in respect to its own fear of death -- but also the greater fear of the Apocalypse in America -- by choreographing a cycle of plays featuring military training and dependency, a dissolution of structure, a paranoid fascistic trip, a desperate orgiastic celebration in the face of death, a race to save mankind by spiritual energy, and finally a reintegration into society. Now they appear to be starting the whole cycle all over again.

## CHAPTER II

THE INDIVIDUALSA. Interviews

The preceding table should give an idea of the background, age, and extent of involvement of the members of the group with which I am most familiar. These fall into two groups: Montreal members, and Core Group in Crestline and Vancouver, most of whom I have never met.

The individuals I shall attempt to describe are two of the Montreal Core members, with whom I worked during the Shakti course. The descriptions include part of the interviews I squeezed out of them, and knowledge I acquired through my friendships after the demise of Shakti.

Bill

Bill was 22, tall, fair, and was our leader in the Shakti course. He was from Winnipeg, had a background in electronics, and some training in group therapy techniques and biofeedback. He was on good terms with his parents and his younger brother, Chris, was also involved in the Vancouver branch of the group. He was one of the students at the Gestalt Learning Workshop in Cowichan, B.C. whom Dr. Gold converted and eloped with to his spiritual training centre in Crestline, in 1972. Bill worked there, acting



as Core Group's video technician, and ran a Biofeedback business in Vancouver, then arrived in Montreal in July 1973 to direct the centre. When Shakti was debriefed in December, he spent Christmas in Crestline, moved to the Vancouver centre in January 1974, helped run the commune on Vancouver Island, saw the film Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and was inspired to start a "church of Shakti", persuading Abe and Dave to shave their heads with him, and dress up in Franciscan robes. Then he set up a centre in Vancouver city, which offered spiritual training courses, which failed. (See interview with Barry below). He moved into his own apartment with his girlfriend, Pat, also a member of the group. He got a job in an electronics firm. She worked with emotionally disturbed children. For a few months they had no contact with the movement (which reached a low or dormant period, many people dropping out, returning home, finding new gurus, or following the advice offered by Gold in his last letter from Crestline, "From now on you must be your own guru.") Chris went to Crestline to be trained in Gold's new venture, Wudshalo. He returned to launch it in Vancouver. Then Bill and Pat moved to Crestline to help design the Biofeedback course that would be a part of Wudshalo training. The latest news on Bill is that he has set up a natural food store in L.A. for buying and storing food in bulk, and while working independently of the movement, is still in contact with them.

Lenore described Bill as "First and foremost, a professional," "He was very conscientious in keeping to his 'role' as group leader, and this set a limit on any personal relationships he had with people in the centre. Sometimes Bill's ways annoyed me. His responses were so predictably vague. He relaxed a lot when we moved to Vancouver. He seemed happier, more personal." Barry said, "I admire Bill a lot. At his best he's a great guy to be with, but I never felt particularly close to him."

#### Interview Extracts

Question: How did you come to be involved in Shakti?

I didn't do a lot of shopping around beforehand. People come into a group for a variety of reasons. Whether or not the reasons they profess to themselves and to other people are why they are really there, I can't honestly say. Why I ended up in Shakti? At a point a group of people appeared that seemed to be doing something I wanted to know about.

Question: How long have you been involved?

How long have I been on a Path, interested in Being, or whatever? For quite a while. Sometimes you bump into an external group reflecting what you've been doing for a long while without knowing it. There's a whole verbal and social context concerned with a particular kind of activity

which may be a calling card, landmark, focal point that serves as a reminder, so that people can see that that kind of thing is going on. Shakti wasn't the beginning of my doing that kind of thing, it was more an intensification, a bringing of what I was already doing into a more honest context.

Question: Did you join for the movement initially or for the method? Master or Method?

When I started Shakti was not yet a public organization. A friend of mine was telling people he'd run into a real teacher. I decided to check it out. Then I got the whole truckload dumped down on my head. Interesting, I thought. It's either true or else this guy al-Washi has the most phenomenal way of dealing with the world, with people, or else he's the most incredible con man going. My initial reaction was; either this was right on and there is nothing else to do, or else I'm being totally conned, and either way this is a good place to hang out, because if I'm being conned I want to find out how, so it won't happen again, and if not, there is no where else to be. Obviously. He made everything else look rather silly.

Question: Why do you believe in erasing personal history?

In Shakti we take personal history and put a big hunk of it on ice. We don't say it is bad, just put it in storage. It's no longer a toy to play with, a conversational item.

Question: Is personal history the Ego, then?

I don't know if it's Ego, but it's usually Ego that does the talking about it. If put aside, it won't get in the way, and more attention is focused on what else is going on. If I know about you and you do something I pull my misconceptions out and glue them onto what you did, and put that back in my head. The information is already dead. I'm not saying wipe out all you've learned, just that personal history isn't needed as material to work with.

Question: But surely your attitudes, beliefs are influenced by your past?

Sure, previous conditioning might account for attitudes now, but we can deal with them as they come up. There is no need to explore the reasons behind them.

Question: Is that the reason for White Room Conditions?

Have you ever heard of a Lonely Hearts Club?

Question: Well yes, but...

We don't want the centre to be a Lonely Hearts Club. People come here looking for companionship. They tend to latch onto that as a first way of setting up an environment. Once they find friends they stop paying attention, they go to sleep. When they come into an environment that is neutral, it allows them to examine what kind of thing they

generate. If your face doesn't express emotion, they imagine an emotion. If you don't respond they try to generate a response. "Oh he's hostile, she's spaced out, Whew! now I know what's happening." Then they think they've got the joint cased out, sit back and go into automatic again, and just wait for verification or changes. But once they can see themselves doing that they are read to start learning.

Question: But do you act the same outside the centre, at your job, with family?

Well you don't overdo it. You don't want people to take you for a piece of dead meat. A sufi should be inconspicuous. When you return to an old environment, family or friends, you shouldn't act different. YOU don't have to conflict with them. There is a way of being honest without being possessed.

### Barry

Barry is in his early 20's, thin, dark, born and raised in Montreal in a Jewish family. He dropped out of McGill in his 1st year to join The Divine Light Mission. He lived and worked in their centre in Montreal for a year, and was involved in Shakti for a year. Now he works in his borther's drapery business and maintains only a loose social contact with the group. He occasionally drops by

to visit me and is presently my only source of information about the group, except for mail. The following interview extracts contain more personal, factual, historical information than Bill's whose intention seems to have been to upset my categories, challenge my secular approach to sacred subject matter, to demonstrate that facts, figures, opinions or histories couldn't "explain" the existence of a spiritual movement. In fact he succeeded in making me feel quite a fool, laughing at some of my questions, showing me how to work the tape recorder, evading my attempts to worm explicit, personal answers out of him. On another level his answers are most revealing and explicit. They demonstrate his total identification with the group, a strong loyalty to their sacred perspective, a skillful effort to undermine my preconceptions concerning religious groups and to show me that a religious movement is ultimately an unfathomable mystery that one can experience, but never explain.

My interview with Barry occurred after we became friends and Shakti no longer existed.

Question: How did you come to join Shakti?

After leaving the D.L.M. I went to India for 6 months looking for a significant event that would decide whether I immersed myself totally in Yoga or left it. Nothing like that happened, so I came back. I'd been

thinking for some time of doing spiritual dance, so when I heard of a Movements demonstration, I decided to visit the Cowachin centre. "Bored silly" by the intellectual work, I asked him why he hung around. "At the beginning it was mostly curiosity. Then I really got into the movements and enjoyed working as a group on them, and we gave a lot of demonstrations, in Ottawa, Toronto, all over the place. Then when Shakti opened up we had to go out on the streets handing out pamphlets. I was back to prosletysing like when I was in the D.L.M., who were always concerned about attracting more people. But there was a difference. Shakti was more of a learning experience. In the D.L.M. I was just doing it. In Shakti I was watching myself do it. I saw being on the streets handing out pamphlets gave me a chance to meet people, tell them about myself, find out what they were doing, all the time watching myself in this new role as religious freak."

Question: Could you explain the basic philosophy of Shakti?

E.J. Gold is different from other gurus. They all say the same thing, talk about a soul, peace, etc. Gold says we all have a spark of the life force, but so what? So does a chair, a dog etc. He says a soul has to be developed by hard work. The philosophy expressed in The Grapefruit Rap (see literature) is unlike any I ever heard

before. That's why Gold says the mystical experience is only the 1st stage in Shakti. The D.L.M.'s aim was to feel, taste, smell that divine essence as much as they could all the time, but Gold sees it as only a seed that must be worked on in order to grow. The reason so few people grow a soul is because they are so caught up in their routines and daily games. There are blockages, nerve disorders in the body which stop growth. So what Shakti was trying to do was to shock people out of their routines, their conditioned beliefs, patterns, responses, so they could have a look at themselves, at what they were doing. That's what I got out of Shakti, the ability to watch myself, to keep the little man, the inner eye, whatever you choose to call it, awake, detached and observing.

Question: Is that the soul?

I don't know if that is the soul, but it seems to be something you need in order to grow a soul.

Question: Why did you leave Shakti?

We were really high when we lived in the (Vancouver) lodge. Our services would fill us to overflowing with spiritual energy so we'd just have to go out and pass it on. But then we moved into the town centre. We cleaned the whole house so it radiated energy. It was a good place to be. But half the members moved upstairs and the rest of



us lived in the basement. The main floor was for classes only. So it became Us and Them. They said we should get up every morning to meditate at 4 a.m., but instead of coming down and doing it with us, they'd send someone down to wake us up. Supposedly They (Bill, Pat, Chris, Abe, Shelly) were more experienced, but we just didn't get off on doing the work they gave us. Finally the situation got so Us and Them, They decided to move out and leave us to run it the way we wanted. Then we realized we didn't want to continue the Shakti training. We had all this Shakti Lit lying around and didn't want to touch it. At that point the house began to suck energy rather than radiate it. I remember one afternoon I was lying on the sofa and fell asleep for no reason. When I woke up I felt totally drained. I staggered outside and soon felt O.K. You felt better being outside than in that house!

Chris and I were supposed to go to Crestline to do Wudshalo training. We each needed \$200 to go. He got it from his parents and I had to work for mine in the fish-market. Finally I got it together and then I phoned my folks. The Jewish holiday was about the begin and it sounded like my family really wanted to see me. So I had the choice of Crestline or Montreal. I realized I would rather be in Montreal. So I flew out here. I never returned. I started to help my brother with his drapery

business. I have an old score to settle with my mother. We have a heavy relationship that I suspect has been going on for many reincarnations, and it is time to resolve it. I've been trying to introduce spiritual ideas to my brother, but he doesn't want to know. Anyway, I no longer wanted to be in a group. A group feeds you and feeds you and after a while you can't taste it anymore. I needed to have time to assimilate, to use what I'd learned.

B. What Kind of Individuals Join Shakti?

What sort of general statements can be made about the individuals in Shakti? One generalisation I can safely make is that all the Shakti members I met were in their twenties or thirties. Also the core members (without exception) were highly intelligent, energetic and well educated.

How did members drift into Shakti? There seem to be at least two different routes. One is through a scientific background, and interest in new techniques. Bill, Abe, Dave, Lucy and Pam were all involved in gestalt therapy before they met Gold. The other route seems to be disillusionment with other groups. Lenore, Barry, Lea and myself had all been involved in Yoga or Hindu groups and were searching for a more western, intellectual religious involvement. Beyond these two routes it is difficult to

generalize. Each individual seems to have joined for his personal reasons which soon became irrelevant. It is safe to say that none of their initial expectations about the group came true. It was always unpredictable, changing. This leads us to the next question; what qualities does an individual need to have to survive in a group like Shakti? My answer is curiosity, ability to work in groups, initiative, ability to learn quickly. Moreover, a certain toughness, spirit of adventure and intellectual curiosity is helpful to withstand both the "shocks" and the boredom of the routine work. Members were required to do a wide range of active practical work like sewing, typing, carpentry, painting, unlike the solitary specialized, contemplative work practiced in Yoga and Zen groups -- although these often require students to set up their centres also. However, simply because Shakti was always closing down and setting up new centres, and never allowed itself to become established, more of that kind of organizational work was necessary. Therefore the kind of student who wants to be left alone to meditate would not survive in Shakti.

## CHAPTER III

THE LITERATUREA. The Range of the Literature

The organisation is prolific in their literature which is published by the IDHHB in Crestline. Much of the writing is evidently Mr. Gold's, but undoubtedly the compilation and production of the literature involved his disciples. The comic book, The Creation Story, attributes the art work to Lin Larson, a Core Group member, and the Shakti Magazine features a front page containing the names of Core Group members as editors. Books like The Autobiography of God and The Avatar's Handbook are written in Mr. Gold's inimitable style and the second Shakti Handbook contains the following dedication, making no bones about to whom the credit for the book should be attributed:

I humbly dedicate this book to myself, since that is for whom it has been written. I would also like to thank myself, in all my manifestations for the invaluable assistance given to me and toward the teaching of me to remember myself -- without whose help this book would not only never have been written, but without whom this book would never have needed to have been written.

However some of his students have also published their own writings within the organisation -- The Book of Bdum by Dave, and The Pyramid Meditation Book by Sheikh Yassun Dede.

There are different levels of literature for different purposes of the group. The Avatar's Handbook and The Autobiography of God contain the core of J. Gold's philosophy and remain fairly constant reading material throughout the history of the group. On the other hand, all the Shakti literature was put out for the specific purpose of launching "Shakti, The Spiritual Science of DNA," Mr. Gold's pet project, a spiritual school. Since the debriefing of Shakti and the founding of Wudshalo, the Shakti literature has been discontinued and some of it, The Mala Manual, for example, is no longer available to the public.

There is also the advertising literature, the pamphlets and posters. During the Cowachin period, the advertising was so sophisticated it failed to excite any response whatsoever. Intent on remaining a secret esoteric group, appealing only to the spiritual adventurer and connoisseur, Cowachin put out cryptic enigmatic posters and pamphlets with brief captions -- "Story-telling", "Objective Thinking", and humorous cartoons bearing their address. The public failed to bite.

There is a level of inside secret literature containing descriptions of the techniques and instructions for teaching them which are available only to members of Core Group.

The following list of Shakti publications gives an idea of the range and type of literature available<sup>10</sup>.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS FROM CORE GROUP:

The Avatar's Handbook  
 The Mala's Manual  
 The Creation Story Verbatim  
 The Bardos  
 Cosmic History  
 The Real Time Course  
 DNA Direct Code  
 DNA Lifestyles  
 The Book of Archetypes

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE ONLY TO STUDENTS:

The Prototype People  
 Core Group OPS Handbook  
 Bardo Level Workbook for Groups  
 Table of DNA Code Corrections  
 Table of Course Corrections  
 Snaps and Options  
 DNA Group Dynamics

RECORDINGS AVAILABLE FROM CORE GROUP:

Epitaph for an Ego  
 Shaping Sounds/Shaping Worlds  
 DNA Meditations  
 Haikounian Mass Texts

B. Description

I will include a brief description of four books which I have read and consider the most important of the literature, partly because they offer the most general

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<sup>10</sup> From the back cover of the Shakti Handbook.

outline of Gold's philosophy (unlike the specialized training manuals) and partly because they are used most consistently throughout the different phases of the movement, with the exception of the Shakti Handbook, which was used only in Shakti.

Shakti, the Spiritual Science of DNA (a textbook of student assignments for the beginner)

There were two editions of this work, one appearing April, the other a revised edition in August 1973. I will describe the latter which was handed out to us upon our enrollment in the Shakti Course. It is made up of the following sections:

- A Preface outlining the problems in spiritual education.
- 3 essays describing the aims and methods of the group.
- A series of photographs of a woman demonstrating the movements, with accompanying instructions. These are an interesting combination of medical terms (the Crown metatarsal axis), sufi names (Flying Torque), and references to Biofeedback. The different positions are meant to induce accompanying meditative states. For example, in stage ten, the physical position is described, and then its internal counterpart, which is identified in terms of biofeedback.

STAGE TEN - Once again, the arms are stretched down toward the ankles, and the abdomen is contracted, while the upper back to the legs is expanded to give the solar plexus "space" to release. The student is now attuned to images which will be released by the snap of tension as the solar plexus sends out signals along the mid-nervous system. Meditation stage two prepared awareness. (About mid range on the FEELOR, bio-feedback device.) Sharp Outbreath no. 2.11

- A Cosmological system, expressed in DNA language.
- A 27 page poem. After reading it aloud in one Shakti course, one student explained it as the ravings of a schizophrenic, another as "a bad acid trip". I interpreted it as the experiences of an unconscious soul going through the birth-death-rebirth cycle.
- A final series of essays on Real Time, role playing, and spiritual survival.

#### The Avatar's Handbook

This is a collection of essays and anecdotes. It deals with the problems encountered in the search for spiritual knowledge; the quest for the right guru, the authenticity of spiritual schools, western vs. eastern masters, and comments on various mystical movements. It is written for the initiate, the connoisseur, one who has "been around" the North American mystical scene. It is satirical,

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11 E.J. Gold, The Shakti Handbook. Core Group Publication. P.O. Box 1556, Crestline, California, 1973. p. 59.



whimsical, challenging in tone.

Below is an example of a philosophical flight of fancy, using language in an experimental, mixed media sort of way to emphasize silence, beyond-language states. He plays upon the reader/author relationship.

The question is, what is it you want to know? There are so many things to know, and yet only the One Great and Terrible Secret, which I find written about every paragraph or so. But it has yet to be put into simple words, or to paraphrase that, a parable, which is not the secret itself, but a manifestation of that Great Thing which has no thingness. Oh, but how I do go on! It is absolutely absurd to write down so many words, whether or not they are useful, if we are not going to get at this thing which is the kernel, so to speak, of the entire book. But it is not, you understand, so easy to get at. It requires attention; both yours and mine. And if I know my attention is here, how can I determine that your attention is also at this moment not lacking, so that this secret only needs to be imparted once and not many times to make certain that you don't miss it?

#### The Book of Archetypes

This is a slender pamphlet which contains a DNA cosmology<sup>12</sup>, (a variation on the one in the Shakti Handbook), a description of the game Daysnap<sup>13</sup>, and a series

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<sup>12</sup> See below, p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix, p.162

of pictures or snaps, or reminders of spiritual consciousness, symbols used to awaken to a higher level of awareness. These include Gurdjieff, a hexagram, and Mickey Mouse. See below:



HERE'S A JOLLY SNAP ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED BY A MINDLESS IDIOT:

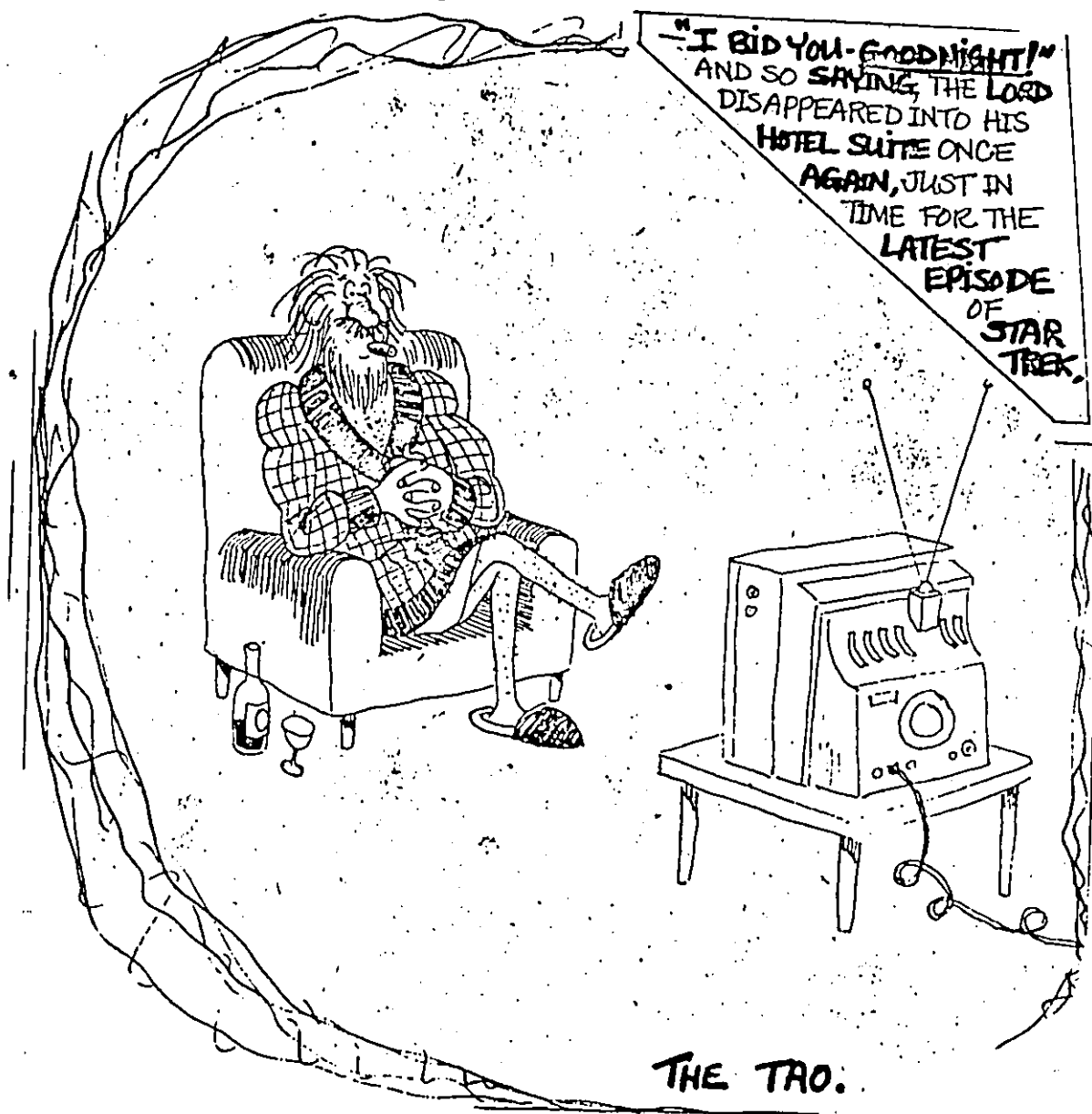


HERE'S A NICE ALIEN SNAP. THIS CAN GET OUT OF HAND, BUT IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR WILLINGNESS TO ADAPT TO ANYTHING IN ORDER TO EXPERIENCE SOMETHING.

