

Unit 22

Religious Conversion

Contents

- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Aspects of Religious Conversion
- 22.3 Religion and Conversion
- 22.4 The Contemporary Debate on Conversion
- 22.5 Conversion and the New Age Cults
- 22.6 Conclusion
- 22.7 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should:

- understand the conversion process;
- follow the present day position of conversion;
- know the sociology of the new age cults; and
- analyse the various aspects of conversion.

22.1 Introduction

This unit is about religious conversion, and its various facets or dimensions. It will therefore be appropriate if we look into the shades of meaning that conversion conjures up in our minds. Conversion may be called a process of complete change from one set of religion, rituals and beliefs to another religion and its rituals and beliefs. It is evidently a major change for the convert and has its reverberations on the family and society at large. Conversion of the religious type has been going on since ages past and continues up to the present day. However it is only in contemporary times that religious conversion has become controversial and the general tendency is to try and put an end to conversion, especially conversion of the type in which various types of economic allurements are part of the deal to change or switch to another pattern of beliefs rites, rituals and world view.

Let us look into the meaning of conversion even if we cannot agree on exactly what it is and in fact the area within this conversion process is so great that it would not be possible to give or arrive at a definition that would be equally agreed to by all religions and religious specialists. Let us follow Malony on what the meaning of conversion itself is. This will make it much easier to understand what are the factors involved in it.

Conversion itself is a term with wide ramifications not just religious connotations. It covers the abandonment of one set of beliefs and rituals and transforming oneself to suit and be agreement with another set of beliefs rites and rituals. In the secular sphere however conversion is a concept that could apply to any serious shift of behaviour from one type or another. In fact we may make use of the concept in describing the conversion from one political party to another as the ideologies and activities of each political party is different. They have different beliefs

and ideologies and this means that the political convert has abandoned one set of belief and ritual patterns to another which could be diametrically opposite to that of the political party that has been abandoned. Similarly we can talk of people who have been for years adhering to one type of branded product, maybe a telephone company or a brand of car as converting to another brand when they exhibit this kind of behaviour. Malony cites the example of a long haired beatnik type of person abandoning that type of look with its belief patterns and converting into a well suited short haired person who is loyal to his new company where he or she is employed. Thus while conversion is applied mainly for religious connotations it is actually a general term when applied to many other significant life changes.

One significant strand of thought regarding religious conversions has to do with the convert being subjected to mind control or brainwashing and thereby adopting an entirely different mind set. It is clear that some ideological shift to another set of ideologies is at the basis of many conversions. Yet it has been pointed out that such symptoms such as mind control and brainwashing are done in such a way that it is not obvious and done in a subtle way so that the person who has agreed to convert is hardly aware of it at the moment and may realize it much after the event. Thus a person may later regret his or her decision as soon as it starts becoming obvious to the person who has religiously converted that the new religion is not suiting him or her. By then he or she is already deeply involved in the new situation. Indeed here we may point out that there are various types of convert, ranging from the fully adapted convert to the convert who is still in two minds about his religious conversion. Another type of convert has constant doubts about his new religion and participates in the rituals and learns the beliefs only half heartedly. Yet another type of religious convert is such that even after they have converted to another religion have no capacity to continue in this new path and lapse back into their former religious beliefs. In terms of the mind control thesis we find that the success ratio is something that is very hard to estimate. Unless deep research is done we may find that conversion is further complicated by cases whose brainwashing doesn't sink in very deep and is only superficial. This often results in a relapse back to the former religions or an attempt to learn about the religion of conversion through the concepts of the former religion. There are yet another type of convert who may be called "religion surfers". This set of people are such that they convert from one religion to another, or one cult to another, staying with the new belief patterns and ideologies for a few months or years and then shifting their allegiances to another cult or religion, and go on indefinitely this way. Thus we may note even at this stage that the brainwashing thesis though attractive and even appropriate for some converts doesn't have the capacity to take in all converts because as we noted such propaganda or the teachings of the various religions and converts is not applicable to all the converts as they are of different types and capacities.

Definition of Religion

Our next point is that as Malony points out following Lemert that religion itself can be defined as "people gathered around a transempirical idea". This clearly distinguishes religious conversion from any other kind of conversion although Malony believes that the dynamics of conversion remain the same in all cases of conversion sacred or secular. It has been pointed out that conversion starts when certain questions arise in the mind of the would be convert. Malony talks in terms of various predispositions which start the conversion process. These are as follows below:

- a) the attempt to find answers to the problems and tragedies in life through a religious mode
- b) a feeling of unhappiness and frustration that does not go away by any secular means
- c) the religion that one lives with is not deemed efficacious enough

Maloney feels that such attitudes lead the world be convert to start looking around for other avenues to solve his insecurity and attitudinal problems in terms of another religion or cult. In short a transempirical idea is sought for present day problems of the individual. Such people become very vulnerable to the process of conversion as their present belief systems have collapsed and are not giving them any relief. As such they become a catchment area for those who are looking for members for their cult or religion. Malony cites a most interesting example of how this is done. The religionists and cultists target precisely those people who are already vulnerable and offer them a way out of their dilemma by promising them heaven or swarga if they were to convert to their religion or cult. Insecurity, confusion, and mixed up beliefs lead many people to seek answers from other religions or cults than the one they were born into. Here we may point out that Rambo considers the study of these phenomena as very important because his research shows conversion to be destructively oriented. Again while we have been describing the catchment area of conversion as those people whose world has no meaning and they themselves are floundering in search of support, there are others who are going through a personal crisis in their lives. These people also seek to find the answer to their frustration by changing religions or cults and we pointed out that there are some who “surf” the total available area of religion and converting from one religion to another frequently and not stabilizing in any – such people could also be called “chronic converts”

22.2 Aspects of Religious Conversion

We find therefore that many of those who convert feel that they are in possession knowledge that is extraordinary enough to be labelled as the truth. A successful conversion thus makes a person very confident and there is sometimes a feeling of overconfidence, and an ability to be able to make quick decisions. Rambo is of the view that conversion is very important because it tends to be destructive of family and other groups because it is very hard for other members of the family and group to understand such a step as conversion to another faith or to one of the many cults that have mushroomed over the last two decades.

According to Rambo we may consider conversion to be a kind of disorientation. For example we may consider that if a person belonging to religion A, decides to convert to religion B, then he or she adopts the entire conceptual and ideological baggage of the new religion or the religion to which he or she is now converted. It is disorientation because the person has been reconditioned or reprogrammed to be able to be an active convert of the religion of adoption. We find that such reconditioning, programming, and the attempt at mind control does not seem to work for many converts who begin to feel in limbo. That is to say that they are between two stools and not on either one of them.

In fact such a step has the potential of disturbing not only the family but every group that the convert now moves in. It is hard to understand by the family and the community why anyone would take such a step. Thus we have a division of society as “procultist”, and another section being that of the “anticultists”. The procult lobby is such that they consist of

those people who condone the action of the convert while the anticultists are those that are vehemently opposed to the act of conversion. It is pointed out by Rambo that the fact of the matter is that most people do not convert but stay with their religious grouping. The people then who do convert are those that have conflicts of a serious nature in their life. One such conflict occurs when there are people who are of parentage of two different religions and hence Rambo points out that in such marriages of a mixed type with an inbuilt choice mechanism that the likelihood of seeking to convert to either one of them becomes serious. This conflict of two religions in one marriage creates a conflict situation which has to be resolved by conversion. Nevertheless this considered to be a deviant response. The problem arises in that the society is not able to understand why anyone would like to convert to another religion. It is perplexing to those with whom they interact. Those who are witnesses to a conversion may sometimes be shocked at the change in the person who has converted. He or she bears a different personality and in many cases where proselytization is an aspect of conversion they cannot believe in the outlandish ideologies of the group to which a person or persons known to them have converted. This is one of the facts that makes the convert even more determined to pursue his or her new religion with a greater sense of commitment than ever before. Everything that a convert does is put under the scanner by family and society who is interested in pulling him back to the religion and grouping that he or she once belonged to. The fact of proselytizing cults are especially vehement that their teachings be propagated and that an important part of the converts activities includes attracting new recruits for their movement. Apart from this the various types of dress hairstyles clothes and conversation all make the convert an obvious part of the community. The anticultists insist that the convert has been brainwashed and his mind has been reprogrammed in a different way. They see such converted people as a threat to the social fabric of the family, community, and society at large and such people are naturally against anyone taking any such step and managing to be an integral part of the wider religious community.

Box 22.1 Responses to Conversion

So it is clear then that conversion is a complex issue. We find that the expectations from the convert vary with the group that he is interacting with. One type of expectation is that the change will be of attitudes, that is mainly intellectual and cognitive. They do not expect that the behaviour will undergo too many changes or transformations. In other types of groups the expectations will be largely one of the emotions. Yet another type of response to conversion in terms of expectations is that the converts will become involved with various type of ritual behaviour which may even be kept secret from the outside society.

Responses to Conversion

There are then many types of expectations and responses to conversion and there is no stereotypical response and there is no stereotypical convert. They remain individuals with a different mind set which has to be reinforced throughout their life with religious meetings, reading the books of the religion or cult converted to. As such the reconditioning of the convert continues to be reinforced by various belief patterns, rituals, discourses and sacred activities and duties. The situation becomes even more complex if the rituals of the new religion or cult demand setting aside a period of time for such esoteric practices such as meditation. That is to say a period or periods of the day when they have to set aside and cut themselves off from friend and family. Such a behaviour, where it is context specific may well be understood but when it is practiced on a daily basis supported

by esoteric arguments and beliefs, but in an alien context where the practice of meditation may mean something else it is bound to attract skeptical attention.

Rambo feels that despite a formal conversion the problem remains stable to a large extent until the practices like meditation or chants are practiced. Thus it is not only a question of the ideology of a cult or religious movement, but also the practices that are involved in them. It is only when they begin to practice the rituals that the beliefs will become ingrained and active in the persons life. However there is hardly any way to standardize expectations and responses apart from the types of response that we have mentioned above. However, this too is debated and some social scientists believe that belief is necessary and an inseparable adjunct to practice. In putting belief or practice in a sequence we may be making a mistake that has to be checked out for each convert. There is also the problem of how seriously the convert takes his new cult or religion and how fast he or she becomes alienated from it. The level and degree of sincerity are also a question that must be addressed here because it is only too clear that just as there are many approaches to a religion the degree of commitment to the new cult or religion also varies and we do not have any particular picture of a convert with which to set up a standard.

Rambo mentions that recent studies are now clearly pointing to the fact that the people who convert to another religion or to some cult are not victims of brainwashing or propaganda and are not victims in any sense of the word. Rather they want to get converted to the new religion and actively seek out opportunities to do so. We will examine the brainwashing thesis of conversion in another section and then examine it in further detail, but what is important here is that while the brainwashing thesis of conversion is an attractive tool with which to deal with the facts on hand it has a number of drawbacks and thinks in terms of victims to exotic and esoteric cults and religions. This as we have pointed out is not really the whole truth. However more on this later.

As regards why people convert this is due to many different motivations. This is because they feel it will enhance their self esteem and give them a more influential base from which to interact. Rambo says that there is no single motivation but the idea is to enhance pleasure and reduce pain. Sociologically speaking the convert as we pointed out is in a conflict situation. He or she may not feel "at home" in the society in which they are placed and therefore try to connect with it in such a manner that prestige and status are enhanced. There are different ways in which a convert is attracted to a new religion and cult and therefore some people are attracted by the conceptual systems, that is attracted intellectually while others may have a passionate feeling about conversion and so they approach it through the emotions. The fact of the matter is that different religions and different cults target those people who would be open to their suggestions in such a manner that to attract them is much easier. Consider a person who has just had a deep bereavement or has been recently divorced or lost a well paying job. The systems dominant religions are then spread out before him to take succour if the religion he or she is born into is not satisfying his or her cognitive expectations. The motivation then behind all other motivations is to find meaning in life which has been lost due to some unfortunate turn of events. In such an eventuality we find that a person is open to change. However here we enter into another caveat, and this is that of the "lost sheep", people who would convert to another religion many a time do not settle down with that religion or cult but go hunting for ever newer and more esoteric cults in search for the "lost Paradise". There is thus an element of dissonance in such cases.

Box 22.2 Ethics and Conversion

The ethicality of conversion is yet another area of concern. Is it right to convert to another cult? Is not the convert committing as apostasy by abandoning his parent religion and moving on to another religion or cult? The question that then remains to be asked is whether the people who convert gain anything substantial by doing so?

Four Sets of Variables

According to Rambo there are four sets of variables that occur when a person converts to another belief and practice system. These are as follows below:

- a) Sociologists agree that the convert is heavily influenced in his decision to convert by his community and his peer group the people that he meets with often and whose opinions he respects greatly. These friendship circles of kith and kin have a very deep bearing on his decision to convert. Thus the conversion comes about through contacts that are personal and only secondarily through written communication or impersonal propaganda.
- b) Further we find that the groups to which a person can convert are very clear that the convert has to establish a close relationship with their leader and meet as often as possible with other members of that group who have converted sometime earlier than him. This is one of the most important tenets of these groups because in a situation where the convert has gone into a minority religion or cult there is need for constant reconditioning and reprogramming which only other members of the sect or cult will be able to provide him. Thus conversion is a fragile process and the new belief patterns are to be reinforced by the discourses of the leader and all doubts and hesitations are sought to be cleared by the leader himself or one of his close representatives.
- c) Thirdly the overall world view of the convert changes or begins to change. This as Victor Turner has noted is done by the means of rituals specific to the new religion or cult. In fact such rituals provide the basis for strengthening beliefs, and confirming the convert in his new religion.
- d) Finally the role perception of the convert undergoes a change, and they are able to perceive in a different manner, and therefore their behaviour changes. Some may become very passionate about the conversion and even seek to work wholtime for the organization, donate money to it and so on.

Reflection and Action 22.1

Interact with some of your neighbours and find out why they are pro or anti conversion. Put your findings on paper.

We may then say according to what we have written so far that there are three major types of people so far as religious conversion are concerned. They are:

- a) People with a positive attitude towards religious conversion. It is from this catchment area that most people convert for many reasons including dissatisfaction with their own religion and thereby with a lookout for any other form of ideology which would suit them. Such individuals are open to suggestion and are vulnerable to the proselitization campaigns of other religions or cults.

- b) People with a neutral attitude towards religious conversion. Such people are well entrenched in the religion of their birth. They do not see any reason to change and cannot understand why people want to change their religion whether it be to one of the major religions or a new age cult. Either way the topic does not interest them very much and they are neither pro or anti religious conversion. In short they have a tolerant attitude towards the freedom to exercise choice of religion. However such individuals do not want to get involved in the issue at all.
- c) People who are totally against conversion and feel that conversion is a conditioning process which the convert has to imbibe and internalize. Such people are those that evaluate and criticize conversions to other religions and cults. other than the religion of birth.

It should be clear by now that conversion is a complex and complicated phenomena which is capable of disturbing the life of the family and community. Let us then see some of the dynamics involved with religion and conversion.

22.3 Religion and Conversion

Before proceeding further let us clarify what we mean by a convert and what we mean by proselyte. These are two useful terms which will help us conceptualize the issue of religious conversion much better. A convert is a person who has adopted the beliefs and rituals of another religion or cult and owes allegiance to them and the umbrella religion or cult. On the other hand proselyte is term used for a person who has wholly absorbed the ideology and rituals of another, to him “new” religion.

Let us then see the position of some religions on the possibility and the dynamics of such religious conversion as we have been discussing. Let us first see what it is to convert to Judaism. On examination we find that the law of the Jews lays down precise guidelines for conversion to it. The process of such conversion is known as “giur”. The guidelines to conversion state first of all that the conversion to the Jewish religion must follow a change of heart and not be so for pecuniary and political gains. Such conversion is then initiated by a faith flowering in the direction of the religion to be embraced. That is conversion is to be sought without thinking of gains of any kind. A convert to Judaism has to undergo a ritual circumcision, and commits himself to be obedient to the 613 commandments and the laws of the religion. Also in Judaism there is no room for conflicting ideologies and the convert must totally abandon his previous beliefs and rituals. Further the “mikvah” or the ritual immersion in a pool of water has to be undertaken. The convert also leaves his old name and identity behind and takes on a Jewish name to signify the break with the past religion. He or she is now considered to be in the new family and is a son or daughter of the patriarch Abraham.

Differences in Conversion Procedure

Now let us see what are the differences between the Jewish and the Christian viewpoint on the conversion process. Judaism is in fact an entire culture and not just a religion. The Hebrew Bible is lenient towards the process of conversion and the convert is given special attention so that he can fit into the new lifestyle of the Jews and is helped overcome the feeling that he or she is a stranger. They have to be taught the new ways of behaving and comporting themselves. It is also a fact that since 300 CE Judaism stopped encouraging or welcoming converts to Judaism. We see then that in Orthodox and Conservative Judaism and those that still

conform are expected to conform to the rigours of Jewish religion. For example the Tanach or Hebrew Bible covers the history of the Jewish people in terms of their commitment to God. Judaism is more than a religion as it touches all aspects of the Jewish Civilization.

Christianity considers itself to be universal and this creates a fissure between itself and the Jewish religion. As a claim to universality we find that Christianity has to keep in mind its relations with other religions and cults. Christians believe that Christianity is an outcome of God's promise to Abraham as also to Israel, which would be a "blessing" to the nations of the world. This leads to further areas of exploration and has several implications. For the Jews the convert is basically adopted by the religion and the Jewish civilization but in Christianity the process of conversion is based on faith in the new religion of one's adoption. However there is an overlap here because like in Christianity in Judaism also the faith component is very clear, and has a social component in that the convert attends Christian churches and such other conglomerations from time to time.

Box 22.3 Conversion to Christianity

What are the requirements for conversion to Christianity? In fact proselytization has been an intrinsic part of the Christian religion and Christians have since time immemorial not only accepted converts but is actually active in seeking them out. With its claim to universality Christianity has it as part of its charter to convert the entire world into Christians. Thus in the New Testament, Jesus commanded the Christians to go out to all parts of the world and convert them to Christianity. Thus evangelism has been part of Christianity since Christ's time itself. Here we find that according to the Christian faith that conversion is an act of God. No matter what is the type of evangelism it cannot make the holy spirit descend on a person who wants to convert until the grace of God that makes this a reality.

In the biblical times the disciples of Christ all were Jews. Christ even performed miracles for those not in their religion without their being converted in Christianity. In the early times of the Church there were many rules and regulations that the convert had to observe. Thus the Christian Baptism which requires dipping into water is similar to the Jewish requirement of a convert to dip into water which was the act when a "new" spirit descended into the convert. Christianity and Islam are both active in the field of preaching their faith and actively seeking converts to their religion.