THIS SNAP DIDN'T DO MUCH ON A LARGE SCALE, BUT THE QUALITY OF BEINGS WHO SNAPPED ON IT MAKE IT A CLASSIC OF ITS TYPE.

### The Creation Story

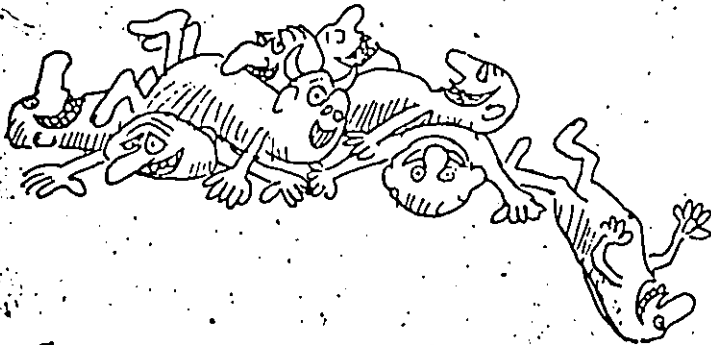
This is a comic book. The text is an extract from the last chapter of Mr. Gold's fantasy novel, The Autobiography of God. The drawings are by a Shakti member. There was an attempt to film a few scenes from the same novel in Vancouver in January 1974. The comic book presents a complex, highly abstract, metaphysical account of the Creation, illustrated with humorous cartoons, of which I have included the following examples:



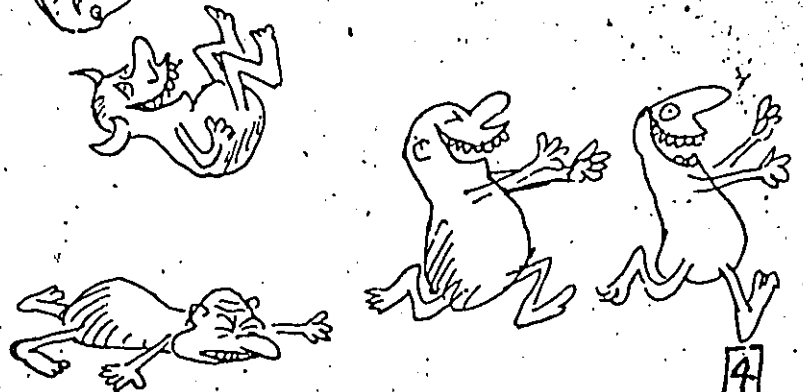
AND IT TAKES A LOT OF ATTENTION AND INTEREST FOR THAT SORT OF THING, AND ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I FOUND OUT IN MY EARLY CREATONING WAS THAT, BEING ENDLESS AND ALL, I JUST DIDN'T GIVE A SHIT WHAT HAPPENED TO IT AFTER I MADE IT, AND THE TRUTH IS....



... I REALLY DIDN'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT IT— WHILE I WAS MAKING IT.

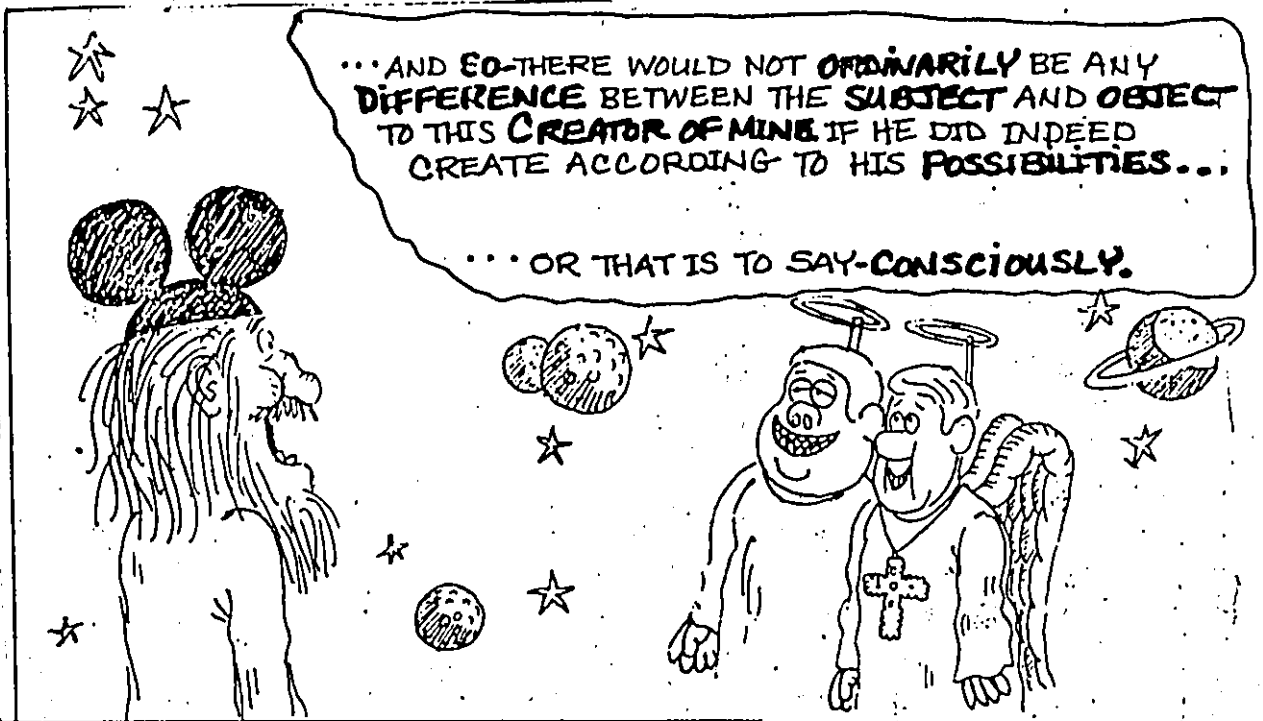


... SO—I HAD SOME FRUSTRATION IN MY EARLY ATTEMPTS SINCE THE BEING CREATIONS OF THAT PERIOD WERE EMPTY INSIDE; SO I HAD TO GET INTO EACH ONE OF THEM SIMULTANEOUSLY IN ORDER TO GET THEM TO ACT TOWARD EACH OTHER AND THEIR WORLD ALL AT THE SAME TIME...



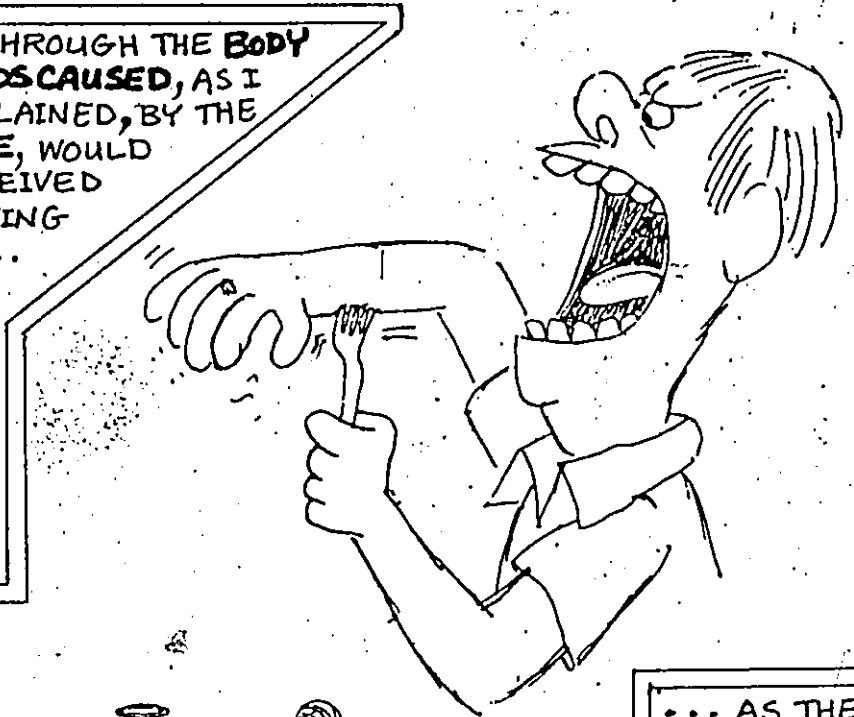
...AND **EO**-THERE WOULD NOT **ORDINARILY** BE ANY **DIFFERENCE** BETWEEN THE **SUBJECT** AND **OBJECT** TO THIS **CREATOR OF MINE** IF HE DID INDEED **CREATE** ACCORDING TO HIS **POSSIBILITIES...**

...OR THAT IS TO SAY-**CONSCIOUSLY.**



AND THIS **EATING** THROUGH THE **BODY** OF THE **WHITE CLOUDS CAUSED**, AS I HAVE **ALREADY** EXPLAINED, BY THE **STRIVING** TO **ESCAPE**, WOULD PROBABLY BE PERCEIVED BY HIM AS THE **EATING** OF HIS **OWN BODY...**

...WHICH, AS YOU TELL ME, HAS **ALREADY** BECOME WITH THIS **CREATOR OF MINE** **LEGENDARY,**



... AS THE **EUCCHARISTIC MASS...**  
AND **HOLY COMMUNION...**



### C. Style

The style of the Shakti literature is very different from that of other new religious movements today, who tend to use flowery, devotional language derived from the major religious tradition to which they are linked.

Mr. Gold's style is very American. His dry, terse sentences are constructed to build up to a punch line. His prose is slangy, journalistic. His tone is tough, humorous. Recently I came across The Third Galaxy Reader in a second-hand bookshop and edited by his father, H.L. Gold, and was interested to discover the style and tone of the father's writing was very like the son's. They are both down to earth, slangy and at the same time scientific and objective in their approach to their subject.

Gold's language is, of course, wildly eclectic, ranging from conventional Christian and Hindu vocabulary to the startling use of vulgar folk media (bar jokes and comic strips) and highly technical scientific terminology.

As is common in religious propaganda, there is a strong attempt to involve the reader. Mr. Gold of course has his own inimitable style of doing this. He insults, confuses, builds up expectations, destroys them with an anticlimactic cliché. The reader is aware of the process of writing, and of the reader/writer relationship. He is constantly shocked out of a train of thought into, "here

we are, me writing, and you, dear reader, reading."

Mr. Gold uses arresting imagery. A central image in his work is eating -- and being eaten, which seems to illustrate his conception of man's relation to his universe.

A Child's Guide to Transubstantiation<sup>14</sup> is based on this idea:

"I have a pet chicken named Harry when he dies I am going to eat him yum."

"When you are eat by something then you are suddenly inside everybody and you can see everywhere at once."

"Someday I am going to walk right up to something and die in front of it I am grateful when it happens."

One of the most noticeable characteristics of Gold's style is his sense of humour and satire.

Much of his satire is directed against the external trappings of religious groups, as for example his playful use of names and titles; "Beast" and Sheikh Yassun Dede (yesindeedey). Mr. Gold's public appearances in costumes like the dhoti and the turban with a sequined dollar sign, and staging a photograph of himself in front of a Disneyland mosque, reveal a capacity for self satire.

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14 A Child's Guide is a colouring book, illustrated with large cartoons. The style is modelled on the 1st Grade Dick and Jane books, an ironically bland, sentimental American medium to contain such a savage, "heavy" death philosophy.

Even his jokes are auto-satirical. I have heard him tell the conventional Zen or Sufi story with an unexpected ending, or the standard western "a man went into a bar..." joke, building suspensefully up to a feeble anti-climactic punch line. The sense of the absurd invades the most serious didactic movements. Mr. Gold delivered a taped lecture in which he expounds his belief system and personal cosmology, choosing to call the spirit the "Grapefruit", throughout the session. Bill chose an equally inappropriate image to illustrate the falling away of the ego<sup>15</sup>.

Another target for his satire is whole North American spiritual "scene" with its rival gurus and confused and jaded groupies desperately searching to distinguish the "true" from the "false". The examples of Shakti advertising below play on this theme:

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15 A sailor on a transatlantic journey was suffering from a case of the clap. He went to a doctor at the next port who said, "There's nothing I can do. It will have to be cut off." He waited two weeks to consult another doctor at the next port who gave the same advice. Refusing to accept it, he waited until he was back in New York, in acute pain, the member swollen and turning all colours of the rainbow. He found the top specialist in V.D. in the city and said, "Please doctor, don't tell me to cut it off!" The doctor took one look and replied, "You don't have to cut it off. In another couple of days it will fall off by itself."

The moral is don't try to lop off the Ego. When you are ready, it will fall off by itself.



An ad for a Movement demonstration:

"L'Ecole de Faux Sufis"

Fake Sufi Dancing  
Snake Fufi Dancing  
Naked Flusi Dancing  
Fake Fakir Dancing

Here is an example of a poster they circulated in California:

THE FAKE SUFI SCHOOL  
P.O. Box 1556  
Crestline, California  
(92325)

We Offer:

AIMLESS AIMS, RESULTLESS RESULTS, FAKE GREAT WORK, FAKE TEACHINGS AND TEACHERS, MISUNDERSTOOD INFORMATION, FAKE AND USELESS KNOWLEDGE SCATTERED AND USELESS EFFORTS, IN SHORT, NOTHING OF REAL AND OBJECTIVE VALUE. ALL AT A FAIR PRICE YOU CAN'T AFFORD.

Unless you're interested, write to the Registrar, and ask about:

THE CASTOR OIL COURSE -- 6 weeks per person

What does this humour imply? A disillusionment with religion, a boredom and decadence within the new religious movements? It goes beyond the emotional involvement leading to those stances. It is rather the result of detachment; it is part of Gold's central methodology; his shock therapy. Humour, the halting of the logical mind, and laughter, the

physiological release of tension caused by paradox, are Gold's teaching techniques. Like role playing, like the turn off's, like unexpected punch lines and like his choice of obscene and inappropriate religious language, they are meant to "jolt" the mind out of its accustomed ruts, to disorient the personality to wake up the soul, to shock the student in order to open him up so that he will be in a state to learn something really new.

The following cartoon portrays the modern concern for finding a "real" Master:

The following cartoon portrays the modern concern for finding a "real" Master:

# SHAKTI! COMIX



PRÉSENTE

SNUFI SNUCRET ET SON CHIEN GROGNON RENCONTRENT...

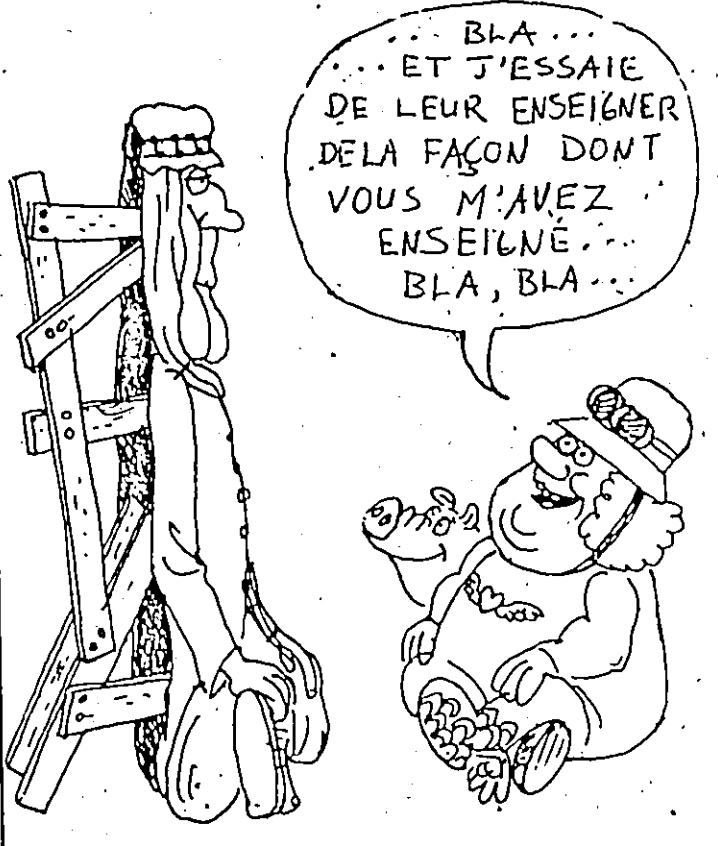


BLA, BLA,  
BLA, VOTRE SAINTÉTÉ,  
... BLA BLA ...  
BLA, BLA ...

## YASSUN DÉDÉ !!



... BLA, BLA ...  
JE LEUR AI DONNÉ  
CES TECHNIQUES QUE  
J'AI APPRIS DE VOUS  
ET... BLA, BLA ...



... BLA ...  
... ET J'ESSAIE  
DE LEUR ENSEIGNER  
DE LA FAÇON DONT  
VOUS M'AVEZ  
ENSEIGNÉ ...  
BLA, BLA ...

## CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHYA. The Central Beliefs

What are the central beliefs of the group? Since the name, place, literature, and techniques of the group are subject to change, do the ideas fluctuate also, or is there a core philosophy that persists throughout the different phases of the group? My conclusion from reading the literature from the different phases is that there is a central idea system, which can be separated into a cosmology, an anthropology, an eschatology, but the three elements are so interwoven as to make up a complete, unified, self-contained system. I have outlined seven ideas on which the core philosophy seems to be based:

Reincarnation - There is an immortal part of man that travels through cycles of birth and death. However this part is unlike the Xtian soul, in that it is not necessarily self-conscious or spiritually aware.

Being - This part, called Being, is usually asleep. It lives out the same life (pre-programmed sequence of action) over and over again without remembering and without learning. In this way it resembles a Machine, a computer, a genetic cell, a tape.

Redemption - At some point the Being inevitably begins to wake up, become aware of itself, and starts to look for a way out of its automatic cycle; seeking self-control and consciousness.

Guidance - At this point a teacher, a school, a method is needed.

Self-realization - The development of Being abilities, is achieved through control over and harmonisation of the 3 centres of man. Self-realization is defined as total clarity of vision, power, mobility on all levels, total recall of past lives, ability to die without suffering pain, fear, or memory loss. A self-realized being of the Shakti model is involved in the world, educating other beings, or working to alleviate the Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse - The coming of a Dark Age, spiritually, and materially, involving factors like a technological breakdown, pollution, warfare, possibly followed, if weathered, by a spiritual renaissance.

The cosmology, anthropology, eschatology, aims, and techniques of the group are based on these seven central ideas.

## B. Cosmology

The cosmology of Shakti is presented in the two Shakti handbooks, and in the taped lecture of Mr. Gold, called The Grapefruit Rap.

The following passage from the handbook sums up their cosmology or in their own words is "an accurate map of how Being gets anywhere, and a detailed map of how Being gets here in particular,"<sup>16</sup> which paraphrased means roughly "an accurate account, of how the soul moves through the universe, and a detailed scheme of how it enters a body and consequently the phenomenal world of our planet.

What is a BARDO? Up to this period in the development of man, the Bardos have been very misunderstood, although they have been known and recorded by man for tens of thousands of his years. Unfortunately, they have been recorded in terms and symbols which were familiar to him and relating only to realities which are familiar to him. The BARDOS are, in fact, an Awareness-Continuum Coded Package -- called DNA -- into which a Being's awareness folds down as soon as the Being leaves the physical plane. Here's what happens. The Genetic Code Modular Package called the GCMP, or DNA, is an indestructible spore, into which all the basic structure of the Being's awareness is packed in its simplest possible form, which travels as a closed-down system until it again enters a universe, which it seeks automatically without the need for conscious direction, due to its program, which seeks out a specific range of choices of a body, choosing any available body which conforms to that code's program.

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16 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 60.

On the entry into a body of the Genetic Code Package, it unfolds immediately into the control area, called the "plexus" of the body, and extends its awareness out into the nervous system, building a matrix of awareness upon which it can act, and through which it senses and perceives events in space and time. When it has to leave a body, the Being retreats completely into the GCMP and exits from that Universe.

The subjective experience of a Being who has "spored" into a Genetic Code Package is a series of experiences and events which are ALWAYS THE SAME. These experiences, statements, people etc. are repetitive and precise -- naturally -- they are the symbolic code of that Being's awareness -- the modular building blocks of the Being -- and so are always exactly the same.<sup>17</sup>

I would interpret this puzzling passage as presenting a model of the soul and its progress through cycles of death and rebirth. The Genetic Code Modular Package, or the DNA is the soul, in the sense that it is the "indestructible," or immortal core, seed of consciousness, containing "all the basic structure of the Being's awareness packed in its simplest possible form." What then is the distinction between GCMP and "Being"? GCMP is a "closed down system" or seed, the state that the soul travels in-between bodies or life in the material world. Being is the state that occurs when the GCMP has "unfolded into the plexus" (central nervous system) of the body; the soul living in and responding to the phenomenal world (space and time).

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<sup>17</sup> Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 60.

There are three interesting and unusual assumptions in this passage. One is that the soul is not the same in life as in death, but goes through a cycle, like a seed to a plant, or a hibernating dormant animal to an active one. Another is that the soul "unfolds" or grows through the central nervous system (as opposed to somehow being contained in the brain or heart or breath) and therefore interacts with the world through the senses. This belief would explain their use of biofeedback and physical exercise for spiritual purposes; by training the nervous system they allow the soul to grow through it. Finally, the belief that the soul evinces no progress through its cycle of reincarnation, that it drifts, pointlessly from body to body in an automatic, mechanical, programmed fashion. It does not learn, mature, improve; it has no conscious direction. Its destiny is determined by its "program", its basic structure, and it is a repetitive destiny, a replay of the same events or experiences over and over again.

This cosmology is a pessimistic or at best, a boring meaningless one. The handbook lists the added disadvantages for the Being functioning in this state of affairs. They are; remaining unconscious during Between World flights; being unable to choose the next body; "massive memory blackouts", as the soul can't remember its previous lives, which are nevertheless identical to its present one.



The only change is for the worse; since the GCMP registers only negative experience, it gradually accumulates these memories which must eventually add up to make a neurotic paranoid soul.

The Genetic Code Module Package (GCMP) also contains, although in a very brief "shorthand" form, all the occurrences and experiences which have been IMPORTANT in the history of that Being, as PAINFUL, UNCOMFORTABLE, STIFLING, DANGEROUS, OR INDUCING FEAR, CONFUSION, OR A FEELING OF HELPLESSNESS to the Being in previous encounters with universes. Very few PLEASURABLE or INTERESTING experiences, or IDEAS WHICH HELP A BEING TO UNDERSTAND ITS OWN NATURE are recorded in the Genetic Code Module Package, BECAUSE THEY DO NOT SEEM NECESSARY TO THE SIMPLE SURVIVAL OF THE BEING.<sup>18, 19</sup>

However, there is of course, a scheme of redemption. The sequence of the programmed symbols in the GCMP can be changed by "the Conscious Action of the Being". The first step toward the formation of a Being able to "Consciously Determine and Direct the Genetic Code Module Package" is "right knowledge", to make a code module of the above cosmology to feed into the GCMP. This leads into the problem of DNA language, or encoding and into their conception of knowledge.

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18 This belief, that unpleasant experiences tend to be recorded because they are survival oriented is similar to Scientology's concept of engrams.

19 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 58.

In "The Grapefruit Rap", a taped lecture, Mr. Gold expounds upon his model of the soul and his scheme of redemption or self-realization. I will attempt to sum up the general message as I understood it from hearing the tape on two occasions in December 1973 at the Shakti centre. The import of the lecture was as follows:

Every living thing as an immortal spark of consciousness, which Mr. Gold chose to term a "grapefruit". This grapefruit is immortal, unchangeable, aimlessly drifting through life and death, and various bodies. However occasionally this grapefruit would find itself in a man and through conscious effort or purpose might be "extended into Man," to make a fully realized Being. He called the nervous system a "blue print of Being" that only remains a blueprint until it is built. This is done by extending the grapefruit along the lines of the nervous system until it is fully grown -- and becomes a Being fully conscious, a self-realized man. This concept is very different from the concept of Karma, in which spiritual evolution is inevitable and promotion or demotion is based on the actions of your former life.

### C. Anthropology

The Shakti handbook contains a model of man as a combination of three factors: Being, Ego, Animal. The

Being is the soul or the immortal part of the mind and has already been discussed. The Ego can be interpreted as the intellect, the thoughts, the identity, or what the Being thinks it is in the context of the material world. It is the psychological entity and its problems, the part of man that is caught up in or identified with space and time. The Animal is the "DNA body programming", the body, its nervous system, the instincts, the automatic survival system. The Being is described as "fragile, delicate, unable to cope in space"<sup>20</sup>, whereas the Animal is strong, able to compete and defend itself in the material world. The Ego is riddled with fear and desire, unreal problems (unreal in a larger spiritual sense), irrelevant ideas and opinions. Being, confused and neglected by Ego and Animal is usually weak, powerless and does not get a chance to develop its abilities, which are unrelated to time and space. Below is a list of the abilities of Being, which are supposedly actualized in a self-realized man.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE BEING-ABILITIES WHICH YOU ARE WORKING TO REGAIN ON THESE BEGINNING COURSES:

the ability to remain out of and re-enter deliberately,  
space and time.

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20 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 58.

- the ability to create, have continue to exist, and destroy, matter and energy.
- the ability to decide, based upon full knowledge of the consequences, any course of action.
- the ability to change your relationship to time and space and any functions of time and space.
- the ability to alter any reality and your relationship to it.
- the ability to experience alternate realities.
- the ability to share realities.
- the ability to share moments of Creation with other Beings.
- the ability to assist other Beings to free themselves from body-interference.
- the ability to create, maintain, destroy, communicate, and place, will and intent.
- the ability to have and use total recall of the entire Being-History.
- the ability to have and use total recall of, and access to, the Akashic Records.
- the ability to start, stop, alter or cease to have occur, any action or action-chain.
- the ability to communicate on a level of mind-only, being-only, as well as body.
- the ability to communicate and search out information outside the physical universe.
- the ability to locate any Being, data, intelligence, memory, universe, etc. anywhere, and on any level.
- the ability to enter into or leave the control center, or solar plexus, of any body or object on any level.
- the ability to create any condition of awareness at all.
- the ability to relate without suffering to any universe, any condition of a universe, any condition of operating within it, and any condition of Being.

the ability to allow another Being to fully communicate with one -- Conference.

the ability to create outside one's direct or inferred experience (Synthesize Creation).

the ability to place Models into the physical universe and have them happen. (Translate Models into Physical Phenomena).

the ability to exit from, enter into, and experience, any Model, without pain, fear, discomfort, or ignorance.

the ability to experience all levels of reality simultaneously without confusion.

the ability to refuse to obey, as a Being, the laws operating locally in a universe -- (to be Unsubject-- to have the ability to break or bend the laws of physics and dynamics existing in a local space, time, model, or continuum--).<sup>21</sup>

This rather remarkable list raises the question of how to interpret these claims. On the face of it Shakti aims to develop the Superhuman with supernatural powers. Does this mean that the Shakti graduate can actually create, destroy matter, enter and exit from space and time, or simply feels sufficiently free and powerful that he thinks he could? Of course this dilemma has a built-in safety valve. That once a man has evolved to the point where he can do these things, his integrity won't allow him to stoop to the vulgarity of showing off his powers; that with the ability to manipulate the material world come detachment

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21 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 63.

from it, consequently a loss of interest in doing it. This argument is a common theme in new religious groups. George Malko describes it in Scientology, the Now Religion<sup>22</sup>. Of course if the Shakti student manages to free his perceptions to the extent that he is able to create and alter reality at will for himself, who is to say whether that reality is real or not? One is back to the old question of the dividing line between objective and subjective reality that Castaneda dramatizes so effectively when he asks "did I really fly like a bird or did I merely think I was flying?" and Don Juan replies "You flew not as a bird, but as a man flies."<sup>23</sup> Therefore if the Shakti student's concepts of space and time are sufficiently flexible, he could conceivably perform all these miracles according to his own definitions of them, within the limitations of his own subjective reality.

This list is very revealing concerning the ultimate aims of Shakti. Being abilities are evidently very different from the Christian experience of union with a personal God, or even the Hindu or Buddhist aims of death without

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22 G. Malko, Scientology, pp. 203-204.

23 C. Castaneda, The Teachings of Don Juan, p.361.

reincarnation, and freedom from illusion (including the illusion of individuality). This list is talking about individual self-control and potency. The self-realized being of this list resembles not so much a Christian saint or an Indian yogi, but rather a sorcerer. And what does this signify? That Shakti people aren't satisfied with the dependence and passivity of the Christian experience. They relish the loneliness, the decision-making and activity of the sorcerer. Moreover they want to enjoy his power, his art, his skill and competence to manipulate the outside world. Secondly, Shakti people aren't "ready for", or inclined towards even the temporary giving up of the social and physical world implicitly required of a yogi or Zen student. They are too caught up in the speed, the fun, the opportunities in Western culture, and its attendant problems. They wish to develop abilities to help them cope with these problems, and exploit these opportunities in a creative way. At the same time their perspective is a spiritual one but the ability to function in the physical American world is included in their path.

#### D. Aims

The aims of the group grow out of the beliefs, outlined above, and can be put in 3 categories: for the

individual, for society, and on behalf of the Universe.

On the individual level, the aim is spiritual education, (to develop Being and Being-abilities) to achieve the state of Shakti, "a state of no-interference on the part of the physical universe with any intent of the Being who is operating in that universe."

For society "Our task is to maintain, transmit, teach, and preserve Spiritual Life in the Material World." (The Shakti Handbook). Practically, they have initiated several Programs preparing for the coming Dark Ages; an ecumenical movement among new religious movements, setting up workshops in survival techniques, from living in the woods, to making your own home, clothes, tools, furniture (i.e. crafts and do-it-yourself courses), to exercises in self-control in crises, "rat-pack" conditions.

Their aims in terms of the universe are a bit vague and hard to define. There is a scheme of spiritual evolution on a universal scale. The Shakti record cover reads, "What's going on? The education of the universe, one idiot at a time." Therefore the role of the group in a universal context would be simply to aid and take part in the ongoing spiritual evolution.

#### E. Knowledge

The word "knowledge" has a particular meaning in Shakti. One of the functions of the group sees itself as



performing is the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. Undoubtedly they mean spiritual knowledge. Right knowledge is seen to be one of the prerequisites for a man's first steps into spiritual consciousness:

So if a Being doesn't know how to arrange a new sequence of coding, and doesn't even know about the fact that it is living inside a genetic code package ... it won't be able to act from Being or exist in Being knowingly.

So one of the first problems we can deal with is to make a Code Module of this knowledge and feed it into the Genetic Code Package. So that the Being is at least aware of the condition of its existence inside the Genetic Code Module.

What we want to do is punch the data about Genetic Code Packages into the Genetic Code Package. Under ordinary conditions, that information would not be available inside the GCMP!24

Paraphrased, the passage defines spiritual knowledge or at least the first step towards it as man's self-consciousness as spiritual being. They intend to make him conscious by presenting him with a model of himself as a spiritual being.

The next stage is to enable man to experience the reality of that model, in other words to experience the spiritual side of his nature. This experience is a different type of "knowledge" than the cognitive one of the

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24 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 58.

"punched-in data" of the model. The following passages express the notion that spiritual knowledge requires a different learning process from intellectual knowledge.

Go easy on the explanations without demonstrations, no matter what the student says about how they understand. We know that a student with even a minor amount of school experience is going to be hard headed about what they know and how they learn. They'll invariably tell you that if they hear about it, they know it.

That's not true in this training. We already are aware that our students are capable of storing information and even occasionally delivering it, on demand, in a test. But that's learning with the personality. We're after the Being's learning and understanding ability.

So the fact is, that, while a personality can learn to appreciate and store up information intellectually, we want to teach something to the Being, and the Being can learn only by experience. There isn't any intellect there. No mind there.

The Being has to learn with a different set of learning tools, and the only way to bring those learning tools into play in the learning experience is to get the Being right into a direct experience with the experience.

So, get those students to carry out all the demonstrations, don't let them watch you do it. Get them to do it. If you do the demonstration for them, or show them a film on it, they'll take one look at what you're doing, and go "Oh, it's nap time."

Get the students to do the demonstrations about the text, and you can explain to them that they already know all about that, that they don't need any demonstration for such simple ideas. We know that. What we're doing is demonstrating those simple ideas to a Being which depends upon the experience in order to understand the idea.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 68.

These passages emphasize experiential knowledge and learning as opposed to verbal, intellectual modes. Also it implies the necessity for being self-taught, of learning from first hand experience. The approach is very practical; that knowledge must be applied, that the environment or task that confronts the student motivates him to acquire the knowledge necessary to deal with it. The claim is that the ordinary conditions of life don't require this type of knowledge, but that the groups create environments or tasks in which it is essential.

This view of knowledge raises two important issues. The first is communication; the function, limitations, dynamics of a verbal, intellectual, cognitive model of "knowledge". Secondly, teaching methods, how environments or tasks are set up or approached to provide the student with the opportunity to experience knowledge.

#### F. The Language

The language of Shakti is a sufficiently striking feature to cause one to inquire into the significance of their concern with language in general and their use of scientific language in particular.

First of all, Shakti is aware of the problems of

expressing religious experience in words. In The Shakti Handbook, the guidelines for creating an effective religious language are put forth. To paraphrase, it states the following:

It must be simple enough to be understood and remembered. It must be objective enough to apply to any situation/planet/culture, and yet not be confused with external reality: "You must be able to separate the symbols of DNA from symbols of only physical world encounter." This would explain the choice of science as a source of metaphor rather than myth which would be limited culturally. Finally, it must be translatable into worldly terms. The connection between spiritual and temporal reality/language must be made. It must be effective, "a method of carrying on module language and world perception language at the same time."<sup>26</sup>

Why does Shakti choose a scientific vocabulary to express a spiritual reality? Science claims to be objective and universally applicable, and unlimited culturally. Also it is very abstract, and obviously symbolic. Moreover in the case of genetic and astronomy terminology, it represents the unseen: What we empirically know to exist, but what our naked senses can perceive only to a very limited extent. In this way the world of genetics and astronomy resemble the spiritual world.

The second outstanding feature of Shakti language is its tendency towards minimalization: DNA is the smallest unit of life; Robot breaks down a task into the

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26 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 67.

smallest increments through a series of simple instructions; chattering is forbidden in the centre, and verbal exchanges are kept to a minimum. For this reason the computer is chosen both as an image of the soul in its between life states, and as a metaphor for communication.

In the passage DNA Communication from The Shakti Handbook, such language as "punching in the data," "encoding", "reprogramming" is evidently derived from computer science. Presumably computers are chosen, like robots, as a metaphor for communication because they represent the most objective, precise, efficient means of storing and communicating data and problem-solving.

There is a tendency in Shakti of minimalization, breaking things down to their smallest unit, of approaching goals through increments: The choice of DNA, as the smallest unit of life, to express cosmology, and the breaking down of instructions into the smallest units, in the Robot Exercise in order to make them as precise as possible.

A few of the examples from the Brief DNA language vocabulary reveal this tendency towards minimalization and efficiency. The first two show their distinguishing between religious and secular language:

Decode - put in physical universe language

Encode - put into DNA language

Flush - method to relieve over-cerebral experiencing

Drop the Mask - release the facial muscle demonstration, etc.

In The Shakti Handbook in the essay on "DNA Communication", three methods to facilitate precise communication are cited: one, to use precise, objective language; two, to state your message in increments; and three, to overstate your message, and to state it repeatedly, in alternative ways or languages. The first two methods lend themselves to a scientific vocabulary and approach. The third lends itself to the use of alternative traditional languages. This latter method is used extensively by Mr. Gold in his writings. The following list gives an indication of his sources and vocabulary and where they appear in the literature:

| <u>Source of Terms</u>           | <u>Terms</u>  | <u>Where Observed</u>                              |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Tibetan Buddhism<br>or Blavatsky | Mala, Lama,<br>Bardo  | Shakti Handbook I                                  |
| Gurdjiev                         | Vibrations, objec-<br>tive thinking,<br>IDHHB   | Shakti Handbook II                                 |
| Christianity                     | God, Gabriel,<br>Angels, Satan,<br>Father, Son,<br>Holy Ghost,<br>Atonement,<br>Transubstantia-<br>tion | The Autobiography<br>of God, Shakti<br>Handbook II |
| Islam                            | The Sufis, tekkia,<br>zawiya  | Shakti magazine,<br>The Avatar's<br>Handbook       |
| Hinduism                         | karma   |  |

In one passage outlining a philosophical idea, Gold will mingle Hindu, Christian and scientific language, or one might find the same idea recurring throughout the literature under different traditional guises. This use of language could be interpreted to imply two underlying beliefs in Shakti. First that religious experience is essentially the same whatever cultural or historical context it appears in. Secondly, that religious experience is quite separate from the expression of it. Since religious experience is by its very nature ineffable, almost any vocabulary will do. However Shakti is on one hand concerned with articulating a precise language to express their religious views, while on the other hand believing that it is impossible to truly communicate a multi-level, transcendent experience in words. In this way they are different from Scientology which also creates its own language and uses a scientific vocabulary, but uses the same language. As Scientology language becomes more established and widely used, it becomes more identified with the truth. Harriet Whitehead describes the difference between the attitude to language by occult groups (Shakti fits into this context here) and Scientology:

One feature that is common in other metaphysical and occult doctrines, but notably absent in Scientology is, in fact, the emphasis upon

"hiddenness". Judah points out that metaphysicians pay a good deal of attention to the symbolic value of words and images. They "have a belief in an inner meaning of words beyond their dictionary definitions-- a meaning that cannot be discovered empirically from the standpoint of usage or etymology, but that is revealed intuitively." (Judah 1968:17). To the Scientologist, on the other hand, nothing is really hidden; it's all crystal clear once you understand the principle of the thing. Symbolism is of very little interest to them. ... Any student caught entertaining the impression that a word means something beyond its agreed-upon usages is quickly disabused of this notion. In this respect Scientology may be the only "Occult" philosophy that underlies the general occult fantasy: that intuitive and rational knowledge are not, fundamentally, inconsistent.<sup>27</sup>

To conclude, Shakti's use of language reflects the group's subordination of intellectual to experiential knowledge. Like many new religious movements, Shakti is less concerned with articulating a philosophy or expressing a belief, than in inducing religious experiences through its techniques. Their anthropology implies that religious experience occurs on different levels; , physiological, emotional and intellectual, and spiritual; therefore a verbal intellectual vehicle would not be adequate to express a complex multi-levelled experience. Thus the group uses language in a self-consciously metaphorical way. They change vocabulary, much as they change roles, to widen the distinction between inner and outer forms, in this case

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27 H. Whitehead, "Reasonably Fantastic," Religious Movements in Contemporary America, Zaretsky and Leone, p. 585.



the underlying experience and its verbal mode of expression. Again by using language that is wildly inappropriate-- like calling the soul a grapefruit -- they shock the reader into questioning the meaning behind the word. From this it may be seen that their use of language is totally consistent with their central philosophy and methodology. For example, even their language is an expression of their belief in reincarnation. Their alternative use of Hindu, Christian, or Tibetan traditional language to express the same idea or experience is like a continuous reincarnation of that idea or experience into different "bodies" -- or words.