We find that in the case of conversion to Islam, that the conversion to it is simple if one sincerely believes that Allah is the only God and that Muhammad is his messenger. If this shahada is taken the person may be considered a Muslim. The new convert then has to familiarise himself with the beliefs, ideologies and rituals of Islam bit by bit to whatever extent the convert can do so.

Let us dwell now on conversion to the religions of the Asian subcontinent. Here the first fact to notice is that Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism do not preach but nevertheless allow people to join their fold in order to gain more members. The feeling in these religions is that all paths lead to the same truth. Here it is very important to note that these religions even allow a person to be multi religious. In Japan which is a Buddhist nation it is possible to follow both Buddhism and Shinto. In India there are some people who claim to be both Hindu and Buddhist, or both Hindu and Sikh. Such an attitude makes conversion unnecessary. But this does not apply to Soka Gakki and ISKCON.

This brings us to an observation of how conversion works in the new religious movements and cults. These are in many ways the area of conversion and are also very active in preaching their faith and attracting members or adherents. This is also an area which is very controversial. Thus those with an anticult attitude tend to criticize these movements and even use strong words like thought reform or brainwashing of a potential convert until she or he is convinced totally that he or she is converting in his or her own interests. There are definite procedures of conversion but they are not made public and the converts are asked to keep the esoteric exercise and rituals a close secret. As such though we know that new age religions and cults do seek converts we cannot tell everything that a convert undergoes to be accepted. What we mean to say is that new age cults initiate their members to meditational and other activities of which the exact procedures to be followed are not revealed to the public at large. We may then say that conversion to new age cults is possible once their ideology and belief patterns have become internalized by the aspiring members. We also find that research has shown that where there is a lukewarm involvement in mainstream religion, the cults become active and the catchment area for converts is much higher. Interestingly we find that in the USA a disproportionately high number of converts to new religious movements are of Jewish origin.

In contrast to our arguments above we find that there are certain religions like the Yasidis and Zoroastrians do not believe in accepting any converts. The only way to acquire identity of these and such religions is by ascription that is to be born into them. On the other hand we also find that cults like the Shakers groups do not allow procreation so all their members have to be converts.

Proselytism

A word here about proselytism would be in order. Proselytism is the effort to change the beliefs and actions of a person in order to change his religious point of view. Christians especially are active in proselytisation of potential converts and the Bible has given explicit permission, indeed a directive to do so. Thus in the Bible Jesus says "Go to all the Nations and make disciples. Baptise them and teach them my commands". This is also known as the Great Commission of Jesus.

We find that the views of people, groups and communities differ on the activities that come under proselytisation and evangelism. One view is that proselytisation and evangelism are part of the freedom of speech, and it is a justifiable activity. The other point of view is that such activities are harmful and derogatory and since they are a nuisance they should be disallowed. However if we consider this situation dispassionately we realize that there are several aspects to this conglomeration. These are:

- a) There should be freedom to change religion not just once but several times if the potential converts choose to do so. In such a freedom of religion the would be convert is not under any pressure to convert except by taking his own stand on the issues concerned;
- b) There should be freedom of association and all people must feel free to have religious inclinations and form a cult if they so desire. In fact it is this freedom of association which has led to the mushrooming of new and old cults;
- c) Further we have the freedom of speech caveat which allows people from new age cults to talk to others about their experiences and so be able to reach out and convert people to their beliefs and lifestyle.

Keeping these rights in mind it is clear to see that new age religious movements are here to stay and even strengthen and broaden their base. The very foundations of the conversion process are built into our modern society which has great stress and strain, and where often people lapse into meaninglessness by just following a mechanical routine which takes them from office to the home and back to the office. Thus it is also very clear that converts are intending to lead a meaningful and happy life and will not let anything stand in the way so far as their conversion processes are concerned.

Yet it can be argued that the very rights that we have been mentioning are a double edged sword, for my freedom cannot come in the way of your convenience or try to destroy the other person's belief system. As such there is little room for coercion and force in conversions, or to try and bait them by means of pecuniary benefits, health benefits and so on. Again there is the question of the "captive audience", which can be made to listen to any kind of evangelism and cannot avoid it. This happens in the case of the army or the classroom which should not be made an area to propagate one's views to those people who are then forced to listen.

Box 22.4 Conversion Controversy

Let us before going further recapitulate the facts that we have set before you. The question of religious conversion looms large before every religion. Some religions are very strict about conversion to the extent that their members are commanded to make new converts and much of the missionary work all around the world is based on this premise itself. Then there are religions or new religious movements which require converts to keep floating. We gave the example of the shakers who do not allow their followers to procreate and are thus entirely dependent on the conversion mode to stay afloat. There are furthermore religions in which conversion is a matter of choice and one can be a believer in more than one religion. Thus conversion remains a controversial area of endeavour and we shall see in the next section some reports that indicate that the controversy has far from died down and is at the centre of religious debates across the religions.

In Hinduism conversion is understood in a different way and is closely linked to the notion of karma – which is to say that those who convert have past birth tendency to do so. One can be a mainstream Hindu and yet at the same time believe in a cult and be a practicing member of it. In the following units you will notice that being a member of any cult is not regarded as an offence, and in fact many of these cults have been spreading a form of Hinduism itself all around the world. Thus there is a vast gap between the Hindu and the Christian viewpoint so far as conversion is concerned. In the case of Hinduism the member is born into the religion and there can be no converted Hindus. However in fact certain mass conversions to Buddhism have been advertised for the Dalits and others in India which are then followed by reconversion back into mainstream religion. That is many new religious movements do not pose a threat to mainstream religion and are in part a reinforcing mechanism. Thus for a Hindu it is easier to choose some new religious movement and not be in conflict because the basic ideology of karma, dharma and artha, do not come into conflict with the mainstream religion on which the cult does its own interpretations and reconditions the person to believe in the esoteric side of religion which is not evident at first sight in any religion. A case can be made out that the cults from India are in fact various takes of the mainstream religion and its text. Moreover it would also be very difficult to conceive of Bhagavad Gita, Vedas and so on as belonging to any specific cult, even though they may try to appropriate it for themselves and their members.

22.4 The Contemporary Debate on Conversion

We have been pointing out various facts about conversion till now but it may be pointed out that we should not miss the point that conversion to other religions is very controversial. Thus conversion to another religion by Hindus en masse is deemed to be very threatening. It is to this we now turn after providing an example of attitudes towards conversion in the Asian subcontinent.

Sri Lanka has expressed the interest that it would like to follow the Tamil Nadu Government which has passed an anti conversion legislation. The government of Sri Lanka is trying to pass a law to take punitive action on those who are attempting to convert people with various types of force or inducements. Indeed this is a very serious matter for to force a conversion with inducements is ethically wrong. In India itself religious conversion is a controversial process. When looked into superficially we may say that to change one's religion is a fundamental right. The argument goes further and argues that conversion to another religion is the only solution for the poor or dalits of India. It is mooted as the only way in which the dalits can join in the mainstream of the Indian nation. However this is a moot argument and there is no definite evidence that conversion is the answer to the plight of the dalits.

Anti conversion Laws

On the other hand while there is pressure for anti conversion laws many religious leaders have been talking of scrapping any proposed anti conversion law. Thus many Christian, Hindu and Muslim religious leaders have gone on record saying that it is a human rights issue. They presented a memorandum to the President of India saying that anti conversion legislation is wholly in opposition to 'freedom of faith' that is guaranteed against the secular Constitution of India, and is also against the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Turning once again to Sri Lanka we find that it is very serious about enacting an anti conversion bill into the parliament. The response to this move by international funding agencies such as the Becket fund was that if such a legislation went through and became law they would cut off tsunami related aid to the country. This is understandably so because the bill proposes up to seven years imprisonment to anyone found trying to convert people to another religion than the one he or she already has allegiance to. Becket Fund authorities have pointed out that such legislations would put gravely in danger any 'faith based' aid and relief at a point in time when it was gravely needed. In the case of Sri Lanka the Constitution does not guarantee any fundamental right to propagate a religion, and if such activities were taken up the conversions to Christianity would cause grave damage to Buddhism which is the dominant religion in Sri Lanka.

Box 22.5 Ban on Religions Conversion

Similar concerns in India about Hinduism have been expressed by different quarters. In another case in Rajasthan the Rajasthan government wants to ban religious conversion. This stand became very clear following a Christian Mission's Meeting in Kota which is 155 miles from the state capital Jaipur. The foreign delegates were informed and warned that their visas did not permit them to join this gathering. On the other hand the Christian mission alleged that some of their members had been physically assaulted. The Hindu activists alleged that the Convention was being used as a cover for inducing religion conversions. They set up roadblocks on the way to Kota to

prevent the delegates from reaching their destination. It was pointed out by the Hindu activists that over 60 foreigners were at the Kota convention and they did not have the visa permit to be there. A day later Hindu activists had to be dispersed when they tried to prevent people entering the premises where the Convention was to be held. The emphasis as always was that the activists would not allow any poor and illiterate people from being converted. This example shows that religious conversion is a very seriously emotive issue as it involves abandoning one religion and joining another.

Some writers like Parmeshwaran have questioned the very morality of conversion so far as India is concerned. His fear is that Hindus, mainly illiterate and poor are being targetted by the Christian missionaries and being offered to convert to Christianity. What is more the missionaries are offering monetary and job inducements for making the converts. This is further no secret and the Christian missionaries have already spelled out their plans for conversion in the subcontinent. Thus Parameshwaran points out that this 'manifesto' of conversion is a basic policy so far as the Christian churches are concerned. The Christian churches have what is a common platform in evangelisation of the east. The agenda is to Christianize the entire world.

Tribals in India

It is occasionally pointed out that most tribals in India are neither Hindu nor Christians and therefore they have the right to choose their religion. However the idea of 'buying' people by offering them various economic and job allurements is indeed a debatable procedure. Further the idea that the tribal population by large is not Hindu is controverted by the fact that tribals have been worshipping Hindu deities from the Hindu pantheon. The north east of India has received special attention from the missionaries and they have been very successful in that not only has the population taken up Christianity as beginners or acolytes but they have themselves produced a large number of missionaries. This is entirely in line with what is successful conversion, that is not only does a region convert to Christianity but they take to it with such enthusiasm that they themselves now want to convert others to their adopted religion.

We now turn to the final section of our unit and examine the 'brainwashing' thesis with regard to the new age cults, which though allied to the Hindu religion are in fact variations of the same with greater stress on activities like meditation. No doubt they too seek disciples and converts but the impact on the overall social fabric tends to be peaceful and even overall ameliorating to the rest of society.

22.5 Conversion and the New Age Cults

As we have noted earlier there are at least two points of view so far as cults in the new age are concerned. One is a positive or pro cult viewpoint, while the other is the anti cult viewpoint. In this section we are going to present and analyse one of the major anti cult theories which is also known as the 'brainwashing thesis' so far as cults are concerned. It is held by the votaries of the brainwashing thesis that cults and their members are involved in putting propaganda in the minds of susceptible individuals and thereby making them convert and become active members of that cult. In short the accusation is that cults exercise mind control over their members and that most converts have been made to see the cults point of view, which in turn renders them totally under the control of the leadership of the cult. In other words conversion into cults is involuntary and the cult membership is comprised of membership which has behavioural

and attitudinal changes induced using persuasion and propaganda. Such converts exhibit a reduction in autonomous behaviour and the assumption of a new identity based upon their new mind set. They also tend to show a dependency syndrome on the leadership of the cult and cult members. Some sociologists have asserted that this is very deleterious, and that 'psychospiritual' aspects of conversion, leads to a cult member to become mentally somewhat deficient and as a result not being able to concentrate or make independent decisions about his or her life. The indoctrination mechanisms are so strong that the new disciples show total commitment to their new group of allegiance.

Action and Reflection 22.2

Talk to some people who have changed their religion and note down why they converted.

This is also known as the extrinsic model of conversion, and it alleges that the disciples, acolytes and recruits are literally coerced into total allegiance to the cult's leader or leaders. The extrinsic model of conversion has several features basic to it and it is to this aspect that we now turn. To begin with Anthony and Robbins point out that the disciples are wholly in the power of the cult, and there is no question of the exercise of one's own decisions. This as we have noted is deleterious in itself as it makes inroads into the mind of the member and forces him to think along the lines of the cult ideology. Next is the extrinsic models total negation of the argument that there may be converts who were self motivated and joined the cult on their own motivation without any additional input from the cults propaganda machine. In other words this model indicates that there is no such thing as voluntary conversion into a cult. This is in fact taking an extreme stand on the issue of conversion because of all the members of a cult in the new age we find that there are surely a good percentage of converts who wanted to convert and the new conditioning was itself welcomed by them. That is to say they invited the cult philosophy to enter their mind in full cooperation to change their allegiances from their previous religious committment to that of the cult that they have joined.

Extrinsic Model

Next the extrinsic model goes on to state that hypnosis and trance states are induced so that the would be convert becomes hyper suggestible and is easily able to adjust his or her viewpoint to fit that of the cult. Such hypnotic trances, the extrinsic model urges have severe consequences for the personality of the new convert and those who are already established part of the cult. These processes are allied with any other process which could be used to subjugate the member and to wholly set aside any notion of free will. This is especially so in the new age cults where it is the leadership of the cult which decides everything for the cult membership. The leader or teacher cannot have his decisions questioned or challenged and in the overall monarch or patriarch who takes care of the members desires and guides them through their difficulties and confusions for their own good. Part of the conditioning of the new age cults is that the teacher or guru is a wholly enlightened being and has direct access to the supernatural and is the sole route to salvation from suffering. Thus to posit a man or woman as the route to godhead or nirvana is itself a questionable attitude, but it is at the very basis of the other beliefs. Thus the first commitment that a convert makes is to regard the cult teacher as the primary influence in his or her life. There is no other person who has such exalted status in the life of a devotee than his or her spiritual teacher and his position is even higher than God whom he is in

direct touch with. As such this type of central attitude around which the entire cultic philosophy revolves can and has led to broken marriages and broken homes since the entire hierarchy of the converts social life is made mono minded in the centre of which stands the image of the guru.

Further the model explains that the very process of intellection is impaired by this type of extreme indoctrination where the guru or spiritual teacher is the most important person in a devotees life. The normal way of thinking is thus subverted in a convert and he is unable to give up the crutch of the guru even though he is usually a distant figure to seen at discourses. One of the ploys that cult members use while indoctrination or brainwashing is that the teacher is available for consultations or removing doubts of a spiritual kind from the mind of a confused member. Over time the cult member realizes that he is only a cog in the propaganda machine and he is supposed to help in bringing more members into the fold alone. The guru is a distant figure who hardly knows even the names of those who are in the outer circle of the movement. Coupled with exotic customs and behaviour patterns these cults have their members even touching their foreheads on the feet of the teacher to show respect and allegiance to the movement. The process of intellection is thus twisted beyond recognition for those individual members who happen not to belong to a culture where such touching of feet of the patriarch and others is mandatory. The fact that these cultists follow such practices itself indicates that they have lost their free will and the power to think rationally. All explanations are subsumed to have been taken with the 'grace' of the guru and the whole idea in fact is to lay down or surrender one's entire life in the service of the guru or leader. Thus the cult members form in fact a kind of cadre which takes commands from above and has no rights but only obligations towards the leader and the other members.

The extrinsic model also indicates that this process of indoctrination ends up putting wrong ideas in the mind of their members who pose to be the chosen ones of the Lord and are destined for quick salvation unlike the people who are not part of their group. The point is that this is not done just at the occasion of indoctrination for membership but continues as and when members meet each other or gather together to hear discourses or discuss them. We can then say that indoctrination into cults is a lifelong procedure and continues from before the time the person was made to convert up until the very end of his or her association with the group.

Box 22.6 Conversion and Identity

Most importantly we find that the member's identity undergoes a change towards a cultic identity and moves away from what was his or her original or authentic identity. This last is a very strong indictment of the cult philosophy, which is that it destroys a persons very identity and makes him or her undergo a personality change which may not fit in with the home or work environment. There are many fallouts of such identity change and have led to many marital breakdowns and many a time in cult violence. This type of indoctrination and brainwashing thus damages the original personality of the member and tries to give him a new cultic self in which the whole way of thinking is skewed towards praising the leadership and organisation. The original self with its importance to family and relatives and friends is pushed over and there have been cases where those who were not able to properly make the transition to the new cultic self have actually gone mental, or shifted their allegiance to yet another cult where they feel they might fit in better.

How far can we go with this model of cultic conversion? Is this position wholly or partly correct? That is to say does a convert into a cult actually lose his mind or does he find his true identity in his role of disciple of the cult he has joined? It will be quite clear in the units that follow that each cult has its ideology and is in competition with many others at the same time. We will notice in these units that the brainwashing model does not apply to most members of the cults we have chosen to present in the units that follow. However the brainwashing argument though it cannot be taken too far has the germs of a critique of all authority since it is very clear that to belong to any organization or cult is a matter of acquiring the culture and the way of living and thinking that is prevalent. Further to posit that all converts are brainwashed is taking the argument too far as there are many confused people in the world who seek solace through one or the other of the cult philosophies. In such people there is no original self and it is easy for them to acquire a cultic personality entirely through their own efforts at meditation or chanting, yoga, sufism, and so on. So if there ever was an authentic self it would not get influenced by the ideology of a cult. It is only because most people and especially young people are in search of an authentic self that they venture into cultic areas. In this they are not always successful but some of them definitely do integrate into the thought support systems of the cults. It also gives them a father or mother figure to admire. It is surprising however that many a time the programming does not suit an individual or it is felt that the new area of cultic exploration may in fact be detrimental, and so they dissociate from the cult or do not go all the way in their convictions of the professed divinity of the leader of the cult.

22.6 Conclusion

We have seen in this unit that conversion to another religion or conversion into a cult is an area where there are many different viewpoints, even negative ones. However we need to distinguish the type of cult we are dealing with, and certainly there have been dangerous cults in the past and some of them continue to persist. Thus those cults that espouse violence as a way of life (or death) are obviously not beneficial to the social body. There are cults however that professes love, non violence, peace, tranquility and so on and have benign meditative procedures and respect shown to the teacher. Such cults it can be argued are all about providing meaning into the life of people who feel that they no longer have a mooring in their religion or that it is too large and impersonal. Such people find the benign cults (as against the malignant cults) to be a boon to them otherwise they would have nowhere to turn. In short far from being threatening the benign cults of which we will be presenting four in the forthcoming units, form a catchment area for those who would like to become more serious about their religious quest and go in for popular activities such as meditation and yoga and have a haven to retreat into. Moreover, the converts too are of different types, and those that are simply drifting or surfing cults soon drop out. Cults provide a very colourful part of religious endeavour and provide an opportunity for spiritual growth, and are instrumental in making people adjust not only to themselves but to the encapsulating society. As such no blanket statements can be made about cults as a whole and without doubt there are cults which have helped millions of people and will continue to do so. However we have already pointed out that we must separate with given criteria, the benign from the malignant cults and the serious cult members from those who are on the sidelines of the movement. There is no necessary seriality between joining a benign cult which is good both for the members and the encapsulating society, and mental breakdown, or loss of identity. It is only the malignant cults which have given the cults a questionable

status with some academics, but as a whole the benign cults are in fact an intrinsic part of the world social fabric and are here to grow and to stay. With this unit on religious conversion we invite you to the next four units of this block, which deal with benign cults that are doing a lot of good in the world, both North and South.