CHART OF SHAKTI TECHNIQUES

| Name                      | Description   | Purpose   | Possible Origins              |
|---------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| Feelor Training<br>@      | -The use of bio-feedback in mystical exercises. The student is hooked up to a skin galvanizer, E-motor, or ECG and given tasks to perform questions to answer.  | To learn to control the nervous system through an objective method of trial & error. To be able to perform tasks, answer questions without subjective emotive reaction.   | Scientology                   |
| Bio Cyp Theatre<br>@<br># | -The adept is hooked up to a whole range of bio-cybernetic equipment which in turn controls audio-visual equipment (moog, lights, etc.) and puts on a one-man sound & light show simply by controlling his nervous system (sweat, heat, blood, brain waves, etc.) | To create and share one's own reality or "universe" through an exercise of the will.  | Bio-feedback                  |
| White Room Training<br>*  | -This is intellectual & communication work in a neutral environment--reading aloud, repeating or paraphrasing material, interpreting, carrying out highly abstract commands, drawing geometrical diagrams.  | To give the soul "Being" tasks to do in an environment which discourages, represses Ego or Personality, thus giving "Being" a chance to grow, find it-self. To train students to absorb and transmit info. efficiently without subjective distortion of material. | Tibetan Buddhism, Scientology |

| Name               | Description  | Purpose  | Possible Origins                      |
|--------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Mala Training<br>@ | -Mala & Lama, or Instructor & Student, are isolated in separate rooms of the starship or hermitage, linked via intercom and video. The converse, Lama answers questions, performs tasks. Communication is cut off slowly, one way. Eventually, Lama is left alone in white, bare room. | For student to internalize his instructor, to be his own authority. To discover self, apart from senses, relationships. To practice telepathy. | Astronaut training or science fiction |
| Movements<br>*     | -A series of nine movements are performed in a circle or mirror fashion, facing a partner. They are slow, dance-like balancing exercises. The simultaneity of the group is emphasized.   | To train, gain control over the physical centre, and the nervous system.   | Sufi dances, Gurdjieff exercises      |
| Meditations<br>*   | -Besides traditional meditation practices, this involves listening to sounds in the room, to music, examining an object, washing dishes, scrubbing floors.   |  | Hinduism, Gurdjieff                   |

| Name   | Description  | Purpose  | Possible Origins           |
|--|--|--|----------------------------|
| Daysnap<br>*<br>#  | -The student draws a role or personality from a hat and wears it for a specified amount of time. After some practice, the game is extended outside the centre (e.g. in a restaurant). A guide or group accompany the actor to prevent his over-identification with the role, and to keep him out of trouble. | To be able to perform any role efficiently without identification. To discover what is beyond the role.  | Gurdjieff,<br>Gestalt      |
| Robot<br>*   | -The student plays a robot. The operator communicates in stylized format - "Are you receiving me?", and gives commands in increments. Malfunctions in the robot are handled by repeating a command or starting at the beginning of the communication.  | To be able to accept authority. To carry out orders exactly as dictated. To learn to communicate efficiently, patiently, precisely, without emotive overtones. | Scientology                |
| Theatre games,<br>role playing,<br>gestalt exercises<br>*<br>@ | -There are countless exercises under this category. Miming stories or animals, sandbox games, behaving like two-year olds. Imitating a movement in mirror fashion, halting in the middle of an action at the snap of a finger and snap! resume the action.   | Learning to play, to exercise the imagination.   | Theatre,<br>Dance, Gestalt |

| Name                                    | Description   | Purpose   |               |
|---|---|---|---------------|
| Events                                  | <p>-These are largely improvised or initiated by the Core students as one-time shots. It includes the 7 A.M. cocktail party, breakfast at the Ritz in formal dress, the Beer Bash, public demonstrations of the movements, parading in the street as monks and nuns, the 2nd Council of Nicaea.</p> | <p>To force the student to apply the techniques acquired in the centre to outside environments.</p> | Art, Gurdjiev |
| The Organisation as an Event            | <p>-This category I have invented to include the events that change and affect the very structure of the organisation itself. The cycle of Austerity/Orgy/Turnoff is a common one, used to end one phase of the movement, and start up a new one.</p>   | <p>To keep the organisation alive, alert; to discourage dependency or habit-forming.</p>            | Gurdjiev, Art |
| *                                       |   |   |               |
| e                                       |   |   |               |
| Sources of information:                 |   |   |               |
| * experiences of researcher             |   |   |               |
| e interviews or informants (incl. Bill) |   |   |               |
| # Shakti Literature                     |   |   |               |

## CHAPTER V

THE TECHNIQUESA. The Range of Techniques

Mr. Gold appears to be a true connoisseur and devoted collector of religious techniques. He is widely eclectic, borrowing from major religious traditions east and west, and inventive, improvising his own techniques as the occasion requires. He is avantgarde, adapting the very latest techniques from the frontiers of science to a religious context. When I attended the weekend workshop in August Mr. Gold introduced us to his large repertoire of techniques, with the air of a conjuror pulling marvels out of his hat. They ranged from sufi dancing, to live readings, to children's games. The function of the techniques that weekend seemed to be to animate the group, to put them through cycles of boredom, laughter, excitement, rest, exercise. Mr. Gold's attitude seemed to be fun-loving, even mischievous. When I staggered out of the lying-on-the-floor-listening-to-Tiny-Tim exercise and joined him in the kitchen complaining that I couldn't stand the music, he replied, "I don't blame you," and remarked a few minutes later, "Those poor fools are still in there listening to that racket."

It is impossible to place Shakti's collection of

techniques in any rigid categories, but I have attempted a rough grouping of them according to source and aims. The groups own system of categorizing the techniques as physical, emotional or intellectual work can only be very loosely applied since most exercises involve the use of more than one "centre".

The first grouping I could identify would be those techniques borrowed or developed from scientific sources. These tend to come from the frontiers of science, like bio-feedback training, parapsychology and psychotherapy. The Bio Cyb Theatre seems to be a combo of bio-feedback training and psychedelic light and sound shows. The Starship training resembles PSI testing with a similar use of audio-visual equipment. Daysnap bears obvious similarities to psychodrama.

The second group would be those techniques borrowed from other religious traditions as for example the sufi movements, the meditations, and Gurdjieff exercises in self-remembering.

The third group is harder to define and consists of those exercises that play upon the sacred/secular and ordinary/extraordinary shift in consciousness. This includes doing ordinary actions in extraordinary ways (washing dishes behind the back) or at extraordinary times (having a cocktail party at 7 A.M.) or performing secular

actions with sacred intent. These techniques are difficult to interpret. I would suggest the point of these exercises being that the element of the sacred lies in the consciousness, not in the actions of the participant, and that by putting the student through a series of increasingly secular and ordinary actions, they are "bringing him down" from his religious high and teaching him how to preserve it in transition to an ordinary situation. The effect of this is obviously to lessen his dependence on the techniques (and incidentally on the centre) for his "high". Another interpretation is that magic lies in the eyes of the beholder; that nothing is ordinary, only our ruts and blockages make them appear so, and when these are cleared away or the soul is snapped out of them by sacred techniques, a special act, can one see the magic, the sacred, the extraordinary surrounding one in the ordinary world.

The fourth group of techniques are those events which serve to change the very structure of the organisation. This includes the Turn offs, Nazi Camp, etc. These planned events affect the organisation in various ways. They serve to close it down, to transplant it, to herald a new course, or to reintegrate the members into mainstream society.



These last two categories raise the question what can be regarded as a religious technique and what an ordinary event or accident? It appears that these cannot be differentiated by the outward form of the act. In Shakti the spiritual practices or exercises are defined by the consciousness and intention of the person performing the act. The parallels with Duchamp's toilet bowl and John Cage's music are obvious. The result is that any action could be considered a religious one.

B. The Effects of the Techniques on the Participants

The effect varied, of course, with the technique and with the student. The White Room Work, alternatively known as Intellectual Work, seems to have bored everyone. Lenore described it as "cold, constipated", Barry said he was "bored silly by these readings. It was low-level intellectual stuff and it gave me nothing." Someone would fall asleep, newcomers would walk out in most of the sessions.

The Movements elicited the most positive responses from students. Public demonstrations attracted more students than other proslytising methods. Personally, I experienced a definite "high" after doing the movements. After a public performance of the Movements, Jan reports a

sensation of "Flying. I walked down the street floating about ten feet off the ground." Lenore said she became addicted to the movements on first learning them, because they gave her such a high.

The meditations induced the same states of consciousness they do in other well-known groups (T.M., yoga, Zen) that have been extensively documented, except that the unconventional forms in which they were presented were a bit off-putting. For example the floor-mopping meditation aroused unpleasant childhood memories in Jan, and Pam reports an impulse to scream during the sound meditation. To my mind, the most important effect of the meditations is they made me notice the quality and the patterns of my thoughts. I have included some of my experiences of this.<sup>28</sup>

Daysnap was fun. There was much clowning, laughter, inspired moments of acting and improvisation. I noticed this activity was highly social, bringing members of the group closer together. Below is a student's reactions to Daysnap.

#### Daysnap

The rules of the game Daysnap is to take a personality other than your own and wear it for a specified length of time, walking, talking, and acting in accordance with that personality. I played this game 6 hours a day

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28 See Appendix, p.172

for 3 days. One day I was suffering and martyred, the next aggressive and gross, then condescending. I wore the appropriate facial masks, contorted about the eye brows and lips. The more subtly I wore these personalities the more convincing they were. I noticed distinct changes in the attitudes of others towards me, and tried to analyze what personalities they were wearing. When the game was over and it came time to slip back into my old personality I found it bland, confused compared to the Daysnap ones. My job, relationships, interests all felt like games that no longer quite belonged to me. I kept watching myself acting out roles for other peoples' benefit, or out of habit and would find it boring, uncomfortable, silly.

To conclude, the techniques are geared towards different effects. Some, like the movements and meditations induce religious feeling and mystical states of consciousness, other offer intellectual and communications training, like Robot and White Room Work. Daysnap and other theatre games produce an emotional "high". In other words, some are more mystically oriented and some emotionally oriented and other psycho-therapeutically oriented. In general participants gained an awareness of problems in communication, in concentration, in work. If nothing else, they learned how to learn.

### C. Techniques/Beliefs-Relationships

How do the techniques reflect the beliefs, and in what way could they be said to realize them?

In Shakti, the techniques are considered more important than the beliefs. This is a general characteristic of new religious movements. The credo and exegesis are flexible and non-explicit, whereas a first-hand experience of the divine is emphasized.

Shakti is presented as a "school" offering various courses and training programs, and its followers are usually attracted by the techniques initially, not the theology. Interviews with Barry and Lenore confirm this. There is a tendency among the new religious movements to believe in a spiritual reality without considering it important to determine the nature of God. Everyone is his own theologian and tolerant of the models of others. In Shakti there is a strong conviction that you can't understand the idea until you have had the experience on which it is based. Therefore there is no point in trying to grasp a theological model intellectually.

However the techniques are in fact based on the ideas, or at least bear some relation to them. The exercises fall loosely under the categories of intellectual, emotional, or physical work, thereby following the Gurdjievan model of harmonizing the three centres of man. The communication exercises are aimed at teaching the GCMP to store information in its simplest form in order to preserve the memory through the cycles of reincarnation. In fact,

all the techniques, and even the teaching methods, reflect the underlying belief system. However the relationship between belief and practice was never made explicit in the group. The Shakti instructors would never explain the point of an exercise, the aim of a technique, except in vague terms. If one inquired, the reply was, "Try it and you might find out."

#### D. Teaching Methods

The teaching methods reflect their views on experiential knowledge. In my interview with Bill, when asked the purpose of the exercises, he replied, "People benefit from just doing them. If a student requires a reason, al-Washi will go ahead and give him one so he'll do it, like giving a donkey a carrot to make him move, but the real reason he'll only find out by doing it." Another reason for not providing a rationale, is that the student will be more open, alert, involved in the exercise if he doesn't know what it is for. One of the central ideas in Gold's method is to keep the student disoriented. Only when he is shocked out of his rut, his preconditioned patterns, is he open to learning. This is a very important thesis in Shakti, and goes a long way towards explaining the bizarre, humorous guise of much of their teaching.

This relates to their anthropology, how Personality and Being function. In order for Being to benefit from the exercises, they must provide an environment in which Personality won't interfere. They do this by suppressing Personality, (White Room conditions, forgetting personal history, avoiding emotive facial gestures, objective language, etc.) or by keeping Personality in a state of shock (happenings, humour, obscenity, incongruous, unexpected trappings for religious material) thus the Being will respond, while the Personality won't know what to make of it.

Not only was there no rationale offered for the exercises, there was no response to the student's performance of them. Perhaps they feared approval would stimulate Personality, or perhaps there were no right answers. Lenore's account of finding lollipops in the Be-your-own-guru game <sup>29</sup> indicates their concern for developing initiative and self motivation.

A major feature of the teaching methods in Shakti was their objective, minimal use of verbal language. The movements were taught mainly by demonstration and imitation. An entire slow, complex, 30-second motion would be attempted by the beginner. They refused to teach the movement in separate stages. Absolute silence was maintained throughout the movement classes.

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<sup>29</sup> See above, p. 11.

The readings were similar, in that ideas were taught by imitation, and repetition, and the whole message would be read out, before paraphrasing or analysis was permitted. In the Meditations the written instructions were read aloud without additional explanation. The purpose of the Robot exercise, as I see it, is to teach the student to break his message down into the smallest, simplest increments he can, and to avoid clouding the message by emotive reactions or overtones. There is a strong scientific flavour in this approach. The techniques were treated as experiments with unforeseen, unproven results. The laboratory must be sterile, alien factors kept out. The fact that the result or proof would be in the human consciousness, a subjective realm, does not deter them from using objective methods. In a sense they are concerned with proving the objective reality of subjective states of consciousness, a realistic aim in the fields of Bio-feedback and Parapsychology. It could be argued that they have borrowed the methods of these fields and applied them to the whole range of mystical techniques.

Another outstanding feature of their teaching methods is that students learn in a group, as a group. The movements require great awareness of the group, in order that everyone performs identical and simultaneous motions. The Robot exercise requires sensitive teamwork, as does

Daysnap, Mala training, etc. Cooperative, not competitive learning is necessary here. Therefore, an important aspect of the techniques is that they train the student in group dynamics -- how to function in, respond to a group. Thus the techniques provide a socializing function. The group Shakti benefits from this, if members can work together efficiently, and so do the individuals who learn new ways to handle their families, jobs. I found the Robot exercise very helpful as a teacher's training course.

E. Summary

The outstanding features of Shakti techniques are their wide range, their improvisational experimental nature, and the integration of ordinary activities as a religious technique. There are several statements implicit in these features. One is that the techniques are aimed at teaching initiative and independence. The student is expected to start collecting and making up his own techniques and is introduced to a wide range of them so that he can pick and choose those that suit him. The next point is that by gradually introducing the student to techniques that have a practical usefulness in the everyday world, they are inclining him towards feeling that involvement in the world can be a valid religious experience.



The end result of these two factors; encouraging initiative and practical socially-relevant work, is to discourage dependency on the centre or retreating from the world and push the student out to reintegrate into society bringing with him a sacred perspective and the ability to apply what he has learned to the everyday world, in a creative fashion. Humdrum, menial jobs acquire a new meaning and glamour if one approaches them as a secret sufi playing a role.

## CHAPTER IV

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHANGE IN SHAKTI

If asked to identify the one most outstanding feature of Shakti, I would reply "change". It is this very feature that makes it so unlike any other religious group I have been in contact with or known about.

Examples of change are: the group alters its name on an average of every nine months. Even their leader's name has gone from "The Beast" through a series of transmutations, to "Mother". The location of the group changes; and so do their techniques and practices. Their language and literature change; even their aims appear to change in response to external situations. Finally, as in all movements, the membership fluctuates.

What is left that is constant? The group leader is the same and his closest disciples, although they seem to float away periodically, but keep returning. Certain pet techniques, like the movements, keep recurring. Certain beliefs -- in reincarnation, in spiritual evolution, seem to underly the whole range of language and practice. Shakti's style, its atmosphere a mingling of fantastic, humorous, outrageous, experimental, avantgarde elements, is constant. Finally, the element of change is constant.

What is behind this apparent chaos? The answer is a philosophy which plans a built-in obsolescence to its external movement; a methodology which uses shock and change as a teaching device. That such instability is self-conscious and deliberate suggests that transience or process orientation would perhaps be a more accurate appellation of this phenomenon.

Two key concepts underly it: role playing and shock. Role playing is best understood in context of the game of Daysnap<sup>30</sup>. In this game or technique students roll a die to which numbers are assigned different personalities, such as "Helpful Herbie, Grossout Gertrude". On choosing a role by this haphazard means the student must then act it out -- often in a situation external to the centre, a restaurant or shop. The purpose seems to be able to take on as many different roles as required, without identifying with them, so that one's everyday role is seen afresh with a new objectivity, and the essential self, or soul is differentiated from the role or personality it is wearing. Once this game is understood it is possible to conceive of the Shakti movement as playing Daysnap -- assuming different roles or external forms; its organisations. These are to be discarded when they no longer suit

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<sup>30</sup> See Appendix, p. 162

Shakti's purpose. Perhaps another factor which inclines them not to identify with or to view with detachment the outer shell of the organisation, is the concept that institutions become dead once established. In this respect Shakti offers a dramatic contrast to scientology, which it resembles closely in other ways. Hubbard's zealous, "fascistic" as it is often termed, concern for the health and prosperity of his external "Organisation", for preserving orthodoxy of belief and method is so far from Gold's sometimes hostile indifference to his following; "Either wake up or don't, remember yourself or don't, its all one to me -- What are you idiots doing in my living room?"<sup>31</sup>, and the elusive, off-putting behaviour of the group towards potential converts.

The concept, or rather method of shock, is based on the idea that people are programmed like computers to think and behave in preconditioned patterns, and only by ministering sudden shocks can they be jolted out of their ruts and able to think for themselves, to improvise, to change their patterns. This concept goes a long way to explaining the most baffling instance of change -- their act of closing down their organisations and of sending away their students. These carefully planned, highly

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31 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 86.

ritualized "Turn Offs" can be interpreted as the final lesson of the course. One of the "ruts" the group is attacking is of course preconditioned ideas of what constitutes a religious movement and a spiritual master. Thus potential students show up at a religious meeting to find-- an art class, a Nazi concentration camp, a motorcycle gang, breakfast at the Ritz. Similarly when Gold made his first appearance in Montreal as Babaji al-Washi, the sufi master, he began his lecture in an East Indian accent, talking of Karma, Brahma, etc., suddenly switched to an imitation of a midwestern farmer humping his mule, and ended up as Gurdjieff addressing the Moskovites in 1920. I interpreted this as a shock, and as a warning against spiritual "hype" and finally as a raising of the question, "How do spiritual gifts, truths, manifest themselves in the world, and how does one recognize or judge them?"

What effect does the group's instability have on its students? Obviously a lot of potential converts are puzzled, turned off, and lost, leaving only the really curious, the patient and serious ones. Once the students are trained, they are often thrown out of the movement, the centre disappears, the name is changed and how does that effect them? One effect is that they are forced to apply what they have learned in the movement outside the movement.

One criticism of therapy groups<sup>32</sup> is the methods work so long as the patient remains within the confines of the group, then he goes home and beats his wife again. Therefore stranding students can be seen as a way to make them change themselves, change society and not become a comfortable member of a clique. Individuals are taught how to create and destroy an institution in a short space of time which perhaps teaches them how to cope with society's institutions more effectively. To sum up, the effect of this instability is to teach independence and initiative. Gold issued the command, "Be your own guru" in February 1974.

Shakti doesn't pretend that its members are life-long, permanent fixtures of the organisation. Nor does it expect the whole world to eventually turn into one big Shakti centre. In this way it is unlike most other new religious movements. When I was staying at a yoga ashram I remarked that many of the members had been involved in other movements, Zen, Kirpal Singh, T.M., and yet gave the fierce impression they were dedicated to a lifetime of yoga. Shakti on the other hand is unabashedly eclectic, borrowing language and techniques from all sources and paying homage to parallel movements, and declines to appeal to a tradition or heritage, or unbroken line of masters to justify its

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32 This was brought up by Bill in one of the meetings giving Primal Therapy as an example.

authority. I see this as an essentially West Coast attribute -- no tradition or culture, or reverence for it -- all folk art, improvisation, creativity, eclecticism, without "roots". Shakti acknowledges the existence of a spiritual movement in North America, unlike many groups who assume all members to be totally new to these concepts, and pretend to be the only spiritual group in the country. The Avatar's Handbook is speaking to an audience who has been around the new religious movements circuit, the jaded guru seeker, spiritual groupie and connoisseur of mystical techniques. It is saying, "Take what you like from all these groups, reorganize it to suit yourself." Shakti could therefore be described as a religious organisation without an ego.

However behind this changing façade, openness, eclecticism, is an underlying philosophy that is most precise and unique, but is usually implied rather than defined. For example under the role playing practices lies a gnostic dualistic philosophy; by changing the organisational "body" of the movement, they are trying to distinguish it from spirit. By playing with façades, dressing up, amusing different personalities they are affirming the illusive ephemeral nature of body, and the reality and constancy of spirit. Alternatively, behind the "shock" therapy

there is the intention of inducing a spiritual awakening and evolution. However, the most relevant part of their philosophy in respect to change is their views on death.

Mr. Gold began a lecture in Vancouver with the following question, "What is Man's greatest fear?" The majority of his audience replied, "Death". He then made a statement to the effect that no, man was most afraid of life, because in fact we never die, we live forever, and the responsibility that situation implies -- the decision to consciously direct one's own eternal destiny -- is utterly terrifying to Man. To my mind this is the most revealing single statement to do with Shakti I have heard and it gave me an insight into their modus operandi.

This philosophy contains an acceptance of death as part of the process of spiritual evolution, not to be feared but rather planned and made use of as a step in the conscious directing of the soul's destiny. If this philosophy is applied to the organisation, the closing down or "death" of Shakti is not to be feared or avoided. The "spirit" of the movement is confident of immortality, so they don't feel the pressures most organisations feel -- the need to expand, to be bigger and better, the need to stabilize, routinize, establish itself as a permanent fixture in society. This philosophy explains the singular



absence of certain neuroses I observed in Yoga and Jesus groups, the fear of losing converts, the fear of failure in having to close down a centre, the competitive, even paranoid attitude to other groups, a repressive attitude to initiative or new ideas on the part of members other than the master and his close disciples. Shakti does not identify with its organisational body as do most new religious movements.

Shakti shares certain aspects of the back to Nature trend of the hippie movement. Very generally I would describe this movement as including: the natural foods movement, natural childbirth, a return to organic materials in dress and architecture, an anti-consumer, anti-technology attitude. This movement implies an acceptance of the organic, of death and decay as an integral part of life. Just as paper bags & clothes are recycled in natural food shops, so are ancient second hand religious techniques recycled in Shakti. Like natural food, Shakti is lacking in the artificial preservation of routinisation, the zeal for conversion, expansion and orthodoxy.

A comparison with the fate of The Whole Earth Catalogue can be made here. A highly successful, popular collection of do-it-yourself crafts and techniques, the author decided to issue a last edition and then close it

down, freeing those involved in working on it to "do their own thing". He avoided the temptation towards establishment and expansion. In the same way Shakti avoids the entrepreneurial-imperialistic tendency of American organisations which enslaves its members by creating dependencies and stifles the charisma of its leaders by routinisation.