22.7 Further Reading

Dawson, Lorne 1988. *Comprehending Cults: The Sociology of New Religious Movements*. Toronto. Oxford.

Robbins , Thomas and Susan Palmer, eds. 1997. *Millenium, Messiahs and Mayhem*. New York. Routeledge.

Snow, David and Robert Machalek. 1984. "The Sociology of Conversion". *Annual Review of Sociology* 10:167-190.

References

Religious Conversion in www.grohol.com/wiki/Religious_conversion

Religious Conversion at [//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_conversion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_conversion)

Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins at www.censur.org/2003/brain_conv.htm, "Conversion and 'Brainwashing' in New Religious Movements"

Narayan Bareth, *State to Bar Religious Conversion* at

[//news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/South_asia/4290843.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/South_asia/4290843.stm)

Newton Henry Malony, "The Psychology of Religious Conversion" at

www.religiousfreedom.com/Conference/japan/Malony.htm

Parmeshwaran, P., *Religious Conversion – Is it Moral?* At

www.vigilonline.com/records/meetings/relconversion.asp

Rambo Lewis, *The Psychology of Religious Conversion* at www.religiousfreedom.com/conference/Germany/rambo.htm.

Unit 23

Transcendental Meditation

Contents

- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 The World Plan for TM
- 23.3 TM and Religion
- 23.4 The Practice of TM
- 23.5 TM and Scientific Validation
- 23.6 Maharishi on Enlightenment
- 23.7 TM and Natural Law
- 23.8 Maharishi's Writings on TM
- 23.9 Benefits of TM
- 23.10 Conclusion
- 23.11 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this Unit you should be able to:

- outline the world plan for TM;
- describe the relation between TM and religion;
- understand TM and scientific validation;
- define enlightenment and Natural Law;
- list some of Maharishi's writings on TM; and
- provide the various benefits accruing from the regular practice of TM.

23.1 Introduction

Transcendental Meditation is more popularly referred to as TM and is a form of meditation that has been taught and popularized by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. TM practitioners claim it to be of great benefit to them in every way physical or mental. It is described as a natural easy to practice type of meditation. TM it is believed has cumulative benefits and the greater the duration that the practitioner has meditated over the years the greater are the benefits to the individual and society. The origin of the TM Movement began in 1957 when at the end of a festival of spiritual luminaries to celebrate Sankaracharya Brahmanand Sarasvati, The Maharishi his foremost disciple announced and inaugurated a movement to regenerate and reinaugurate spirituality and spiritual accession the world. This may be considered to be the formal beginnings of TM. When the movement began in 1957 we find that the Maharishi underlined the religious aspects of TM. At first TM was subsumed under an organization called "Spiritual Regeneration Movement". This was however, was felt to be too loaded spiritually for a good foray into meditation. The need of the western environment was not that of another eastern ideology concerned with religion. What was required was a system of meditation that was secular in approach and skirted the question of religion and religious values to

some extent. This was because the 70's were a liberal decade in which the world-ethos was value –neutral so far as religion is concerned and the Maharishi did not want TM to be seen as a Eastern transplant onto western culture. He then began to focus on the scientific approach to meditation making it available and accessible to laboratory testing so far as, its efficacy was concerned. The idea in doing this was to show “theoretical parallels” with his ideology and also practical verification of the phenomena of TM. What was going to be verified was in fact the effect of TM on various stress related problems and increase in interactional skills.

23.2 The World Plan for TM

In the 70's itself Maharishi put forward that he called “The World plan” in which the idea was to have a TM centre for each million of the world population. In the early 1970's this proposal would mean that there should be at least 3,600 TM centres to be able to cater to the world population. This plan did take off but ultimately it was not very effective in terms of numbers. Further several of the TM centres that were opened did not remain functional beyond a certain point of time. In the contemporary world we find that TM centres exist all around the globe and it is estimated that over 5 million people have learned the technique. Further, since 1990 Maharishi has made Holland the area from which he coordinates his global programmes.

TM itself is to be practiced for two twenty minute sessions once in the morning and once in the evening while sitting with eyes closed. The TM technique has been described as comprising the “silent mental repetition” of a Sanskrit sound called a mantra. The mantra has to be repeated silently in the mind until the mind becomes more and more quiet. Only consciousness and the absence of thought define this meditative state.

This is the aim of the state of meditation and is called pure consciousness or Samadhi. Not only does the mind settle down and mental activity recede but it also has a profound impact upon the physical metabolism itself making it move into a very relaxed mode of being in consciousness. That is the body “settles” into deep relaxation. The tension from the body is released and then after a period of rest thoughts return to the body. This is known as the “outward stroke” of meditation. Following this stress releasing stroke the “inward stroke” starts again. This cycle is continued for the duration of the 20 minute meditation and is repeated many times. In other words, the mantra is used to silence the mind focusing on the inward breath and the outgoing breath while silently repeating the mantra. This causes the mind and the body to become very quiet and still and to reach a state of deep rest that is superconsciousness. The meditation has remarkable effects on the meditators as we shall see when we talk of the effects of TM. It has been proved by scientific laboratory tests that the TM form of meditation is scientifically valid. In the language of TM stress is described as “structural or material impurities resulting from overload on the physiology”, which is psychosomatic- that is it involves both body and mind. The philosophy behind this is that total purification of the physiological is possible and that this leads to enlightenment itself. This needs a few words to explain and we will do so for the learner. Through the yoga of the body, which involves physical postures (Hathya yoga) it is possible to cleanse the body of impurities. Yet again through the meditation of mind or Rajya yoga it is possible to purify the mind. It is only when the body and mind are both purified that does it become possible to gain a state of enlightenment. In the case of TM both the positive and cleansing effects of Rajya and Hathya yoga are realised and a psychosomatic distressing and rejuvenation of mind is realised.

One of the central features of TM is the mantra itself. Mantra is a pattern of sound that has a particular resonant vibrant strong quality which can be and has been traditionally used. Thus, mantra becomes very important in the case of meditation since it must be a sound, that too a traditional sound that creates strength and goodness in the meditation. The TM practitioners however, simply maintain that mantras comprise meaningless sounds. These sounds which may or may not have a specific meaning outside a context are chosen especially for each and every meditator so that they may have beneficial effect upon the meditator. The TM mantras are chosen especially to have a soothing effect upon the nervous system of the meditator. In the entire list of mantras that have been used for meditators it was found that each mantra is the name of a Hindu god. This could be a problem for a meditator who is not a Hindu and professes another religion. TM sources however, claim that the mantras are not a religious adjunct and that meditation on any of them is not going to change anyone's religion.

23.3 TM and Religion

Then there is the question whether TM itself is actually a religion, a cult, a business organization, or a group that is teaching meditation to people of all religions. TM can be considered a religion since it involves spiritual changes and improvements in all participants. On the other hand, there are very few rituals and standardized worship involved in it. So there is no question of having faith in the mantra or Maharishi and again there is no question of worshipping the guru. However, it can be noted here that when a person is practicing TM meditation it is being done with the full authority of Maharishi. Further when good results of meditation begin to appear the meditator is grateful to the guru which is Maharishi. So, it must be noted that the Maharishi is a guru who popularized and taught TM.

Box 23.1 The TM Mantra

The TM practitioners have to keep their mantra a secret and not to divulge it to anyone and not to repeat it aloud because the mantra must be kept silent so that it can be more towards the inner spheres of the mind. The method for choosing mantra often depends on the age of a person at the time of the initiation and so the age is what decides a mantra will be. If a person gets initiated into TM at the age of 25 and then drops the practice for a few years, and then decides to take an initiation again the mantra will accordingly change. This is possibly because as the age of a person changes so does the spiritual vibration. As such to suit the vibrations of spirituality over the years the mantra would have to be changed.

The question comes up again and again—is TM a religion? The Maharishi is quite clear on this. He feels that

TM and religion are wholly compatible, they are both necessary and in fact he has gone to the extent of saying about religion and meditation that “one without the other will not survive”. This is clarified immediately by another statement, viz;

TM practitioners should follow their own religion. This goes to show that TM is religion neutral so far as its beneficial results are concerned and no one is asked to change his religion to become a practitioner of TM. Thus TM does not interfere with the practice and faith of any religion.

A third caveat in this line of reasoning is in the form of an unsubstantiated belief that religion at its outset, no matter which religion had TM at its

core. This is more in the realm of faith for this is almost impossible to prove. However, this is an important belief for TM. Following from this belief we come to the next one which is

The religions of today no longer even remember that once TM was their core and they have hence been regarded as a body from which the soul has departed. These statements of Maharishi make it amply clear that although TM is not a religion it is apparently the heart of all religion.