To confirm the importance of this philosophy in Shakti, I only have to remind the reader that presently Bill has left Shakti to open a natural foods Co-op, Mrs. Gold is teaching courses on natural childbirth, and Mr. Gold has just written The American Book of the Dead, a manual instructing Americans in the correct way to die. These are the very latest developments in Shakti.

CONCLUSION

In this conclusion I intend to look at Shakti in relation to the other new religious movements in North America. In order to do this I will demonstrate the similarity and parallels between Shakti and certain other groups, particularly Scientology. Next I will examine how Shakti sees itself in relation to other groups, referring to the report of the Second Council of Nicaea for information on this point. Then I will go on to explore the theories of R.S. Ellwood and J. Needleman in regard to the new religious movements to see how far they apply to Shakti. This will lead to a discussion of in which ways Shakti can be said to be more contemporary, scientific, and socially relevant than the new Hindu, Buddhist and Jesus groups in North America.

The movements which bear the closest similarity to Shakti are, in my estimation, the Gurdjieff groups, Arica, and Scientology. Shakti and Arica share certain features in their history. Oscar Ichazo "came out" in a psychotherapy workshop at the Esalen Institute, much as Gold came out at the Cowachin Gestalt workshop. They both perhaps represent a sacralisation of psychotherapy. Arica is fully as eclectic, offering a wide range of techniques, as a practical scientific approach to spiritual consciousness.

The organisation too has some of the same openness, independence of its members, as Shakti.

However there is no evidence of a historical connection between Arica and Shakti. They appear to be two separate but parallel phenomena, spontaneously growing out of the same basic situation; the need felt by a small selection of contemporary Americans to find a scientific experiential multi-disciplined way to develop what they regard as spiritual abilities and power.

That Shakti borrows ideas from Gurdjieff is indisputable, particularly the concepts of the three centres of Man and objective thinking. These are both presented in P.D. Ouspensky's In Search of the Miraculous<sup>33</sup>. Moreover Gurdjieff and Gold belong to the same school of guru, what Ellwood describes as "The Western and modern individual of the magus type"<sup>34</sup>. They are both humourous, enigmatic, unpredictable. Gold often refers to Gurdjieff with respect in his writing but makes disparaging remarks about the Gurdjieff Foundation, claiming Shakti is a truer vessel of the spirit of Gurdjieff<sup>35</sup>. Whether he was actually involved

33 P.D. Ouspensky, In Search of the Miraculous. p. 287.

34 R.S. Ellwood, Spiritual Groups. p. 158.

35 Gold, The Avatar's Handbook, p. 86.

at one time in a Gurdjiev group or not, I don't know. However it is interesting that the earliest name I have traced for Gold's organisation is The Institute of the Harmonious Human Being.

Judging from George Malko's description in his book Scientology, the Now Religion, Scientology techniques are very close to those practised in Shakti<sup>36</sup>. The introductory communications course of Scientology is made up of five exercises:

Confrontation  
Bull-baiting  
Dear Alice  
Termination  
Duplication

Below is a description of these and the corresponding Shakti exercises.

Scientology

Confrontation: two students sit facing each other, hands on knees for an hour without moving.

Shakti

Meditation: students sit in a circle on cushions facing each other for an hour unmoving. Keep everyone in line of vision without looking directly.

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36 G. Malko, Scientology, the Now Religion. Delacarte Press, New York. 1971. p. 123.

Scientology

Bull-baiting: one student "baits" his partner by insulting, attacking him, exposing his weaknesses.

Dear Alice: student reads aloud from a book "owning" each phrase. Student paraphrases a page from the book.

Termination: one student "owns" a phrase. His partner receives it, acknowledges communication with a thank-you. Emphasis on cycle of communication and its completion.

Duplication: students repeats his partner's verbal utterance or duplicates a gesture or action over and over again until it is identical and exact.

Shakti

Turn-off: students are told by Guru or Core leader that they should leave and not come back, they are stupid, lazy, unimaginative, etc.

Intellectual Work: students take turns reading aloud Shakti material, repeating a page if an error is made. They paraphrase a page.

Robot: one student gives instructions in simple increments. "Robot" student carries them out, occasional malfunctions. Then cycle of communication starts all over again with "are you receiving me?"

Mime and Mirror Exercises: two students stand facing each other. One leads and his partner mirrors his gestures. Two students sit on knees facing each other. At a snap of the leader's fingers, they rise simultaneously and say "I I I" and sit. This is repeated with "you you you", and "God God God".

These exercises are concerned with the dynamics of communication; a clear objective delivery of the message, the ability to remember the message or duplicate it exactly, the ability to acknowledge a communication, and end it.

Both groups aim to overcome attachment to the ego, and to the emotions. Clarity in communication requires the ability to avoid subjective interpretation or delivery of message.

However after the communications course, Scientology techniques diverge from Shakti. Dianetics is concerned with the treatment of engrams<sup>37</sup> whereas in Shakti personal history is dispensed with, ignored, suppressed. Engrams, personal problems are seen as belonging to Personality, the Ego and can therefore never be solved because it is the nature of Ego to perpetuate problems. By working directly with Being and its spiritual problems are these lesser considerations resolved. They shrink in importance and disappear.

The ideas and language of the two groups also bear similarities. Aside from the general religious views common to most new or Eastern religions, i.e. belief in "soul (Thetan and being)", in reincarnation, in spiritual progress and enlightenment, they both belong to that genre of new

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37 Engrams are unpleasant memories in the unconscious, caused by traumatic moments in life or past lives.

religions that Ellwood describes in Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America<sup>38</sup>. Their goal is knowledge, power, clarity, self-determination, control over their environment. Scientology is defined as "knowing how to know" and Shakti sees knowledge as the first step towards self-realization. Shakti is defined by the group as "the state of Being in which the physical Universe is in a condition of No Interference with any Intent of the Being who is operating in that Universe." Scientology's "operating thetan, At Cause over matter, energy, space and time in the physical total sense" sounds very much like Shakti's "Being with the abilities of Being." The Scientologists' state of "At Cause" is virtually identical to the state of "Shakti", judging from the groups' respective definitions.

Both groups draw upon the techniques and language of science and psychology. They employ biofeedback for various purposes: divination, measuring states of consciousness, detecting truth, lies and emotion. They incorporate the discoveries and theories of science into their cosmologies: genetics, racial memory or the collective unconscious, modern astronomy and space travel. They create their own vocabulary, drawing heavily upon the language of science. In both groups the mind is seen as a computer which in

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38 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 157.



Scientology is "implanted and operating" and in Shakti "programmed and functioning". The mind is seen as a perfect computer that has been programmed in a haphazard, inefficient way. Therefore both groups intend to reprogram it. Scientology starts by erasing all the engrams, and Shakti by first feeding it with the knowledge that it is a computer-computer self-consciousness as it were, and then teaching it to program itself so it will be fit to handle higher data than mere survival oriented, fearful data, which in the end turns out to be something very like engrams.<sup>39</sup>

A strong spirit/flesh dichotomy is found in both groups. "This piece of meat"<sup>41</sup> and "the animal"<sup>40</sup> have only an accidental inconvenient relationship with the spirit who is "implanted"<sup>41</sup> and "unfolds"<sup>40</sup>, in a body chosen at random in each incarnation.

Shakti bears other affinities to Scientology. They both have a science fiction background. Hubbard was a short story writer for Astounding Science Fiction and E.J. Gold's father, A.L. Gold was the editor of Galaxy magazine. There may actually be a historical connection between the two men

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39 See above, p. 65.

40 Gold, The Shakti Handbook, p. 5.

41 Malko, Scientology, p. 101.

if one is to believe Mr. Gold's story of the circle of Sufi sci-fi writers who met in the New York storage tank tropical forest<sup>42</sup>. Hubbard was one of the names he dropped as belonging to his father's group.

George Malko says of Scientology, "If I were to call L. Ron Hubbard eclectic, it would be a mild understatement," and "a philosophy which combined, with typically billowing grandeur, the highest aspirations of pure Eastern thinking, and the meanest invention of the best science fiction bravado."<sup>43</sup> Certainly the same could be said for E.J. Gold and Shakti. The Eastern thinking would include the doctrine of reincarnation and the religious goal of freeing the soul from the cycle of birth and death. Both groups take a scientific, meaning an objective, heuristic approach to this goal. Their use of biofeedback is a working example of this. Science becomes science fiction when it is used as a metaphor for religious ideas, and both groups use the language of genetics and of space travel.

Scientology grew out of Dianetics, a psychological therapeutic, self-improvement technique. It gradually acquired religious dimensions after being rejected by the

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42 See above, p. 6.

43 Malko, Scientology, p. 27.

scientific world, as it took on more and more of Hubbard's science fiction fantastic philosophy, giving it cosmic, literally extra-terrestrial, inter-planetary dimensions, as in its pursuit for engrams it delved beyond the pre-natal state into former incarnations. It makes use of psychological models (the analytic and reactive mind) and techniques and applies them to spiritual goals.

Shakti could be said to have grown out of Gestalt, in the sense that E.J. Gold subverted the Cowachin Gestalt workshop by converting several therapists to spiritual goals, and taking them home to Crestline where they worked on a method of using Gestalt techniques to achieve spiritual states of consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

Shakti and Scientology (and incidentally Arica) could be seen as two examples of the same phenomenon; the transcendental movement in psychology, the application of scientific objective techniques to spiritual goals. However the similarities in their techniques and ideas described above are so remarkable as to suggest a direct historical link between the two groups.<sup>45</sup> Further evidence of this appears in E.J. Gold's dedication of his Autobiography of God.

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44 See above, p. 9.

45 Hubbard was reputedly of the sci-fi writers in the Sunday meetings in the tropical forest and may have been a friend of Gold's father.

I wish to dedicate this book to good friends Id Rise Shah & Raffle LeFort & Pir Valiant Kon, who keeps the Sufi Movement moving; and to Baby Rammed Ass for his never-ending efforts to wake everybody up; and to Oscar for the Pop-Art wall; and to Rimpoche for nothing in particular, and I also would like to thank "Ron", the one for whom a squash was named -- for getting all those paranoid juvenile delinquents off the streets and into his three dimensional stucco, brick and floating steel reactive mind.

The dedication implies both an admiration for and a rejection of Scientology in the sense that Gold took the Scientology course and then left to start his own based on similar ideas. Whether Gold's familiarity to Ron's ideas comes from reading, or from actually belonging to the Scientology movement when he was young, I don't know. It is possible that Gold's group could have started as a "squirrelling-off" movement from Scientology (to use their own language).

It is interesting that Shakti resembles Scientology so closely in techniques and ideas, and yet differs from it so radically in its approach to organisation. Scientology's notoriety appears to be based on the characteristics of the "Org" itself, not on its ideas and techniques. Its Ethics, Mission, its financial prosperity, its methods of recruitment and of enforcing orthodoxy are its most antagonizing aspects. John McMaster, the world's first "clear" resigned from Scientology in 1969 because of the activity of

the Sea Org's Ethics Mission which he described in his letter of resignation as "the tyranny of form monitoring function."<sup>46</sup>

E.J. Gold's emphasis on keeping his organisation flexible, of encouraging initiative and independence in his disciples, on treating the external organisation of the movement like a living, travelling theatre whose façade and scenery must be changed for each new act, shows his determination to avoid the rigidity, departmentalization and complacency that tend to grow once a movement becomes an institution.

If in fact Gold's own group did originate as a "squirrelling-off" movement from Scientology, it seems that it kept the techniques and ideas of Scientology but elaborated on them further to make them more interesting, complex, fanciful and fun, and rejected the more unpleasant fascistic tendencies of the Org by resisting the entrepreneurial-imperialistic trends described in Chapter VI, and setting up a series of movements with farcical façades and built-in obsolescence.

Having established the similarities between Shakti, Arica, Gurdjieff groups, and Scientology the question arises as to what political relationship, if any,

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<sup>46</sup> Malko, Scientology, p. 153.

exists between these parallel groups? The December 1973 report of the Second Council of Nicaea offers an excellent clue to this question. This report is described in Chapter I, but to reiterate, it was an emergency meeting called by Gold in Crestline of a certain cross section of spiritual leaders including Ichazo, Ramdass, Castaneda, Rimpoche, Idres Shah, Gurdjiev leaders and Sufi masters.

What is striking about this assembly? First there is a notable absence of Christian, Buddhist and Hindu leaders (with the exception of Ramdass). It appears to represent all the miscellaneous groups outside the large, better known Eastern and Jesus movements. What do these movements, Gurdjiev, Arica, Tibetan Buddhism, Shamanism, and Sufism have in common?

According to the report, these groups share a belief in the coming of the Dark Age, which they see in terms of a technological, social and ecological crisis. They share a common solution; to encourage social involvement and discourage individualistic mystical aims; to set up training programs in survival techniques. They also talked of merging and going underground, and abandoning recruitment and self-realization programs, in short, a kind of retrenchment. To sum up the report reveals a shared concern for the major problems faced by the modern

world, and that concern appears to extend beyond the boundaries of the individual organisations. An ecumenical movement between new religious movements is suggested here, and a willingness to sacrifice the prosperity of the external organisation (expansion and permanency policies) to the need for social relevance.

The intricacies of the personal relationships between these leaders is of course not known to me. It must be taken into consideration that this event might be a myth invented for its shock effect on the students. Even if this is the case, Mr. Gold by creating such a myth evidently feels some connection and identification with these leaders in aims, methodology, and style. Shakti claims to own an 8-hour tape of the Council, but I have been unable to verify its existence.

A useful context for these groups might be found in a term used frequently in Shakti, "fourth-way schools". This is borrowed from Gurdjieff and means a religion in which physical, emotional and intellectual works balanced and whose aims are carried out by involvement in the world, rather than through retreat from it. The other 3 schools are: the way of the fakir, monk and yogi, representing physical, emotional and intellectual discipline respectively. Shakti identifies all the groups represented at the Council as "fourth-way schools", because they each offer a range of

techniques to develop different facets of the human being, and do not advocate retreat from the world and share a certain social consciousness.

To explore the connection between these groups further, it would be useful to look at the theories of Ellwood. He devotes a chapter to describing Scientology, Gurdjieff and parallel groups concluding that what they share in common is a Sadhana.<sup>47</sup>

He defines this as "a spiritual path in the sense of a concrete and specific program for the use of meditation techniques, physical activities, and ritual under the direction of a master." ... leading to ... "a radical but predictable change in the individual's mental and spiritual state." For Ellwood, Scientology and Gurdjieff groups, (and I would include Shakti and Arica) are in a special class because they represent modern Western endeavours to articulate a precise sadhana and their major concern is to initiate people into it and lead them through its convolutions. All these groups have behind them what he describes as a modern Western individual of the Magus type. He quotes M.H. Murphy Director of the Salen Institute as saying that there is a lack and a need felt in the west for a sadhana and that he considers psychoanalytic procedures and some

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47 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 29.



of the techniques emerging out of the humanistic psychology movement to be steps towards the development of a sadhana deeply rooted in the Western psyche.

Ellwood goes on to state the emphasis of the sadhana is upon a calculated individual spiritual attainment, somewhat at odds with the Christian emphasis on God's sovereign grace, and ethical obligations towards one's neighbours. The sadhana might appear selfish to a Christian. However the spiritual attainment of the sadhana is quite different from a Christian union with God or a Hindu samadhi -- freedom from illusion and the road of birth and death. The goal is knowledge, clarity of vision, psychic powers.

In what sense do these groups assemble together at the Second Council of Nicaea represent a sadhana? All offer courses mapped out from beginner to advanced levels, designed to develop spiritual abilities. Certainly these could be described as "a concrete, a specific program for the use of meditation techniques, physical activities, and ritual under the direction of a master," in Ellwood's words.

H. Murphy's suggestion that recent psycho-analytic techniques are the first steps in the formation of a "sadhana deeply rooted in the Western psyche", throws an interesting light on use of these techniques in Shakti. If in fact Shakti is responding to a need in the West for a

sadhana, specifically suited to contemporary urban culture, what could be more natural than to commandeer the recent techniques in exploring, training, and healing the mind, and incorporating them as one stage into a spiritual training program?

The articulation of a Western sadhana, as a process, could also explain the eclecticism of Shakti. If in fact no tradition of a spiritual apprenticeship or school exists for the development of psychic powers, (according to Castaneda, it does exist in North American shamanism) it makes sense for Shakti to simply collect all the techniques it can from a myriad of sources, and experiment in arranging them in different combinations and sequences to construct a viable, effective spiritual training program.

To what extent can the aims of these groups be said to be those of a sadhana? Certainly the Shakti aim, to develop abilities of Being and the Scientologist's goal, "to be At Cause over matter, energy, space", are close to what Ellwood describes as "The Shaman's goal: crystal, lucid vision, mobility on all levels of being, power and invincibility."

What is unique, or particularly Western about these aims? I can quote two statements that explain these aims in a striking way. The first is a quotation from a Shakti poster, "In Shakti the mystical experience is the

first step." The second is a passage from the writings of Adytum, a group described by Ellwood in his chapter on sadhana-based groups:

I achieved samadhi at my first formal meditation. That which Eastern Swamis and Gurus yearn for through a life time of disciplines. That which Eastern Occultism considers the GOAL! But I knew better! I knew that this was just a beginning. I knew that Cosmic Consciousness could even be a trap. An invitation to rest in the Ultimate had been attained. I therefore BEGAN my researches into Consciousness at the point where others have mistakenly thought they had achieved the final liberation.

I was out to discover WHY evolution existed with all its pain, separateness, etc. I was out to discover how individualism occurred and what was its destiny. I was out to prove or disprove reincarnation, personal survival, etc.

Now that I knew GOD IS, I had Eternity in which to research the rest of The Mysteries.

Ann Davies  
"My Mystical Universe" 48.  
(Pyramid Cap)

What I find striking about these statements is their scientific approach. Not only is the mystical experience induced by scientific means (conscious control over the nervous system, techniques proven by empirical testing) but once the experience is attained, the scientific spirit, in the sense of the questioning, intellectual, logical part of the mind, reasserts itself and wishes to continue its

quest, not content to rest in union with God, the Universe, freedom from reincarnation, etc. The dissolution of mind, of separate identity found in the mystical experience is not accepted, and a reaffirmation of individuality occurs. The uniquely Western scientific lust for research, for "proof" triumphs over the unitive experience, whether it be devotional, pan-en-henic, or monistic. Moreover, this response to the mystical experience strikes me as uniquely Western. The Buddhist horror of pain and suffering is often labelled "pessimistic" and the Hindu belief in the illusory nature of the phenomenal world elicits the criticism of "passivity". The Buddhist and Hindu choice of escaping the cycle of samsara, inspires the American gut response of "quitter" or "cop-out". Only an American soul, having achieved samadhi would be fool enough, curious, intellectual, materialistic enough to choose to be reincarnated, and bring his spiritual bliss knowledge, power, like a bodhisattva, back down to earth. In this way the sadhana aims are worldly, individualistic, and social, whereas the Hindu and Buddhist aims are more "other-worldly". The Jesus groups, not believing in reincarnation, are necessarily "other-worldly" in their aims.

Having proven, I hope, that Shakti is part of an effort in the West to articulate a sadhana, what type of

people are attracted to this particular path, and for what reasons?

To answer these questions it would be useful to look at the theories of Needleman and Ellwood concerning the roles of science and of nature in the new religious movements.

Ellwood and Needleman claim the new religious movements confront the problems arising out of modern man's relationship with these forces where the established churches have failed. I find these theories particularly relevant to the sadhana-based groups.

Needleman sees the new religious movements as representing a return to "the Cosmic element in the religious thought of the West"<sup>49</sup> and a rejection of "the sort of intellectualism found in our eastern cities, an intellectualism rooted in European acosmism and its accompanying sense of the human mind as autonomous and outside nature." He sees the scientific world view as inimical to the cosmic one. "A squinting extrapolation from the 'success' of scientific method has suffocated our sense of wonder. And a bloated technology has screened out awareness of the claim of earth which past societies discovered in the demands of work."<sup>50</sup> He sees the new religious movements as

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49 J. Needleman, The New Religions. Doubleday, 1970. p. 5.

50 Needleman, The New Religions, p. 219.

supplying the cosmic wonder which established churches lack, "In Europe the scientific revolution destroyed the idea of a sacramental universe and religion became a matter between man and God; science took care of the Cosmos -- and very quickly erased all concepts of mind and purpose from it."<sup>51</sup>

Ellwood notes as one general characteristic of the new religious movements a reaction against orthodoxy, both the orthodoxy of the established churches, and scientific orthodoxy and points out a tendency in new religious movements to "disdain as materialistic, science and technology for their own sake."<sup>52</sup> However on the other hand new religious movements "have in common with the scientist a feeling of bitter alienation from much of the West's religious past, hence an emphasis on modernity and the hope of a better future. Part of being modern is to be scientific. Thus while new religious movements might reject the materialistic aims of science, there is a tendency for some of them to embrace the language and methods of science."<sup>53</sup>

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51 Needleman, The New Religions, p. 4.

52 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 29.

53 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 302.