What does TM do? What are its effects? TM claims to destress individuals and make them more efficient in dealing with life-situations. It is not a programme to create recluses but is in the realm of karma yoga or the path of works. In the initial stages of research into TM many claims were made. Some of these claims seemed spectacular but nevertheless possible. For example it was claimed that if a minimum of 1 percent of the population of a town did TM its accident rates would drop dramatically and so would crime rates drop greatly. These were questioned. However, there is no denying the more major claims of lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol and the right way of reacting to stress have all been confirmed. Thus, TM aims to get closer to the higher consciousness through the practice of meditation. Transcendental Meditation is very much about reducing levels of stress and anxiety. That TM in fact does do this has been demonstrated by modern scientific laboratory research into the effects of the technique. Thus scientific research has proved and demonstrated that one of the most beneficial meditation techniques is TM. It was found that extreme reduction of stress and tension and anxiety made possible by TM is 3 to 4 times more effective than the same effect caused by other competing modes of meditation and stress reduction techniques which were examined. This is a remarkable finding for it provides for the first time scientific evidence for what is otherwise an uncollated TM experience. Also relevant is the fact that the Maharishi did not shy away from scientific examination and evaluation of his meditation technique. This bold new move by a contemporary guru is to be lauded as an all time achievement in the field of spirituality and meditation. No other meditation type apart from TM has had such rigorous tests done in the laboratory and none has succeeded like TM in spreading meditation. It takes great confidence and courage to subject what is essentially an area of inner consciousness to the anodes and cathodes of science to measure the effect. The remarkable fact is that the TM group passed these, scientific tests with flying colours. Some further remarks about science and TM. We find that TM has been taught by Maharishi and his authorized teachers since 1957. However, it took more than a decade before TM began to get a validation from scientific research. The initial articles about the "wonder" of TM were published circa 1970 in scientific journals and popular magazines including "Science" (167, 1970) "American Journal of Physiology" (221, 1971) and also the "Scientific American" (226, 1972). The research into TM was pioneered by two medicos from Harvard called Benson and Wallace and was made on "dozens" of TM practitioners. Further researches followed and articles appeared in "*International Journal of Neuroscience*"; "*Psychosomatic Medicine*"; "*Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology*"; "*Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*"; "*Journal of Clinical Psychology*" and so on.

23.4 The Practice of TM

At this point we may turn briefly to one of the problems with the marketing of TM in that it is very expensive and the price of TM is prohibitive and is more than most people can afford. At this point it is important to consider whether there is an 'elitist bias' in the marketing of TM. Now this can be

for many reasons including the scarcity of teachers relative to the demand. However, whatsoever the reason might be this economic factor in initiation into TM creates several effects. First only those who have the financial means and also a deep commitment would go in for TM. Secondly, we find that TM is more popular in the North Block of countries, US, UK, Europe, where the economic standards are higher than in the South including India, Afghanistan, Burma, Pakistan and so on. Thirdly and finally TM is inaccessible once again to the poor. They simply cannot afford it.

Let us turn now to some of the organizational facts of TM. This will take us inevitably to some of the remarkable achievements of Maharishi himself. We need to point out here that TM cannot be divorced from the ideas of Mahesh yogi because TM has been his brain child. Mahesh yogi the founder of TM is not simply a dreamer or visionary but a man of action. In the past 50 years of its existence over 5-6 million people have learned to do TM and are trying to improve their lives by doing 20 minutes of meditation morning and evening.

Mahesh yogi organization has trained about 40,000 TM teachers who function as initiators all over the world. He has opened thousands of teaching centres where TM is taught. He has also founded many schools, opened and inaugurated many of colleges and universities world wide. Further, there are meditation packages called Maharishi Vedic Science programs which are being extensively used and applied in the public organizations and institutions world-wide. As we have mentioned earlier Maharishi launched TM in 1957 and since then it gradually became a world wide, 'global organization'.

The role of Maharishi himself has been that of an ideator and facilitator. He has criss-crossed and circled the globe many times over teaching and preaching TM technique, writing books on TM, having consultations with government leaders and trying to see how TM movement could solve political problems national and international. He has also addressed many conferences of scientists, and people in the field of education, music and literature. It was in the year of 1961 when Mahesh yogi put into action his plan to teach trainers for his TM program. The training as conceived then has stood the test of time and remains a seven-step course. This is what is taught by the trainers to the initiates of TM.

In 1964 Maharishi's first book "Science of Being and Art of Living" was put into print. This book proved to be most popular and successful and has acquired the status of a classic. It has sold in millions in 15 different languages. The book remains as relevant today to seekers as ever and has been recently reprinted and reissued by Penguin Putnam. Two thousand teachers were trained in 1971 in the TM programme and a world plan was inaugurated to spread the programmes to every possible corner of the world. Here, again we witness the zeal of the Maharishi to bring enlightenment to all aspects of the functioning of global society in order to bring in and usher in the Age of Enlightenment. At present the TM organization is building Maharishi Peace Palaces in 3000 major cities to create more TM and to provide a means of peace in the world. Such palaces are meant to create a "general influence of peace" on a community and global basis.

23.5 TM: Scientific Validation

One of the major areas where Maharishi literally risked his well earned reputation was to go in for scientific validation of the feelings and experiences of peace and bliss of the meditators. He felt that these meditational experiences of peace, bliss, deep rest and reduction of tension

and anxiety in meditators could be and should be scientifically proven or backed up, with scientific research. The initial results of this approach were first published in *Scientific American* in 1970, which is over a decade after the movement had started. Beginning with the 1970 research results TM has become the most scientifically probed meditation. It has become most thoroughly scrutinized by scientists, more so than any other single technique. As a matter of fact till date more than 600 studies have been researched in over 200 countries around the world. Over 30 research institutions in 30 countries have published a total of over 100 research articles in scholarly journals. These studies have been by and large positive and shown TM to be appropriate for ameliorating the ills and negative condition of many parts of the world.

Box 23.2 TM and Science

TM is perhaps the only program to have received such a great deal of scientific attention. In an age where science rules supreme such validation can be most crucial for the spread, popularity and authenticity of a programme. Has this validation been not forthcoming or had the results been negative then the TM programme would have been invalidated. However, the results were in fact so positive that TM got a thorough boost and those interested in it included scientists, doctors and laymen.

Let us now talk about a related finding in TM, which is that of the Maharishi effect. This effect proposes that if just one percent of a society does TM it creates a profoundly positive impact on the community. Further, the Extended Maharishi Effect the same solidarity is produced by “the Square root of one percent of the population” which are doing and practicing the TM Sidhi Yogic Flying programme. This programme has come in for adverse comments especially the claim to levitation and yogic flying.

In this section we finally turn to the efforts of Maharishi in the fields of Vedic science. That is to say that apart from TM specifically the Maharishi has revived the ancient knowledge of the Vedic tradition much of which is or was lying dormant. The Vedas scripted some 5000 years ago from an oral tradition were written down in Sanskrit and dealt with all the aspects of man’s life on earth and the beyond. As the TM literature points out Veda means the complete knowledge of Natural Law. We may then say the Maharishi Vedic Science is aimed at the “Science and technology of consciousness”. These programs are thus “consciousness based” and have as their goal the awakening of the full potential of the consciousness of human beings. This would help in making the world a better place and help man avoid mistakes at a personal level (conflict, divorce, violence, inequalities) and also at a global level which is economic caploitation and war. The way Maharishi looks at Vedic Science is that it would help everyone on earth achieve their right to being a fully enlightened efficiently functioning human being. The full use of body mind and soul would result from an application of Maharishi Vedic Science.

Thus the practical Vedic technologies of Maharishi are designed to reduce or eliminate the problems that are faced in day to day life. There are several areas which were taken up on priority basis:

- i) Vedic health is a consciousness based area which involves the intelligence of the body and mind to create better health through various means including exercising with yoga and eating the right kind of diet. This area of endeavor is called Maharishi consciousness based health care.

- ii) Vedic Education, in this Maharishi Consciousness Based Education is used to getting a holistic education in which there is awareness of a high order and that of a good order of morality. It teaches to share and care for others and to give back to the earth/environment more than you take from it.

These and other such programmes like that on Vedic agriculture (organically grown food); Vedic astrology which provides future trends in life through jyotish and finally Vedic music from the Maharishi Gandharva Veda music. In this way Maharishi has spanned a vast spectrum of vital concern.

Till now we have been discussing about and prescribing TM as a meditational technique or method. However, it is time that we introduce into our discourse some of the spiritual ideas of TM since we are now in danger of presenting TM simply as a kind of spiritual exercise that helps in controlling stress and tension and thereby leading to better efficiency in life and work. However, TM is more than an exercise of 20 minutes meditation in the morning and evening. To get an idea about the spiritual ideology of TM we turn to an explication of the same in an interview that Maharishi gave Rachel Kelly of UCLA. In this exchange of questions and answers Kelley talks of various aspects of social process including the role of students and the question of enlightenment.

23.6 Maharishi on Enlightenment

At the outset of the interview Maharishi tells Kelley that TM is a phenomena that has been around for many years and therefore Kelley should ask some new questions so that new areas could be explored. It was in this context that Kelley broached the topic of “enlightenment” which is an experience and a concept which is in fact at the centre of spirituality and is mentioned in scriptural traditions most especially the Vedic Tradition. On being questioned about what enlightenment is the Maharishi points out succinctly that is it being in accordance with the natural law. Enlightenment the Maharishi points out means “absence of darkness”. This in itself implies a perfect life in which everything falls into place and there is no conflict and mistake. It is pointed out that such a state implies that there is “no weakness” or any kind of shortfall in life. In everything an enlightened man does there is success and the fulfillment of all desire. That is to say we are living in accord with the natural law. Everything is therefore easy and gets completed without undue duress on the person. It was in this sense that Buddha was Enlightened. It is also the sense in which the Maharishi is an Enlightened man. In accordance with his own definition of enlightenment the Maharishi his story is a story about enlightenment and what it means. Maharishi has certainly clear touch with the Natural Law and has therefore been able to accomplish so much that it is difficult to imagine that one man could be behind the vast TM empire that teaches enlightenment and promises a total life. The Maharishi points out that the enlightened man is not in the ‘dark’ about anything. In other words TM is not simply or only about stress busting techniques but a spiritual path which shows ready results and which have been verified by research.

At this juncture in the UCLA interview the questioner asks about TM. It is asked whether anyone is capable of assimilating and using TM and what are the basic prerequisites for this endeavor.

Action and Reflection 23.1

Meet some practitioners of TM and ask them to relate how they have benefited. Note down your findings in your notebook.

Maharishi is very candid in his reply. He says TM simply requires that the student has a desire to learn it through a teacher. This is a very important statement and very revolutionary because in the Vedic tradition the qualification of a disciple and the requirements of discipline, commitment, authority and so on are very great. Maharishi by opening up Vedic knowledge, and making it benefit of the stringent requirements of studentship under a master has opened up this treasure house to all those who simply have a desire to learn from a teacher. At this point a few words about faith in the teacher need to be discussed. In the Vedic system we find that the guru is the ultimate authority. The Vedic system is about the faith in the authority and words of the guru. In the case of TM Maharishi has not put on the trappings of the guru so far as ideology is concerned. TM can be learned practiced and benefited from even if there is little faith in the guru. However, unless there is respect for the teacher there will be hardly any inspiration to go on with the technique. It is here that Mahesh yogi has made such a difference in the field of spirituality. He has very clearly substituted faith in the guru with proof of the working of the technique. When there is scientific evidence about the TM benefits and effects which student will not have faith in the master who is propagating and teaching this meditation method? Thus, in the system of Maharishi Vedic Science it is laboratory proof that matters and things do not have to be taken on trust or belief. This has been a modernization of Indian tradition in a basic way.

Maharishi points out that meditation is taught by the teacher and learned by the disciple. He notes that all the 5 million or so people who do TM, and those who have been meditating for the last 40-50 years are all on the path of enlightenment. Not only these meditators are actually 'gaining enlightenment'. This of course implies again that they are coming in accord with natural Law and ceasing to be confused, miserable and depressed. They are reaching the stage when there are "no mistakes in life" and also become non-violent and peaceful. This is the path of TM. It is therefore a cult which has kept the ideology of the movement in the background while the practice of meditation has been put to the fore. Usually, it is the ideology of cult which is eulogized and used as a point of reference to attract students, but in the case of TM the ideology comes through only after you are already on the path. It becomes gradually clear to the meditation that far from simply overcoming stress he or she is on an endless path and is becoming ever more attuned to the flow of Nature's way and is in fact embarked upon a spiritual adventure.

At this point in time Kelley asks Maharishi what is the value of students meditating according to the TM way? The Maharishi is very clear about his answer and points out that the student life is to gain knowledge, if possible to gain total knowledge. Then if the TM method is used the students are striving towards total knowledge. Now, this needs a little explanation in that the TM method though based around a mantra is basically a sit down type of meditation and the meditator observes the working of the mind through the various thoughts, ideas, problems that go through his or her consciousness. Thus apart from the destressing effect of the meditation there is also unleashed a tremendous amount of information about the thinking and desiring process. Facts that were buried in the unconscious come up and demand attention. As such the meditator is geared to solving the problems on the one hand and destressing gives him the time to formulate a strategy. Very often this could be precisely how to improve the performance in meditation. Then, alone is total knowledge possible. It cannot be that a person sits down, does a mantra, and becomes enlightened. Meditation the TM way therefore is much more than meets the eye and its secrets have to be unraveled.

Maharishi then goes on to clarify in this interview that the consciousness of the transcendental is “the unified field of all the laws of nature”. He compares this to the findings of the unified field theory of physics which tries to put all scientific knowledge under one umbrella. This is at the basis of all intelligence and to get to the natural law means getting into the field of Total Intelligence, in which all and everything is known. This is another name for Enlightenment. In this state Maharishi reiterates that all goes well and all goes according to plan. In the student life the aim is to develop knowledge to the greatest possible degree and to thereby set the foundation for the rest of the life. This is the time not simply for activities of rote or memorizing but creativity, so far as student meditators are concerned. This is really very important because Intelligence implies creativity. Thus, TM is believed to be a fountain head of creativity, so far as student meditators are concerned. Without a clear headed appreciation of life as it faces a student it would not be possible to face and to understand complex life-situations. Nothing can be approached mechanically in life as life-situations keep on changing and only through meditation can they be controlled. Further we must realize as Maharishi points out that spiritually is an “unfolding”. It doesn’t happen all at once or suddenly. It happens bit by bit and accumulates slowly but surely. Thus when Maharishi says that students should gain total knowledge we take it that this applies to all students of TM and not to those who are at the universally alone. So, the goal of TM meditators is total knowledge, Intelligence, and to get in flow with the laws of nature. However, Maharishi has also pointed out in this interview that TM students and University TM students can together “recreate” the whole social structure of society and make it a better place. This is a highly idealistic stand. unlikely Till now 5-6 million TM meditators exist but the population of the world is about 5 billions of individuals. Here, of course the idea of a percentage of meditators calming down the world does help us to view facts in better perspective. However it cannot be denied if everyone began to do TM the problems of the world would certainly ameliorate.

Kelley now asks whether the “ease” with which one reaches the Natural Law is not exaggerated? How can something which is very natural and easy also be effective? It is asked by Kelley to the Maharishi that how does this contradiction get resolved?

23.7 TM and Natural Law

The Maharishi explains that TM creates a condition of great relaxation in the mind. TM makes the mind spontaneously quiet and the silence that comes from meditation persists in active life. TM is thus a reservoir for energy to be drawn out from the “bank” of consciousness. In the manner a man withdraws money from bank and then has no worries of expense similarly in TM the energy fields within the body are lighted up and there is an abundance of energy after a session of TM. Since, TM attunes to the field of Total knowledge, Intelligence and Natural Law the TM technique is one which combines ease with effectiveness. There is no struggle, no nightmares, no disappointments only greater energy to be used for the greater good and for the betterment of life for everyone around us. Maharishi insists that TM is effortless and does not involve hard labour or demand impossible concentration etc. According to Maharishi it is very important to economise on the effort. He believes in: do less and accomplish more. Obviously, what is being implied is an intelligent application of energy by the disciple rather than mechanical effort. According to Maharishi success is not an achievement which has resulted from desperate efforts, titanic struggle and at the cost of one’s health. Success is instead achieved by aligning oneself with the ease and flow of

the Natural Law. Maharishi also suggests that it is in the consciousness that the desires get fulfilled and that these should be examined closely. All pros and cons seen clearly in meditation and basing oneself upon Natural Law the TM meditator would live a moral purposeful life. Thus as the meditates twice daily he comes closer and closer in time with the Natural Law and this makes everything easy to accomplish.

Kelley then asks the Maharishi about those would be meditators who are afraid to go into a deep rest state? Kelley points out such deep rest states are not known to the would be students and they can find them frightening. Maharishi clarifies this doubt by pointing out that these fears are unfounded and that TM creates relaxation as natural as sleep. He points out that TM is not at all forced and is a natural and creative process. He also points out to Kelley's question that if there were a large number of TM students at UCLA they would create great scientists and geniuses who could alter the face of the earth with their inventions and discoveries. He cites Keith Wallace as one such pioneer who gave the world the first research into TM and published his most positive findings.

Further Maharishi has indicated by his demeanour that life that that life is to be enjoyed and should be a lot of fun. Maharishi is sometimes known as the "giggling guru" because he laughs and enjoys what he is doing very much.

The whole gist of the teachings of Maharishi centre down to the consideration of what he terms a "lack of proper education". This is what the Maharishi holds responsible for the ills of the world, and surely according to this approach a lack of knowledge of TM would constitute a kind of lack of understanding, sharing and caring for the world. The Maharishi reiterates that the central feature of any society or civilization depends on education. So, we might as well ask what does the Maharishi mean by education itself? The Maharishi is referring here obviously to the awakening of intelligence in the life of the disciples, devotees, students and others so that they can function according to Natural Law. Maharishi points out very pertinently that it is the intelligence in the physiology that makes it move or drives it ahead. Without that intelligence education would be incomplete. The emphasis then must focus out he awakening of intelligence and this is one thing which TM also attempts to do through its meditation techniques of sitting 20 minutes twice a day, morning and evening.

Box 23.3 Aspects of Learning

Maharishi points out that education is oriented all over the world towards the physical when actually it should be geared towards the force that drives the physical that is the world of consciousness. This would be a revolutionary step as it would instill in the students a new set of morals and values. Maharishi gives a graphic example when he points out that although it is the hand that commits the act of violence, it is the mind which is ultimately responsible. It is clear it is education which should culture the life and the mind. Culture of the mind is that in which a higher intelligence operates and not a lower one. It is this higher intelligence in life operations and activities which TM seeks to activate. Once the intelligence is awakened through TM practices then the student has come in accordance to the natural law and life will become a wonderful journey. However, if the education is unable to see the fact of the necessity of creating a centre of higher intelligence in the physiology then education will not be education for humanitarian purposes of peace and goodwill.