Ellwood identifies another feature common in new religious movements, belief in the sacredness of Nature. This he explains partly by "the revival of monistic cosmic religion by the cults," and partly by "what is left of nature gives a sense of the rarity and uncanniness of the harmonious, and it is enhanced by the sacred feelings induced by nostalgia."<sup>54</sup>

To sum up, what Ellwood and Needleman are pointing out, is a growing sense of a cosmic relationship and identity in the new religions. This results in a sense of man's moral responsibility in regard to the cosmos and the effects of technology on nature. Ecological problems become religious and ethical questions. Technology or use of it for materialistic ends, become profane.

The history of Shakti reflects these concerns. The apocalyptic philosophy expressed in the Second Council of Nicaea, the survival courses offered in Vancouver in crafts and do-it-yourself skills were preparation for the anticipated technological and ecological crisis. However, beyond these very immediate, practical recourses, how is a sadhana considered relevant to the problems of the conflicts between science and nature?

It must be emphasized that the sadhana is a

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54 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 302.

personal, spiritual solution to a social and material problem. In other words, it occurs on another level. The Nicaea report stated "nothing can be done on a material plane". Therefore Shakti had no political, social actions in mind. However, the Shakti sadhana does have a certain relevance to the problem.

First, if it is the use of technology that is profane, and destructive, Shakti presents a new way to use it. Technology can be used to explore and develop man's consciousness, not merely to manipulate his external environment, Shakti is saying, by its use of electronics as part of its spiritual training (audio-visual equipment in the Mala training, and Biofeedback in the Bio Cyb Theatre and Feelor training). Thus Shakti is proposing a solution to the ecological crisis by advocating the use of technology for spiritual, not material ends. The implications of this can be extended to say, Shakti is suggesting humanity re-channel his scientific enquiry from an outer to an inner direction. Dr. Barbara Brown in New Body, New Mind says, "Biofeedback is an experience: at the same time it may be the mind watching itself evolving."<sup>55</sup>

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55 B. Brown, New Mind, New Body Biofeedback: New Directions for the Mind. Harper and Row, N.Y., 1974. p. 16.



Secondly, Shakti claims to develop powers that put technology to shame; telepathy and teleportation make telephones and modern transport appear unwieldy and old-fashioned.

Thirdly, the sadhana offers a boost to the morale, even if the world is coming to an end. The efforts in Vancouver, to "pass spirit" in the streets, and "transmit spiritual energy", can be seen as a kind of morale boosting in a time of social crisis.

Fourthly, the Shakti sadhana with its emphasis on detachment from roles, might be seen as equipping people to function in a decaying social structure, and adapt quickly to new situations and "roles" that are forced on them. In this way it prepares the businessman of today to be the blacksmith or farmer of tomorrow.

Fifthly, Shakti offers an occult system, a sort of proto-science that is simple enough to provide an integral, meaningful interpretation of the world. Occultism is a way of healing the compartmentalisation, the gap between the objective and subjective sides of Man that is part of the scientific world view. Harriet Whitehead defines the function of Occultism in America thus.

The basis of Occultism in general, and American Occultism in particular, is a synthesizing orientation

towards all the ways that man has found to "relate himself to the ultimate conditions of his existence." Occultism seeks to reunite the separate pieces of the intellectual, emotional, and apprehensional jigsaw puzzle. <sup>56</sup>

Her explanation of the connection between Scientology, science fiction and the occult applies equally well to Shakti and to the Gold family:

Scientology ... is the creation of a man whose intellectual background and style was either strongly molded by, or simply reflected in his vocation as a science fiction and fantasy writer, and his participation in the science fiction community of the 30's and 40's. It has been argued that the Positivist bias, the speculative styles, and above all the skill with which science fiction integrates worldly knowledge with elements of the fantastic and the improbable, bring the science fiction world into very close alliance with the Occult orientation. If Scientology has terms and concepts that sound more specifically like science fiction than like earlier Occultism, this is in no way inconsistent. Scientology defines itself as the "science of knowing" or the "science of knowing how to know," and its appeal is exactly commensurate with how well it fulfills this implicit promise.<sup>57</sup>

To sum up, if the problems arising out of Western man's relationship with science and nature, lead to the

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56 H. Whitehead, "Reasonably Fantastic," Religious Movements in Contemporary America, Zaretsky and Leone.

57 Whitehead, "Reasonably Fantastic," Religious Movements, p. 587.

formation of apocalyptic religious cults, the sadhana can be seen as a particularly Western, active response to these problems. To a Hindu, the coming "Dark Ages" are simply the Kali yuga, the last gasp of a breath of Brahman, a part of maya and therefore not worthy of concern. To a Buddhist it would be just another example of pain and suffering, to be avoided by escaping into The Void. But to the shaman, the Clear, the Being, the coming Bad Times present a challenge, an opportunity to use one's carefully cultivated powers!

What is Shakti's relationship with science? The influence of science is manifested in their science fiction beginnings, their use of scientific language, their use of techniques from science, and the scientific approach to religious experience.

What is the significance of Gold's father being a science fiction writer and editor, why are science fiction stories read in the storytelling sessions? Techniques like "Robot" and "Moonwalk" might have originated from the science fiction writers club in the 30's described by Gold. The question of how science fiction fits in with new religious movements is a particularly interesting study.

Science fiction is ethical and speculative. It raises questions as to Man's future and as to the ethical

obligations attendant upon the power of science. It begins where science leaves off. Science is departmentalized and philosophically neutral. Science offers an excellent vocabulary for myth and allegory. Man's literal relationship to his cosmos is explored.

"The truth, of course, is that the scientific outlook does not necessarily supplant the religious and that the concepts of science fiction and theology frequently coexist. And surely the sublime majesty and immensity of the universe ...provides some kind of empirical basis for that area traditionally associated with man's response to the idea of a God."<sup>58</sup>

Science fiction takes the newest, most startling elements on the frontiers of science and gives them a religious, allegorical significance, compensating in this way for the blind, amoral, impersonal quality of science-fact.

New religious movements tend to have an ambiguous relationship with science. On one hand technology is profane, and the scientific world view is emotionally and philosophically unsatisfying and yet on the other hand, they are unable to reject or ignore it, because it is too much an integral part of our thinking and culture.

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58 D. Ketterer, New Worlds for Old. Anchor Press, Doubleday, N.Y., 1974. p. 45.

The science fiction element in religious groups does much to reconcile this conflict. Space travel is seen as a means of exploring past incarnations (in Scientology). Man's destiny is part of a larger plan of some super race of aliens (UFO cults). The microscopic world provides a model for the life of the soul (Shakti). In UFO cults the science fiction approach is literal, in Shakti it is metaphorical.

Shakti's approach to religion is scientific in the sense of empirical, experimental, and experiential. Religion is seen as an experience to be induced consciously through techniques which have been tested and proven effective. Mystical practices in this way resemble a scientific experiment.

As I mentioned in Chapter II, there were a large proportion of members in Shakti with a scientific background in electronics, gestalt therapy, psychology, and physics. Also the social manner of the Shakti members struck me as markedly cold, detached, impersonal, in dramatic contrast to the warm, friendly, concerned treatment I had received in Yoga and Jesus groups. I think it is safe to say that Shakti tends to attract people with a strong scientific bent, who need a scientific approach to religion. Their rational training makes it difficult to accept the myth of

Christ and the concept of a personal God, and their strong intellectual, inquisitive bent makes the passive stance, the "letting go" of a yogi unpalatable for them. Therefore the sadhana groups, with their cool scientific approach, their intellectual flavour, their potential for initiative and creative contribution on the part of their members (except in Scientology, where this is smothered by the Org), hold a strong attraction.

The emphasis upon individuality in Shakti and its sister groups holds a particular charm for its members. There is a spirit of romanticism and adventure, and of fantasy that appeals to youth bored by the banality of the job market, and by the predictability of the educational system. To some the role of the solitary shaman on an endless journey with only his powers to protect and keep him company, is evidently a more appealing fantasy than the role of the chaste, calm, ascetic yogi, withdrawn from the world, or the beloved child, the virtuous pilgrim watched over by God.

Zaretsky and Leone see new religious movements as providing an important outlet for individual needs, community services and free enterprise that is part of the American heritage, but is stifled by the large corporations, the universalistic norms of today's society:

For a society that thought religion a private matter, we see that it is the only place left where sound experimentation is possible. It is the folk answer to a system that is over-diplomaed, over-certified, too specialized...It is the last voice for decentralization and the free enterprise system.<sup>59</sup>

Zaretsky and Leone identify the individualism expressed in the new religious movements as typically American:

What gives the current religious revolution its strength is that it is so typically American and so entrepreneurial. It is the display of the middleman as a religious leader. The loose and diverse organisation, the do-it-yourself theology, the preach-whatever-the-market-will-bear attitude are part of the pattern. As a people we have a built-in incentive toward individual innovation, and we are reaping the consequences of that tradition today in religion. If it is gone from the small businessman in the economy, it is alive and well in religion.<sup>60</sup>

If one accepts this premise, Shakti stands out as an extreme expression of this entrepreneurial spirit. Obviously the sadhana groups express the cult of individuality more strongly than do the Jesus and Hindu groups

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59 Zaretsky and Leone, Religious Movements in Contemporary America. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1974. p. xxxvi.

60 Zaretsky and Leone, Religious Movements, p. xxxiv.

in their aims and ideologies. However, Shakti goes beyond this to express it in the very structure of its organisation. In stark contrast to Hubbard, who excommunicates members who attempt to incorporate new techniques and ideas into the Scientology program, Gold issues the edict, "from now on everyone be their own guru," and taunts his followers, "If you knew what to do with your lives, you wouldn't hang around and take orders from me." Moreover the periodic "debriefing" of the organisation can be interpreted as a revolt against the modern tendency to form large corporations, the imperialistic trend in institutions, the "bigger and better" syndrome, discussed in Chapter VI.

In this context it is interesting to note a fusion between that American frontier folk hero -- the cowboy -- and the shaman or holy man of the "Fourth Way Schools". Arica has a term, "space-cowboy" to describe a student so "high" on techniques as to be unable to participate in the group. The lonely cowboy as a shaman or mystic appears in the recent films El Topo and The Holy Mountain. Castaneda's books present the American Indian as a holy man, and in T.V.'s Kung Fu the cowboy hero is revamped into an oriental monk. This might account also for the popularity in samurai and kung fu films. The cowboy was always a religious figure, only whereas he once expressed a Christian ethic he



now is beginning to reflect the cosmism, and shamanism of the sadhana movement. Equivalent American folk heroes, the spaceman, and the scientist, appear with a new religious dimension in Gold's The Autobiography of God.

So far in my conclusion I have attempted to show in what ways Shakti reflects the contemporary American's preoccupation with the issues and problems of science, nature, and individualism. There is one more factor that must be taken into consideration in studying Shakti, and that is the media.

Zaretsky states:

What distinguishes the current religious renaissance from previous ones is the fact that the communications media have provided broad scale publicity on the impact and spread of religious enthusiasm and for the themes and churches that compose it ... The emphasis has been on the sensational and unusual aspects of religious experience ... The media have not so much created the popularity of religious movements as they have helped to give them a kind of legitimacy through influencing the public viewpoint about them.<sup>61</sup>

One characteristic of the media is that it can magnify a tiny incident out of all proportion, "It is easy to make...an ephemeral movement of a few dozen souls appear momentous."<sup>62</sup> However, this is exactly why the

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61 Zaretsky, Religious Movements. p. xviii.

62 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 298.

media is so well suited to religion. It must be remembered that only a tiny percentage of the population of America are directly involved in the new religious movements and out of these an infinitesimally small percentage belong to Shakti. Can the importance, interest and significance of a spiritual movement, even its sociological, psychological significance, be measured in terms of numbers of bodies? Ellwood expresses this point clearly:

Yet statistics are not very meaningful clues to the significance of movements like these. If the mass communications of McLuhan's global village can magnify out of proportion movements of little statistical scale, the media's creations, like those of dreams have a life of their own ... The cults will not convert America as Arabia was converted to Islam or as Britain was to Christianity. It is questionable whether nationwide shifts like this, very rare in any case, can conceivably happen again, given the degree of individualism now available in religion.<sup>63</sup>

It is Shakti's awareness of this situation that makes it in some ways more contemporary and sophisticated than groups like Scientology, like The Divine Light Mission and like Youth for Jesus that fully intend to sweep the continent and will not rest until the whole world is one big happy Scientology Org, etc. Shakti is unconcerned about its numerical membership, students are "turned off",

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63 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 298.

thrown out, initiation is often difficult, the emphasis is on exclusiveness, secrecy. However, they understand that "the media's creations, like dreams, have a life of their own" and use pamphlets, posters, videotapes, films, tapes, lectures, events, demonstrations to create an image, an ephemeral dream, that flashes by, and vanishes leaving only a memory. Shakti "came out" as an ancient secret school with a vast following now at long last -- open to the general public, whereas it was in fact a recent invention of Gold and Core Group. However on another level it would be a "real" spiritual movement whose authenticity is "felt" and "known" by Core Group, and for them needs no credentials. For Shakti, spiritual ideas are conveyed more efficiently and instantaneously through the more spiritual medium of the media, rather than through the unwieldy body of a slowly expanding organisation. Their use of audio-visual equipment in an ESP training exercise indicates the assumption that the media is a step towards the spiritual, the psychic.

The role of the media in the religious revolution might also explain the absence of a competitive attitude to other groups, and a kind of ecumenism found in Shakti.

Ellwood claims that the cults are:

Contributing to the formation of a Protean or expansive man whose spiritual life is not tied to a monolithic culture or self-identity. They are changing the meaning of religion from a single commitment to a series of experiences.<sup>64</sup>

He asserts that the members of the new religious movements will always be in a tiny minority, but for Ellwood the new spiritual man will simply be the majority, exposed to the choices, aware of alternative realities and ways of thought, not belonging to a particular cult, but "a man within whom they can coexist more comfortably than before -- though not necessarily with equal value."<sup>65</sup>

If Shakti shares this concept of the "new spiritual man", this would explain not only their ecumenism, but their eclecticism. They are more concerned with exposing members to the range of religious choices and possibilities than in formulating a precise choice and identity and demanding commitment to it. Their insistence that once a student goes through their training program, that he leave the organisation and go out into the world to apply his knowledge in a new context, illustrates this.

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64 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 298.

65 Ellwood, Spiritual Groups, p. 299.

In The Avatar's Handbook, Gold asserts that he is attempting to develop "a school for spiritual masters". What he seems to be saying is that he wishes to teach people how to communicate religious experience. "The quickest way to learn something is to teach it", as the old cliché goes, and there are undercurrents in Shakti of a humanist philosophy of education. Lynn Sharbs of Vancouver Shakti Centre reported of her teaching experience. "The teacher functions most effectively as the student of the child."<sup>66</sup> Bill announced during one of the work sessions "We can only teach you to teach yourself." The Robot exercise and White Room Training are to a large extent teachers training or communications exercises. The fact that Shakti is always changing and experimenting with its courses and training programs almost forces the student to decide which techniques he likes best, and in what order, and essentially to design his own program.

Does Shakti in fact succeed in turning out spiritual teachers? If one looks at the present activities of old Shakti members, one could argue, yes -- Dan has set up a carpentry workshop, Bill a natural foods co-op, Randy is running an art advertising agency, Barry is an interior decorator. In what sense are these religious activities?

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66 J. Graepon, Environments of Musical Sculpture, p. 204.

The answer hinges on one's concept of what constitutes a spiritual school. Gold discusses this problem in The Avatar's Handbook and distinguishes between an outer and inner school. "No one ... can tell you what a school is and what a school isn't...even the Hell's Angels and Theosophy might be a screening process for a real school."<sup>67</sup>

Gold related a rather charming little story that develops this idea, on the occasion of his visit to Montreal. When he was a young boy in N.Y.C. and would accompany his father to the Sunday afternoon meetings of the science fiction writers in the tropical forest, he noticed a very skinny man with a large adams apple, thick spectacles, acne, and a pronounced stammer. One day the man said to him, "Sometime, if you have nothing else to do, you might try going to the corner of 45th St. and 17th Ave. and you will see on the N.E. corner a red building with a blue basement door. If you go through that door you will find yourself in a tailor shop and there you will meet a man whom you could sit and talk to for a while."<sup>68</sup> Gold smiled and never took up the suggestion. Then, seven years later, he suddenly realized he was being offered a chance to learn, a lesson, a spiritual clue that he had wasted. The moral

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67 Gold, Avatar's Handbook, p. 96.

68 Lecture of July 17 in Montreal.

of this story seems to be, if you don't break down your preconceptions about what constitutes a spiritual school or master, you might not recognize the real thing when it presents itself; and will thus lose one of the rare opportunities to learn that occur in a lifetime.

In the context of Shakti's teaching philosophy, there is no reason why Dave's carpentry shop, Bill's health food shop and Barry's drapery shop are not spiritual schools and they can only be judged by their students.

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Field Survey Form

Researcher: Susan P.

Association: Shakti

Meeting July 28, 1973

Introduction

Shakti, the spiritual science of DNA has Montreal centre on 266 Notre Dame W.. The six core members of shakti live there, three men, three women in their middle twenties, who hold outside jobs in order to pay the rent. The Montreal centre was established six months ago by two members from the Core Group in Crestline California who have since moved on. The Shakti belief system is exceptionally eclectic and paradoxical, but the main influences appear to be Gurdjieff's theories on knowledge and sufism. Shakti meetings usually take the form of dance exercises from the Washi dervishes or storytelling sessions. The following account, however, is of my encounter with Babaji al-washi, the founder-leader of Shakti who came up from California for the weekend. I had been notified of his arrival, and that he would be conducting Bardo exercises all day Saturday. I will allude to Babaji below as AW, and to the core members as Shaktites.

Observation

I arrived at the Shakti centre at 10:50 AM and was met at the door by a Shaktite who told me to leave my shoes and purse outside the main room and enter it quietly, lying down on the floor with the other people I would find in there and

I had to shut my eyes and listen to the music. I did so, seeing 19 bodies ranging in age from 22-32, an equal balance of sexes. The music caused me acute discomfort, sounding to me like a corny, commercial mixture of Broadway musicals, vaudeville, rock and country and western. I peered from side to side to check reactions. Everyone was lying still, eyes shut. After a few minutes I crept out. Seeing a Shaktite sitting in a room across the hall, I said, "I couldn't bear that music". "I don't like it myself; why don't you go speak to (she either said 'Bis', or 'Beast') about it." "Who?" "Al-Washi, he's in the kitchen."

I entered the kitchen, seeing a man sitting with his back to me at the large table with four Shaktites. I sat down, saying, "I had to leave, I couldn't stand listening to that music."

"I don't blame you", al-washi replied.

Observation

AW is a fat shaven-headed man of perhaps 35, then wearing only white cotten gathered trousers. His skin is fair, his eyes dark brown, his nose straight. His social manner ranged from charming, bullying, brilliant to obscene.

POOR PRINT

AW explained he chose the music as "good Being music". "Tiny Tim is a very pure Being". (The music was the sound track of Tiny Tim's musical, Great Balls of Fire.) "It's happy music, play music. Shakti is a school, a kindergarten for adults, and the proper music teaches them how to play." He asked if I'd ever heard the original Gurdjieff School music, describing it as "Mozart played by arab terrorists", and burst out laughing.

He told a few anecdotes, featuring zen or sufi masters, always with unexpected, paradoxical endings. The Shaktites laughed appreciatively.

#### Interpretation

Storytelling is valued as a teaching device. It is "play", and the surprise endings are meant to "shock" the listener into "Being". Stories both illustrate the illusory nature of reality, and take one out of the present reality into the world of the story. It is interesting to note that the usual Shakti affectation, or mannerism of keeping the voice and face as expressionless as possible was discarded in the presence of AW. Emotive signals are condemned for disguising Being. "Drop the mask" is Shakti motto. AW, on the other hand, jumps rapidly from role to role, using different accents, tones, and mime gestures, making the listener very conscious of the masks.

#### Observation

AW talked of Arica, saying "They do<sup>14</sup>  
real exercises, nothing outrageous like making  
people listen to Tiny Tim." He asked me,  
"What kind of music do you like?" I said  
"I like baroque music. I am a music student  
and that's what I study." He replied "You'll  
have to get over that!" (laughter) "You  
must forget music and discover sound."  
(Aside) "How did you manage to attract  
such a sophisticated young lady?"

The Shaktites made coffee and put a cup  
before him. I asked him if he was the pianist on  
the record they used to accompany their dervish  
dances. It was called, "Epitaph for an Ego; the  
dances of the Washi dervishes", and I had heard it  
at the time of my first visit, and had been told it  
was composed and performed by al-Washi. AW, "I can  
just about play Frere Jaques on the piano with one  
finger". He made spastic motion with one hand, spillin  
he hot black coffee in his lap where it stained his  
white trousers. He jumped up shouting "This isn't the  
way I wanted my coffee!" and left the room. The  
Shaktites cleaned it up and replaced the coffee.  
A female took a spoonfull of sugar and held it  
over the cup, with great intensity. "How does he  
take it, one or two?" I everyone concentrated. "Two".  
They all nodded.

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Shostakovitch!"

Interpretation

- 1). Bullshit? Ignorant peasant.
- 2). Was it a calculated 'shock' to break ~~myself~~ down my conditioning?
- 3). Shostakovitch's music is remarkably baroque for a 20th C composer( e.g. he wrote preludes and fugues)

Observation

I asked AW about the origins of Shakti; whether they had a direct historical link with Gurdjieff's original school, or whether they had simply adopted Ouspensky's writings.

AW replied, "Are butterflies beautiful?"

I looked puzzled. He said, "If you understand why you can't answer that question, you will understand why I can't answer your question about Shakti."

At that point he stood up. "Let's take a break. Take that record off, and we'll meet in the main room after lunch."

Meeting: Storytelling

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Date: 27.9.73

### Introduction

This was the first time I had been to a formal storytelling, although I attended an impromptu one during al-Washi's visit, in which 15 people had sat in a circle and read in turn from The Autobiography of God, a picaresque, whimsical, philosophical novel, featuring among other things a T.V. addict God, space travel, Aristophanes, Atlantis, and Sufi masters exposing themselves in Central Park.

### Observation

I had phoned them an hour before. I was let in by a boy in his twenties and named John and shown into a room I had never seen before and told to wait there.

### Interpretation

This was the third time I had been put alone into a room to wait. Possible reasons:

- 1) It puts you in a receptive, calm state of mind, preparing you for the Bardo-exercises.
- 2) It separates the beginner from the initiated members. The centre is also a home. I could hear someone washing dishes. Putting me in the storytelling room rather than allowing me to enter the kitchen served to emphasize the ritual, rather than the domestic aspect of the place.

3) Perhaps it is a graceful way of stalling while they decide what to do with the ~~beginner~~ ~~the student~~

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Indecision when dealing with students is ~~criticised~~ criticised in The Shakti Handbook

I waited for perhaps fifteen minutes. The room was small, pleasant, well kept, with a white wool carpet, 2 floor couches with homemade cushions, a wooden table covered with plants, a large cotton print of the Koran, and a mirror hanging on the wall. One corner had been made into a closet by hanging 2 sheets of canvas at right angles. I wondered if the overall effect of an arab tent was a conscious one.

Three members of Shakti entered in a procession, John first carrying books and 2 girls behind him. His hair was fairly short and he was dressed inconspicuously. They had long hair and wore long skirts.

### Interpretation

I had seen them before in the dance classes. John was advanced and very involved in the dance. The smaller girl was fairly advanced and the other one rather clumsy. The bigger girl had moved into the center recently. I assumed there to be a close relationship between John and the smaller girl as I had seen them standing apart talking quietly at the window several times after dance class. The smaller girl was always friendly towards me, whereas the other's response was minimal. I was the only outsider - their dance classes tend to be more popular. I wondered if they would have held storytelling without me. Their behaviour was ritualistic, a performance for my benefit.



They sat down. John put the following books before me, saying "choose one!"

They were 3 paperbacks by Idries Shah:

The Way of the Dervishes

Tales from the Sufis

The Magic Mountain

Nazrudin

and a hardback whose author I couldn't read:

Mulla Nazrudin

I chose one and the others followed. Then we read etc in turn, rotating around the circle, for about an hr. They featured famous sufis like al-Ghazali, Rumi, Nazrudin, anonymous dervishes, kings, beggars and Arabian animals. The stories ended with a moral or an unexpected twist. Then John picked up a paperback of science fiction stories, ~~by~~ chose the last one and passed it to me to read. The book was called Down in the Black Gang, by Philip José Farmer. The story was about a mind-reading brain washing machine. When it is found to be capable of reading and transmitting ~~into~~ into words, the thoughts of a lifetime, up until the moment of death of an unborn child, the scientists conclude that all members of the human race are programmed and preconditioned.

## Observation

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The next book John took up was a small pamphlet called The Avatar's Handbook, by Mother Beast (2nd Series). This deals generally with the process of spiritualization of forming religious groups, and with the difficulties of learning and teaching. It was full of humorous cartoon illustrations. The language was objective, scientific, and colloquial, the level of thought sophisticated and complex.

Upon finishing the book, there was a short silence; then John asked if I had any questions. For the sake of brevity I will summarize the information I extracted.

### 1) concerning A.W. Washie

He wrote the handbook, and the Autobiography of God. Little is known of his past by those present.

### 2) history of Shakti

Organ School has existed under different names for a long time. Group of science fiction writers got together in early 60's and formed inner school. Among them were:

Frederick S. Pohle

Philip José Farmer

Roger Zelazny

Robert Heinlein

There is a "core group" to the school who work closely with A.W. and dispense themselves throughout the organization, but no one knows who they are, except other core members. Their beliefs and practices also are secret.

3) concerning Montreal centre

Now 4 Shakti members live there (in August there were 6). There was no leader to guide the others' progress, although for administration purposes the senior member made the decisions. Each did his own "work", having the prerogative to decide what for him was "work" - anything from housekeeping, reading, sewing, dance or outside jobs could qualify. Some members came to Shakti through AW, and some through other members.

4) When I mentioned disconcerting elements in AW's behaviour, or their taste in literature and music, John explained it as "the way of Malcolm," or "the way of blame," to offer the attendant ample reason and opportunity to leave if he wants to.

### Observation

I left. John saw me down stairs, saying in the elevator, "you must understand one thing; I can't tell you anything unless you already know it. If you come here, it is probably because your Being senses this as perhaps the first environment in which it has a chance to learn how to function properly."

### Interpretation

Possible explanations for their vagueness and secrecy:

1) Most religious groups don't like to be pigeon holed intellectually before you've had a chance to "experience" them.

2) The members themselves didn't know, having little objective curiosity about the movement

3) Shakti emphasises the individual's search - making you find out for yourself; the learning processes other than the usual conceptual, academic ones.

4) D.W. is constantly stressing the illusory nature of appearances and performs satirical imitations on ~~sp~~ stereotyped spiritual masters. Fights efforts to "place" or explain him, therefore secrecy about past.

5) John explained that if you ~~of~~ thought you understood e.g. Yoga, the benefits of it were lost. You become narrow, rigid, routinized. Secrecy, paradox, shocks, work keep one at a high level of awareness, make one "pay attention".

Spiritual masters. Fights efforts to "place"

## Meeting; Oct 2, 1973 - Movement Class

### Introduction

This was a movement class at the Shakti Centre at 9:30 PM, Tuesday. It was a beginners class and very different from the ones I attended in August. The people ~~at~~ came in response to demonstrations given by Shakti at Sogola, and churches, and ads in the McGill Daily and Montreal Star.

### Observation

On entering, I sat in the dark hallway with the beginners. There were ten of us, seven male, three female, all in our twenties except for a woman in late thirties. Judging from the names on the list after the class, there were 7 Jews, 1 French Canadian and 2 Englishmen present. We sat in silence. The door to the dance room opened. A small slim girl in late twenties who lives there, whom I shall refer to as SI spoke, saying we had been given a chance to leave all that we brought here from outside behind; to enter the room, leaving our shoes in the hall, and to not speak since the room was exclusively for high energy activity. We did so.

The room with its polished wood floor is reminiscent of a ballet studio, with a baby grand in one corner, a sound system in the closet and an enneagram traced out in the middle of the floor (a circle with nine points).

Perhaps this is Gurdjieff's influence, for Ouspensky mentions them.

The class was conducted by two girls who live there, the same who attended storytelling. S I directed the class verbally, demonstrating occasionally, and S II who had been clumsy in performing the exercises in August had since improved dramatically and demonstrated each one for us, at S I's signals, but never spoke. Both girls wore white cotton turkish trousers (gathered at ankles) and shirts, obviously homemade. These were the standard Shakti costumes for public demonstrations.

First we did warm up exercises. The first 4 involved balancing on one leg, with the hands crossed over the breast, the 4th hopping and spinning in circles with one leg thrown out for momentum. The 5th consisted of the hands drawn down over the face to relax it, the breath emitting in a sharp "poo!"

At this point S I said:

"The purpose of these exercises is to teach you to move your body instead of it moving you. Most of you walk as if you are falling, the momentum carrying you from step to step (demonstrating a clumsy walk). In the next exercise was as if you are - correction, you are - walking through peanut butter," demonstrating a very slow, sticky walk. The next exercise was "walking through a

~~Handy - using the hands to swim~~

room of honey, using the hands to push your way through". All these exercises were executed - ingly slow. The seventh exercise was "rowing", a shifting of weight from one foot to the next, the hands making rowing motions. The eighth was lifting one arm incredibly slowly, the most difficult and tiring of all.

Then she put on the usual record, Epitaph for an Egg: Dances of the Washi Dances and we started the Shakti movements. There are nine in all, and we did the first three. We stood in a circle around the ennesagram. ST demonstrated and we repeated. All these movements are very slow and involve balancing on one foot. ST one said, "There are no stars in Shakti, we want no competition. Move as a group and pay attention to your neighbour." We performed each exercise, first in a circle, and then in 2 lines, mirroring each other; therefore starting on opposite legs. Then we were told to improvise in mirror formation. She put on a dixieland jazz record. We marched in a line in rhythm, and then skipped and bounced "like bubbles" "like feathers" and "like elephants."

Finally we sat down in a circle 160  
and SI delivered a small lecture on  
Shakti. Briefly, the content was as follows:

Shakti aims at making this (pointing  
at herself) fit for a Being to inhabit. There  
~~are~~  
are 3 main centres in man, the physical

the intellectual, the emotional, that tended  
to get clogged up. They must each do  
their own work and function as a team,  
(This, of course is straight out of Ouspensky's  
In Search of the Miraculous) Shakti pre-

pared the body for a Being to inhabit. The  
notice on the door says "An airport for  
landing fields," the soul or "Being" presum-  
ably as the passenger. On Oct 10, Shakti is  
giving a 6-week training course that involves  
intellectual and emotional exercises besides the  
movements. The job of the centre is to supply  
work of a special kind.

A question period followed. Concern-  
ing the origin of the movements SI replied "they  
are an ancient tradition, but where they origi-  
nated, I don't know." As to al-Waahi's  
connection with Gurdjieff, "a teacher does  
not necessarily tell you who his teachers  
were." As to Shakti's history she said the  
School had existed for a long time under  
different names and had only emerged as Shakti  
in the past 6 months. Members of the School  
had been in Montreal for a year, formerly  
under the name Kowachin, a west coast  
Indian word, meaning "the land between",  
and Le Jardin Electronique. The recent



"coming out" as Shakti was explained as a last ditch attempt to find people to do spiritual work, who might eventually join the inner school, for as in all spiritual groups today, there was a feeling of urgency in finding

material, for "there isn't much time left." Shakti centres exist in

Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, California, Denver, NEW YORK CITY

The name Shakti, /is defined for our purposes as "energy source". As to what it meant to her personally, she seemed reluctant to discuss; "I feel there is nothing left for me but this, to work" she had joined the movement in January.

She then bought some of their literature out and mentioned the \$2.00 donation (to be placed on a silver bowl in the hall) and passed around a list to sign, reminding people of the course, and the story telling sessions. At one point she asked who had come in response to their ads and who to their demonstrations, the case unanimously being the latter. At this point people began to leave.

Shakti - The TechniquesTraining Program Phenomenology ITraining Program IIntroduction

In the following report I wish to give an idea of the techniques and methods used in a Shakti training program. The aim of most of these exercises is to acquire control over the 3 centers- the emotional, the physical, the intellectual (Ouspensky explains this system of Gurdjieff's in In Search of the Miraculous, which seems to have originated in Tibetan Buddhism.) With control comes detachment and non-identification, and the later techniques aim at developing ESP powers and in learning to function independently of a familiar environment, a terrestrial, worldly frame of reference (i.e. after death or in post-bomb desert conditions).

The main difficulty in presenting this material is that Shakti tends to be secretive about its methods and beliefs until it feels you are ready for them; i.e., have done the preliminary work to qualify you for the next step. I can describe the pre-assignment exercises first-hand, since I am taking their 6-week course (see Training Program II). The following account is taken from an interview with a Shakti student who wishes to remain anonymous and besides containing a description of methods, gives her personal reactions to them and the reasons for her interest in Shakti.

Paying Attention

As I walked towards the Center, I got to thinking about Paying Attention. I started to walk slowly, deliberately, trying not to let my body make a motion unnoticed by my conscious mind. My movements became minimized, uniform, and soon each gesture unfolded smoothly out of my will and intention. I walked in a slow, relaxed manner my feet slightly out-turned, my arms swinging in perfect/counter rhythm to my legs. Suddenly I heard a car stopping and a voice; "Alright, Madam, would you mind telling us what you are doing?" I looked up to see a policeman in his car. "You taken some kind of drug or trying to get picked up, or what?"

When I told this story to the people at the center, they said, "A sufi never gets himself noticed. He lives in the world inconspicuously. The most unlikely people you see around you, a bus driver, a Hells Angel, could be secret sufis."

Daysnap

The rules of the game Daysnap is to take a personality other than your own and wear it for a specified length of time, walking, talking, and acting in accordance with that personality. I played this game 6 hours a day for 3 days. One day I was suffering and martyred, the next aggressive and gross, then condescending. I wore the appropriate facial masks, contorted about the eye brows

and lips. The more subtly I wore these personalities, the more convincing they were. I noticed distinct changes in the attitudes of others towards me, and tried to analyze what personalities they were wearing. When the game was over and it came time to slip back into my old personality I found it bland, confused compared to the Daysnap ones. My job, relationships, interests all felt like masks that no longer quite belonged to me. I kept watching myself acting out roles for other peoples' benefit, or out of habit and would find it boring, uncomfortable, silly.

With  
White Room conditions  
and Forgetting Personal History  
a

It was a relief to enter the center where the neutral and no one knew who you were. I began to relax my face and to speak in neutral tones like them. It is nice to be with people who don't smile at you and ask questions but simply ~~asked questions~~ gave you work to do with them. At first I felt a strong curiosity about the inner life and past of these people, but felt I knew them better in some ways than my family and old friends because I had developed a sensitive watchful attitude towards them. Somehow I came to know them although it is difficult to say how, since they never expressed these things through words or visible means of communication.

On the other hand I could understand majority of visitors were put off and intimidated and never returned. The white room conditions in which the exercises take place remind one more of a modern sterile laboratory than of a monk's cell or hermit's cave (in a sense it is both). The Shakti people themselves, before one gets used to their unique social manner, can appear cold, unresponsive, inhospitable. Some visitors shift their personalities into high gear to fill up the vacuum, the majority just sink into a bored stupor, or actually fall asleep, especially during the meditations and readings.

Association: Shakti

Training Program II

Introduction

In this report I will attempt to describe the material that was presented in the 6-week Introduction to Shakti course that I am just completing. This is the first in the Shakti Training Program. I have since the two following courses, the Pre-Assignments and a 49-hour meditation course.

S

Structure

began

The Introduction to Shakti course began on Oct. 17, 1973. It met twice a week on Wednesdays 8:00 to 10:15 P.M. and on Sundays 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. On Wednesdays we did the "intellectual work", and on Sundays meditations in the morning and, after a lunch break, the movements (see report on movement class); "emotional and physical work". A 12-dollar donation was required for the course.

The Group

The usual group consisted of 4 students, 4 Shakti members and 1 student teacher. At the first meeting there were 2 women who never reappeared, and towards the end of the course a new student joined. The students were André, a French Canadian student in physics at U. of M., age 24, Michèle, also French student at a CEGEP, Jack, 26, high school math teacher, (see personal interview form on him), and myself. Richard, the most recent student is evidently English, (that is all I know about him at present). Ray, 25, Jack's wife and elementary school teacher was taking the 6-week teaching course, and presented some of the material to us. The 4 Shakti members live in the center, and have outside jobs and are named Bob, Lorraine, Susan, and Gary, and are English Canadians in their 20's. I know very little about their origins, opinions, etc., since personal history is considered irrelevant to the work they are doing, and they are reluctant to discuss it.

Wednesday Meetings

These took place in White Room Conditions, a bare white-walled room furnished with only a table, chairs, and a blackboard. The students sat at the table all evening, and were forbidden access to the rest of the house. Bob, our group leader sat with us, and the other S. members sat apart in the same room, but did not participate. Ray once said they were there to lend energy to the group. In the middle of the session we took a break. The S. members retired to the kitchen with Ray, and we could hear them whispering; probably coaching Ray in how to present the material, or planning the second half of the meeting. They served us a drink, and resumed the meeting which often lasted up to an hour overtime.

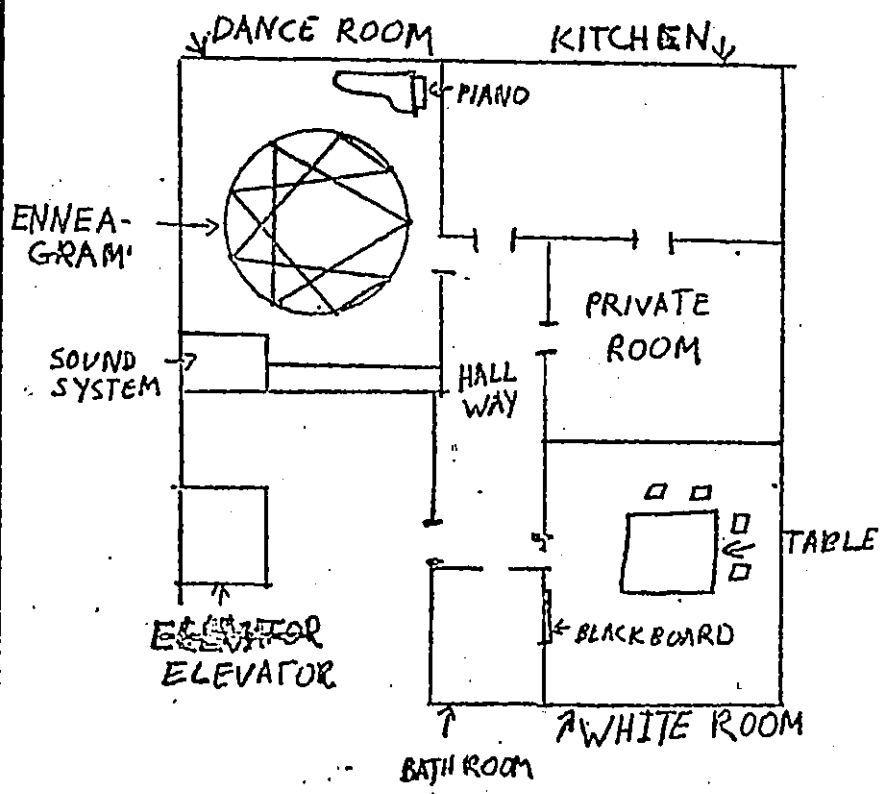
Territorial rules and taboos, and a calculated use of space and setting up of environments conducive to the various activity is a strong feature of this group. The white

room was a totally different environment than when it had been used for storytelling, and now was used for intellectual work and for Sunday lunches. The main room was used for "high energy activity"; the movements of the sacred dance and meditations. Students were not allowed to enter the kitchen except to wash up after lunch on Sunday. The hall was used as a waiting room before activities. This strict delineation of the space helped to maintain the student/initiate hierarchy and generally a high level of discipline and concentration. Here is an excerpt from a S. pamphlet that presents the theory behind White Room conditions;

"...a very special landing field needs to be set up for Being. The White Room is the only kind acceptable .. we have cleared the runway of all rubbish.. educate the Being to space, coax it out of the W.R. and turn it loose in any space it wants to be in. But it's necessary to understand we are genuinely proposing that someone go into that White Room as a landing field, and be invaded, and conquered, by Being."

Sensory deprived environments are common factor in spiritual practices, (caves, cells) and since S. tries to teach one to work, solve problems, cope with situations independently of one's environment (e.g., after death or the Bomb, on another planet, or generally outside of Space and Time), The W.R. can be seen as a space with minimal associations or distractions.

Below is a plan of the Shakti center and its allocation of space:



I. Literature

The Wed. night activity consisted mainly of read-aloud from the-se books:

Shakti, the Spiritual Science of DNA (both editions)  
The Book of Archetypes  
The Creation Story Verbatim

(all by E.J. Gold, alias al-Washi, core group publications, Crestline, Calif.)

A peculiar feature of this, was that if one misread or mispronounced a word, one would be told to begin the whole paragraph over again. Interpretation or paraphrasing of the content was discouraged and avoided. We were instructed to read it on its most literal level, without analyzing or categorizing the "New Information", or forming judgements or conclusions before the whole of the material had been taken in.

This approach reminded me of the Islamic "ilm al hadith", with its emphasis on accuracy of the spoken word seldom applied to the the spoken-written word, but since S. is related to Islam through sufism, the similarity might not be entirely accidental. Also it resembles the Vedic practice of learning scriptures by heart before understanding them, a distinctly un-western procedure. In my view the advantage in this approach was it prevented a too facile reduction of the material, hinted at the various levels of meaning or application, emphasised the symbolic, ineffable nature of religious texts, making us aware of the problems of varying interpretations and of communicating generally. There might also be a suggestion that misreading, misinterpreting or reducing is equivalent to defiling what is pure and sacred. Of course this approach also asserts the legitimacy of al-Washi's writings as sacred texts in their own right, not just collected smatterings of sufism, Tibetan Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism seen through the eyes of an idiosyncratic megalomaniacal ex-Scientologist (as might appear to an outsider).

Given this approach, I can hardly venture at this point to discuss the content or belief systems in the readings, and would simply recommend an accurate reading of the literature-aloud.

2. Theatre games

Various games were suggested or described and tried by some:

Daysnap- the student takes on a personality allotted to him for a specified length of time (e.g. Asshole, Gross, Condescending, Helpfull, etc.)

Break off an activity and tak resume it the next day at the same time exactly at the point where you left it.

Light a candle and identify with the flame, verbalizing its feelings and sensations.

Teaching methods

One evening we did a drawing exercise called a "3-star fix", (problem-solving independent of context) which Ray presented to us. we made it difficult for her by joking etc. but she persisted in maintaining an

emotionless, step by step procedure, insisting on consensus of opinion and using neutral vocabulary. She was trying to present material uncoloured by her own personality or opinions. "Learning how to learn" is stressed, avoiding explanations, making the student teach himself, aware of his particular problems in learning. Working in groups efficiently is emphasized. Our group was gradually directed less by Bob, and at the end of the course was directing itself, Bob acting as an audience, who occasionally intervened when we got off the track. The guidelines for efficient group dynamics were:

1. arriving at a common decision
2. carrying out that decision without digressing
3. courtesy
4. not to leave suggestions hanging
5. equal input of energy from all present

At our last meeting Bob suggested we continue coming to do Intellectual Work but that we concentrate mainly on learning to work together as a group, so that eventually we could merge with the central group and work with them.

He also announced that he had just got instructions from California (I get the impression that a lot of long distance phone calls go on between S. centres in N. America), and Shakti had now revamped its course. The 6-week instructors course that used to follow (that Ray had been doing was now extinct and in its place a 49-hr meditation course and the Pre-Assignment course followed. We have now begun these.

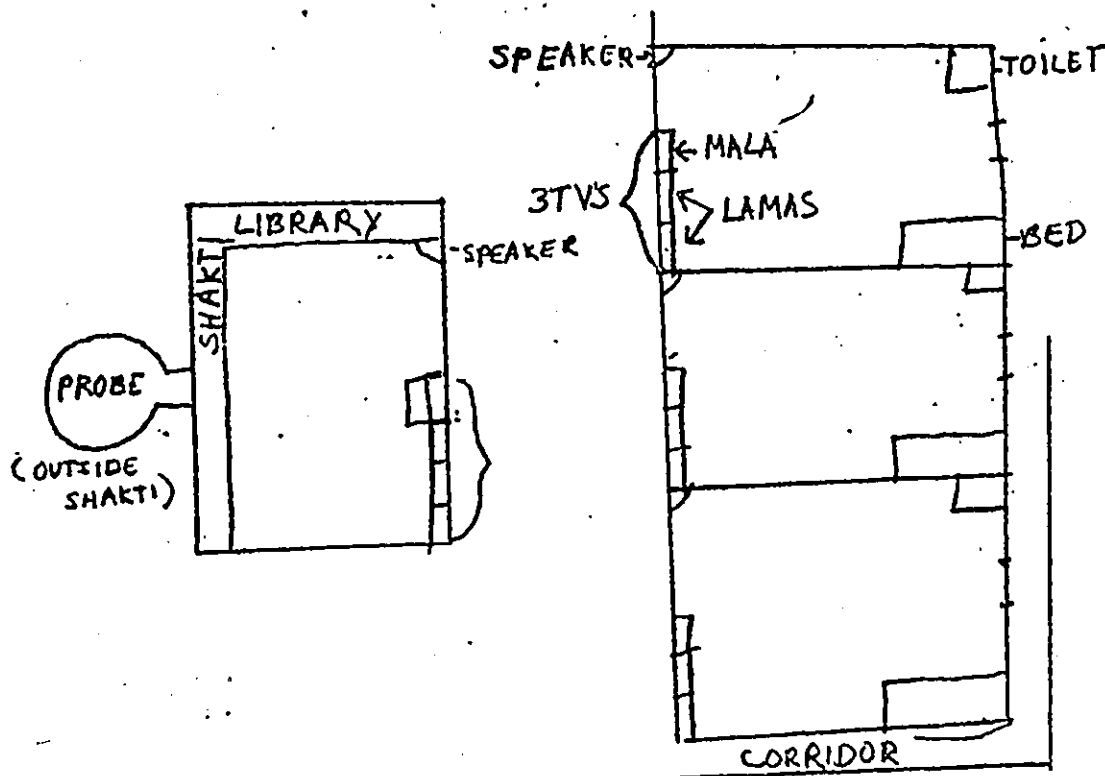
Advanced Training Techniques

During our Wed eve sessions Bob dropped bits of information about Mala training in Crestline. They use biofeedback devices and audio-visual equipment. He demonstrated the skin galvanizer to us. The student wears it in a quiet room alone, learning to control his nervous responses so that a steady hum emits from the machine, not the wild fluctuations in pitch that result when the subject is excited. at a later stage he wears it among other people and while working. Bob claimed that certain S. members could play tunes on it? EEG's were also used, with the aim of learning to control the brain waves, leading to the ultimate test of the "Bio Science Theatre" which is a complete audio-visual environment, a sound and light show in which the Shakti adept controls and directs solely by regulating his metabolism and physiological responses.

I found this interesting to compare with techniques of yoga. The aim and end result is apparently the same, but the biofeedback approach is objective, using externally verifiable proofs to direct the subject, whereas in yoga he must rely on belief and his own internal sensations to direct his efforts.

Bob also described a training program of solitude or a retreat for Mala students. The diagram below is based on the one he drew. The 3 squares are White Rooms containing a bed, toilet, and audio-visual equipment. Each contains a Lama (student in Mala training). The Mala's room has a library of tapes and films of Shakti and other subjects, and the equipment to project it.

- ies
- Stage 1. Lamas can see each other (but not selves) on 2 screens and Mala on 3rd. Also all parties can have audio connections.
- Stage 2. Connections between Lamas cut off. They can send (request films, tapes) and receive from Mala.
- Stage 3. Lamas can only receive from Mala.
- Stage 4. Lamas break off all connections. Exercise in telepathic communication follows.



## CRESTLINE STARSHIP

The duration of the retreat is not known to me. The place is called a Starship. The Lamas have their food served to them by a "stewardess". These terms could suggest that the exercise is a journey outside the material world. Media is used as the "medium" between the worlds of matter and spirit. From physical, sensory communication we go to electronic intercoms and then to ESP.



Shakti :

Susan Palmer

Training Program III

Introduction:

In this last report on Shakti !, the core members of which have moved to Vancouver, I will describe 9 different meditations, that we practised as part of the Shakti! training program. I will also attempt to discuss the theory implicit in the practise of these exercises and also their affect upon the Shakti members and students, individually, and as a group.

Structure:

Most of the meditation tookplace in the Dance Room on Sunday mornings. Meditations no. 1-5 were part of the Introduction to Shakti Course. Meditation no 6 was the first point of the Pre-assignment course which was discontinued when the Shakti members left at Christmas. This meditation we practised for four consecutive Sundays. Meditations 1-5 each lasted an hour. No. ;6 lasted 2 hours with a break in the middle. Morning meditation was followed by a lunch break in the white room after which we returned to the Dance Room to practise the Movements. Meditation began at 10 and lasted until 12. The movements took place between 1-3, or sometimes lasted until 4:00 P.M. The participants in these exercises included the four core members and the students, whose numbers fluctuated between 4 and 6.

Meditation No. I

We sat in a circle on cushions. The instructions were to sit still, keeping the others in one; line of vision and listen to the random sounds without attaching significance to them or to the other people.

Meditation No. II

The same directions as above, only we listened to a tape of music, a slow simple piano improvisation.

Meditation No. III

This meditation was introduced by a reading which Susan took from a book on psychology, which concerned the limited use of our senses, which tend to be used for survival of function, and surrounded as we are by "hosts of mysterious objects," the difficulty of really seeing, experiencing an object in its entirety.

Meditation III (continued)

A basket was passed around the circle containing a shell, a dice, a rubber, a bamboo flute, and a bowl. We each chose an object and examined it for an hour, having been instructed to think in terms of its origins, history, use, relation of other objects, present, future, and finally attempt to see it in the context of all its different aspects, simultaneously.

Meditation No. IV

The four students were led into the White Room which was bare except for four buckets of water and sponges. We were instructed to take a sponge and wipe the floor, beginning at one end until every inch was covered, "Paying Attention" to our movements and keeping the others in our line of vision. The floor was perfectly clean already. After washing we waxed it.

Meditation No. V

After lunch Lorraine announced that al-Washi had said "working to music and rhythm increase human efficiency 100%. We were instructed to wash the dishes and clean the table in rhythm. A honky tonk record was put on and we skipped and hopped about. While washing dishes I slowed down. Lorraine said "Are you doing it in rhythm? This is a serious exercise!"

Meditation No. VI

We had a choice of sitting on cushions or in a chair any where in the Dance Room. The instructions were typed out and read aloud from a black note book before each hour of the exercise. They were; "Take a seated asana and hold it for an hour. Meditate upon your passing thoughts. Become those thoughts, identify completely with them and with nothing but those thoughts."

Meditation No. VII

This exercise was done by the four Shakti students in January, while packing up and closing down the centre. The instructions were to stop every half hour while in the middle of an action and continue the action, moving as slowly as possible for five minutes and then to continue at a normal speed.

Meditation No. VIII

This exercise was introduced by al-Washi at the time of his visit in July 1973, and enacted by a group of approximately 30 students most of whom were from New York. Instructions: choose a partner and sit on your knees facing each other. Look into each others eyes. When al-Washi snaps his finger, raise up on your knees still holding the gaze and say "I I I, you you you, love love love." Snap, sit down. Snap, sit up; "I I I, you you you, God God God." This was repeated three times, at the end of which exercise al-Wahsi asked us in which part of the body did we feel the sound of each word. The most common answers were "the throat, the chest, the head".

Meditation No. IX

This exercise was tried immediately after No. 8. We chose a new partner and stood in a circle, each pair facing each other. We joined eyes and palms with our partners and were instructed to move our hands slowly and lightly until they began to move themselves and only at the point where one felt the hands were truly controlling themselves, one should stop and begin again.

Aim or theory of meditations

We were never told the reasons behind these practices. Wehn specifically questioned on that point Bob and Lorraine replied that one discovered the reason for the exercise, its purpose and value only by doing it, and if al-Washi chooses to give a reason, it is like a carrot for a donkey; by thinking he understands the reason, the student is motivated to move. However the real reason can only be grasped when one has advanced to a higher level.

Some theories can be deduced from Shakti literature and from the course description. Wednesday night White Room training was "intellectual work" which the Sunday exercises balanced as "emotional and physical work" Gurdjiev's idea of the 3 centres of man can be seen as a basis for this training in "the harmonious development of the human being". We listened to a tape one night of al-Washi speaking in which he described the nervous system as "a blue-point for Being" and the exercises as cleaning out those lines, delineating them more strongly so that Being could move along them and build a real, fully conscious Man into whom Being has extended itself.

The meditations were of course one way to break down pre-conditioned modes of thought and behaviour, and their rather startling unusual forms can be seen as breaking down one's preconditioned attitudes to meditation. They differed from Yoga meditations in that rather than trying not to think or close down the senses, one identified with thinking, or concentrated upon a particular sense.

(continued)

Shakti Training Program III

The meditation exercises seemed to be structured with the intention of breaking down the distinction between meditation and ordinary activity. By focussing on the senses, by using humble incongruous objects (erasers, bowls) and sounds (plumbing, traffic) and ordinary activities like dishwashing, and floor-scrubbing, the implication is that any activity of experience can be approached as a meditation.

The series of exercises show a meaningful progression in terms of Gurdjieff's ~~meaningful progression~~ "harmonious development." First individual senses were trained, then physical work was introduced, followed by mental or thought exercises. The purpose appears to be to train the different "centres" separately before attempting to focus them as a unit in a complete meditation.

The fact that the forms of Shakti meditations are so different from Yoga is certainly due to their different goals. Shakti defines itself as a "Fourth Way School"; this way is the way of service or work in the world. This is a Gurdjieff concept, the other three ways being those of the Fakir, the Monk, and the Yogi, representing in order a specialized development of the Physical, the Emotional and the Mental centres with the aim of leaving the physical world for the spiritual one. Similarly the aim of Yoga is to get through and out of "Maya Samsara" and into Brahman. Lorraine once compared Shakti to Mahayana Buddhism in which "once contact with Spirit has been made the aim is to bring it back down into the physical world. A passage from The Dune Dunces Cap Book, pyramid meditation hat instructions by Sheikh Yassum Dede expresses this idea very well:

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The primary aim of our work is to unify Persona (body-personality) and Being, so that it becomes possible for man to 'do' in a conscious state. For this reason, one should shun out-of-body experiences. Many people want to learn to astral project: my answer to this is that most people are astral projected most of the time, and that is what leads, in large part, to the situation in which mankind finds himself. The first step on the path to the Great Work is for the seeker to learn to operate consciously in the body. Some teachings shun the material body, however you should know that your Persona (body-personality) is a very ~~important~~ necessary and valuable tool for use in developing ~~in~~ consciousness and in doing the Work. In my opinion it is ~~not~~ an act of misunderstanding purpose or pure selfish cowardice to desire to be only re-absorbed into Spirit, as if the ~~Whole~~ Creative Plan were a waste of time and had better never been started. In effect, this sort of desire is opting for sleep rather than meeting your commitment to the Universe consciously.

(Sheikh Yassun Dede).

Consequently the meditation exercises are geared towards developing one's awareness of the physical world, towards refining the senses and bridging the gap between ordinary and "special" or sacred activity.

### Personal Experience of Exercises

Since two hours a week were devoted to meditation, I kept notes on my reactions to these sessions, on the patterns my thoughts followed, on the physical and emotional sensations I experienced. I was interested in meditation as a way of using the mind to explore the mind, and as an empirical means of testing or arriving at "a Blueprint for Being," in al-Waah's words. I was interested in watching for different layers of the mind which I experienced in meditation and attempting to compare the structure & shapes I noticed with various models of the mind or soul I had studied in psychology or religion. Moreover, I assume that much of what I experienced is common to anyone who attempts meditation, so by recording and examining it one can gain a clearer idea of how it affects the subject and how as a group activity it would

affect the relationships of the people in that group. Obviously the following account is from the point of view of a beginner in that art and cannot reflect anything of value concerning the theory or practise of meditation. I took notes after each session for eight weeks and here I have summarized them and included things that occurred most frequently

Notes on Meditation

- I would try to find the perfect position in order to keep still for two hours - the right place for the right cushion, the right cross-legged posture. Inevitably I would shift slightly during the session. Sometimes one foot would go to sleep and I would flex the toes silently so as not to have to straighten out the leg.
- A feeling of security, coziness at the prospect of having the next two hours to myself with no outside interruptions or stimulus.
- Glancing at the other meditators to see how they are doing - Competitive thoughts about being able to sit in lotus longer than any of the men.
- Reprimand myself for not concentrating. Start to wonder what I am really supposed to be doing. What is meditation? How do you know if you are doing it right or not?
- Drift off into daydreams, miscellaneous, disconnected thoughts
- Recalled to present. Try to concentrate on each moment.
- I try out various ways of concentrating - repetition of word; breathing, gazing at an object, focussing on point in the middle of my forehead (these are all techniques I learned from the Sivananda Centre)
- I think " Aren't I good at this! Not allowing a single stray thought to intrude!" - a stray thought! I tell myself to shut up. Even doing that is interfering with concentration. So is worrying about interfering with concentration. These sort of ~~are~~ mental convolutions keep recurring until I get bored & choose a new thought.

- I plan what I will do the rest of the day. What to cook for dinner, what to sew. I look at the people in the room and indulge in sexual fantasies. I relive scenes from my past. This can go on for a long time.
- I wake up and remember where I am and what I'm supposed to be doing. I resolve to meditate more often. I start all over again trying to concentrate. I sing a Bach partita mentally, trying to concentrate on each note. I go off in a stupor, a near sleep. I awake and can't recall what I was thinking about. That period remains blank.
- I decide to live completely in the present to realize that I am alive as intensely as possible. I close <sup>the</sup> my eyes and see light patterns on the lids, like exploding amoebas in neon clouds. I stare at the still center of the exploding kaleidoscope. Opening the eyes I notice similar patterns in the grain of the wood, in the patterns on the floor, in the skin on my hand. Tiny sounds seem mysterious and significant - the plumbing, the traffic, doors slamming, footsteps.
- By this time I usually feel that my body is numb, asleep, immovable, and separate from my mind which is much more quick, real, and alive. The image of a bird perched on a rock often comes up. I decide to try and unite the two by mentally becoming aware of the body. I can feel the strongest sensations in my head and stomach and very little else except some sort of current through the body connecting the finger tips, back and legs.
- Sometimes the thoughts move in a devotional vein. I pray to God, project love towards him, talk to Him in a pleading tone, repeating phrases like "God save me", or "Help me Lord", or "Dear Lord deliver me." This can go on for long periods of time without boredom. Sometimes I find I am swaying from side to side without noticing it - it is strange that I should fall into this kind of mood in a non-Christian, non-devotional environment. I assume it is the influence of my childhood religious education in which I was taught to pray regularly.
- at some point I feel shocked and disgusted at how petty my thoughts are and how inefficiently and erratically my mind functions. Watching my mind meditate is like watching a fat, bald middle-aged man running a race in the Olympics. I resolve to exercise it daily.

- I resolve to keep silent in future and not expose my mind to others.
- When the meditation ends I feel tired like I am getting out of bed in the morning; reluctant to move, grumpy at the prospect of re-entering the world.

### Interpretation

At first glance the above notes might seem to have no more to do with meditation than the daydreams one might have on a bus going to work. The answer to that is that daydreams on a bus can be seen as a diluted form of meditation and that meditation appears to be an acquired taste, rather like smoking pot for the first time; the initiate says "I don't feel a thing" and only after a few times can learn to recognize that peculiar feeling as being what is called "stoned". It is possible that I was really meditating but didn't know it.

Colin Wilson writes on the experience of exploring the mind in his novel The Mind Parasites, and I found his descriptions of the process and its problems, and his model of the layers of the mind useful in interpreting my own experience:

If I sank too deep into my mind, I tended to fall asleep. Language and <sup>reasoning</sup> belong to the realm of the body. It is as difficult to carry them into the depths of one's mind as to carry logical thought into a dream. Those deep caves of the mind are inhabited by memories and dreams, which drift by like great fishes. How to maintain a sense of purpose, to distinguish between reality and illusion at that depth?

He compares the process to deep sea diving in which the intelligence remains wide awake as it descends into the subconscious, like the diver who fights to stay conscious as he descends. This theory could be used to account for the times I blacked out or slept during meditation. He describes five layers of the mind; the conscious intelligence, dreams and memories, the "nursery", a warm, innocent region of life with no images, the emptiness of intellectual space, and below the source or god. This resembles the five layers of the atman described in Hinduism, an onion-like series of astral bodies.



... If I accept his model as an accurate description of the layers of consciousness I experienced, I could interpret my notes as shifting through the first three layers. My conscious mind keeps intruding to make me aware of the present activity, dreams and memories or the distant ones. That seem to take up the major portion of my thoughts, and the third layer is that warm comfortable stupor that I can't remember a particular... Perhaps the correct aim is to plunge rapidly through the second layer so that the conscious mind is still awake when it reaches the third layer. Colin Wilson advises the mind explorer "Bump gently down through dreams and memories, ~~and~~ remain passive, ignore them. Each is capable of expanding and becoming aware of its own." Clinging to a mantra or another concentration device would facilitate this non-identification with the images of the second layer. I could interpret most of the meditation experience recorded in my notes as the struggle of the conscious mind to penetrate beyond this second layer.

### Effects

When I asked the other Shakti students what effect meditation had on them and their lives; Jack replied for him it released tension, gave him an inner peace which helped him teach high school math without getting as harassed as he used to. Ray said it energized her, increased her efficiency in working. Richard's emphasis was that it deepened his religious insights and convictions and helped keep him in touch with that type of consciousness. I personally found it gave me a rest or respite from my everyday involvements and during the time I was involved in meditating, I had a birds-eye view, sort of objective, higher perspective on what I was doing with my life. Very broad questions like "What is Death", and "Why am I here" and "How can I best spend the time I have left" kept flashing through my mind.

It is difficult to say how meditating together affected our social interaction, our relationships with each other. Since the centre discouraged "personal history" and "emotive signals", "masks" (facial expression) and "preconditioned responses", I suppose ~~was~~ were somewhat inhibited, cold and uncommunicative in our interactions. On the other hand there was a strong sense of cooperation. I would always get a lift home from these meetings and sometimes a lift there in bad weather. Also there was a feeling of complicity, of elitism in being a group who met to do very special, unusual, sacred, esoteric work together. Meditating in the same room together, each person is essentially alone, and yet I found my perceptions of the other people were sharper than. Could feel the state of tension in each person. Tiny movements, stomach rumblings, breathing all became magnified. For example when we were doing meditation I was acutely aware through her movements that Ray was feeling uncomfortable and impatient and she left the room in the middle of the exercise. Later during lunch she remarked she felt she was going to scream if she didn't leave. Since our relationships were impersonal and simple, the emphasis was on working together efficiently. The fact that we shared a common goal, common activities and assumed that there were spiritual or psychic ties uniting us that perhaps were not immediately apparent, gave us a feeling of closeness that was unconditional by expectations, hopes or fears and stayed at a constant level, changing very little during the months we worked together. Intrusions of personal data, feelings, anecdotes, were felt to be in rather bad taste since in interference with the purpose specific invitation of our Being, which we were trying to become more aware of.