As such it would be defective and harmful. Through what type of education can we raise the intelligence in man, and make it active in life? Maharishi's

answer is the necessity of Vedas, knowledge that is practical and total and covers every aspect of life in the world. It is a knowledge that was perfected and put into script about 5000 years ago in the Sanskrit script. We do not stop simply at literary or mathematical exercises but include Vedic Health or Ayurveda which has itself developed a complex theory of humours and phlegms in the body and requires a skilled practitioners to administer the various medicines. Thus again it is intelligence that is guiding the doctor from a higher source which helps in the diagnosis of cure or containment. Ayurveda in its practice takes great care of dietary provisions and even uses precious metals and stones in the preparation of its *bhasms* or medicine compounds. It has no known side effects and derives directly from the vedas. The medicine available today is very advanced relatively but it has many side effects. Similarly, Maharishi points out that what is needed further is Vedic (organic) agriculture and what he calls Vedic Defence. Vedic defence is a very interesting idea in that it means to “prevent the birth of an enemy”. This is itself a pacifist philosophy in which the idea is a lifestyle that does not breed enmity and hatred. It is also realistic in recognizing the need to defend oneself and this means an intelligent way of living. One of the most important requirements for intelligence to flourish is a clear mind and sufficient reserves of energy. With a clear mind and sufficient reserves of energy it is possible to live intelligently peacefully and with balanced desires. Thus the attitude of Vedic Defence is not simply be strong enough to push back the enemy but to live life in such a way as to have no enemies. When we ask how this is to be accomplished the answer is TM. In attempting this Vedic method of approaching education, health, defence and so on Maharishi assures a happy and peaceful life.

Action and Reflection 23.2

Reflect upon and discuss the “Natural Law of Living with TM practitioners. Note down your findings in your notebook.

In relation to Vedic defence how does it stand in relation to the war crime and violence all over the world. The endeavour of each generation has been to wipe out the crime and war but it has not been able to succeed. In fact, there have been two world wars and endless regional and local conflicts as well as international conflagrations. One explanation that has been given for war and violence is high testosterone levels in the males which make them aggressive and violent and therefore they indulge in the territorial imperative of war and violence. While this explanation is fine what is missing from this theory is how to end this aggressive streak in man and make him peaceful and peace-loving. The method that Maharishi would like to use to tame all the aggression and violence is to do group practice of TM and TM-Sidhi program produced in a group of about 200 people will create peaceful vibrations that eradicate crime and create peace. Maharishi is doing this through the Peace Palace initiatives where 200 TM-Sidhi Experts will live and meditate together for world peace.

23.8 Maharishi's Writings on TM

Let us now look at some of the books which the Maharishi has published since his has been a multimedia approach to the popularization of TM. These books deal with different areas of endeavour and outline the various dynamics of the problem. As always the solution that lurks at the back of the discourse is TM or TM-Sidhi programs.

The first book that Maharishi published in 1963 was called “Science of Being and Art of Living— Transcendental Meditation”. This book explained in detail all about TM and the Art of Living. No, doubt the concept of

spontaneous living and coming in accordance with the Natural Law are very important concepts here. It was a path breaking book that reached many millions of people and not only pointed out the desired paradise but also how to get to it through the simple technique of TM. It was a book with a vision for a “new humanity”.

Mahesh Yogi then gave his insights into the Bhagavad Gita. Maharishi's commentary is profuse and incisive and he praises the Gita as the book in which all practical wisdom is enshrined. The Gita is a book which has inspired the Bhakti Saints and the Sufis alike. Where does that leave us? What has the Gita got to do with TM? At first glance not much perhaps but on deep consideration the Gita is very definitely the very source of the TM technique as it is taught in the Gita itself. That is to say there is a mantra (Om) and there is a guru (Krishna). Krishna asks Arjun in the Gita to sit down in a comfortable place, free from vermin, and then to focus between the eyebrows, eyes closed and then to inhale and exhale keeping the mantra flowing in and out of the nostrils in proper rhythm. In the case of TM the mantras given are many and individual but the practice of meditation is very similar as prescribed in the Gita. However, this is the Vedic Science and sources and similarities are not being hidden. In fact its consonance with Gita meditation gives TM even more authenticity.

Box 23.4 Maharishi and Vedic Education

Maharishi feels a study of his first book would be most valuable. As is known Vedic Education divided life into various stages in which the early age was to be devoted to celibacy and studentship. However, these steps are not easy to follow for everybody and Maharishi once again points out that the kind of meditation he is advocating (TM) fulfills the Vedic dream of students living peacefully and improving the world. The educators would have to be TM trained and these are the people who will impart education about being happy in the here and now through meditation and the alignment that it brings to natural law and the creativity that follows. The goal of students should be total knowledge. As noted the Maharishi feels the students and teachers of premier institutions of learning can change the face of the world and can be at the vanguard of a new world.

Some of the other books that Maharishi has penned include

- a) Maharishi speaks to students
- b) Celebrating perfection in Education
- c) Maharishis Absolute Theory of Government – Automation in Administration
- d) Maharishi Forum for Natural Law and National Law for Doctors
- e) Ideal India
- f) Constitution of India Fulfilled through Maharishis Transcendental Meditation

As can be seen from a sampling of what Maharishi has written his concern clearly is to bring the higher or transcendental consciousness into every heart and into every aspect of every nation. His agenda is to change the world for the better and for this he has theorized and practiced unified consciousness of the Natural Law in the fields of religion, education, Defence, Administration, Natural Law and even the Constitution of India. Maharishis has been a fruitful and useful publishing career.

All these books can be rightly seen as part of Maharishis peace initiatives for the world. Maharishi is a person centred teacher who believes that

each human being should have the 'deep rest' of the TM experience to guide and recharge him. Having transformed himself then the individual becomes himself a centre of peace, love, bliss and contentment. To bring peace to humanity Maharishi has taken many initiatives. In 1957 he stated that if one percent of the world's people practiced TM there would be an end to war. In 1963 during the Cuban Missile Crisis Maharishi counselled meditators to extend their period of meditation as this would avert the crisis. In 1974 the 'one percent theory' of crime reduction got scientific proof of crime reduction in such cities and areas. From 1978 to 1984 Maharishi sent thousands of "Yogic Flyers" to trouble spots around the world.

23.9 Benefits of TM

We have dealt with various different aspects of TM so far including its history, philosophy, and methodologies. In this concluding section we talk of the all around benefits of TM as recorded by scientists and social scientists. The TM literature points out that TM is the key to:

- clearer thinking
- better health
- fulfilling relationship
- a peaceful world

Thus in terms of clearer thinking we find that the TM practitioner begins to find it relatively easy to solve problems and to feel fresh and alert most of the time. There is a feeling of hope and transcendence. This is often noticed by people around the TM practitioner who is relatively "distressed" and more relaxed, since he has been doing his or her meditation. These benefits are practical and real and have been verified by around 600 scientific studies at different centres all over the world numbering some 200 independent research institutions spread over 35 countries. Such research indicates that the benefits of TM to body mind and brain are measurable and have a scientific basis to them. It is one thing to claim benefits but another when there is scientific finding and proofs.

These benefits are now being experienced all around the world for the last five decades. In fact, it is often pointed out that the TM is an ancient Vedic technique which is modified for contemporary usage. This was done by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to make the technique suitable and effective for the modern age.

Thus the saying that we need proof to believe is amply borne out by people enjoying benefits in various fields. The mind-benefits, or benefits to the mind include various factors including a more efficient memory bank; clearer and logical way of thinking. There is also a capacity for clearer creativity and the ability to concentrate and focus on a problem is greatly enhanced. The brain potential is also realized greatly. The effect on the intellect is to make it much sharper. The IQ becomes higher and there is generally a greater degree of awareness and consciousness in perception and apprehension of life-situations.

As regards the benefits to the body are concerned they are very many and include the reduction of stress. There is also a greater degree of energy feelings in the organism. Here is better health which means medical expenses are reduced. The body also feels younger and energetic. The body also experiences better and deeper and restful sleep. The TM practitioner's blood pressure is lower and if it is high it will come down.

There is also a tendency for the meditator to reduce his alcohol usage and this is also beneficial in itself. Meditators also develop the ability and the will power to stop smoking. There is also a great reduction in the tension of the body and there is also a recorded relief from asthma. The practice of TM also reduces and lowers cholesterol which is an agent which excess of is bad for health and heart function. Further, the body being alert the person is able to react aptly to a situation quickly and efficiently. That is the reaction time for response to a challenge is much less and much more efficient. Practicing TM prolongs life apart from making it healthier. Thus, the benefits for mind and body are extensive and are like a cleansing of the chakras in conventional yoga so that primordial energy flows can go on in the body unimpeded by energy blocks.

There are benefits for relationship through the practice of TM. Thus friendship becomes fulfilling. The person develops a feeling of inner calmness and peace and tranquility. There is also a greater feeling of self confidence and the ability and capacity to tackle relationships.

23.10 Conclusion

Through TM the capacity to see as a 'whole' also develops by first making the perspective on the world bigger, and then holistic. The meditator also develops a great deal of tolerance and patience which are essential in relationships. Further there is a capacity to appreciate others which develops with the practice of TM. Behaviour of the meditator becomes in tune with the other people and they exhibit harmonious living within the environment. All this also has the effect of making the meditators life more enjoyable and happy. Anxiety levels experience a drop and there is a tremendous reduction in abreactions such as anger. Further even depression is reduced and finally eliminated by meditating the TM way. As such there is an explosive input all around the social sphere of the TM practitioner.

There are also practical benefits for professional life of the meditators. Initially the professional develops a stronger and positive self image and his concept of himself becomes clear. Further the meditator develops the knack of making the right decisions and make them with less reaction time and deliberation. The meditator is able to do his job in a more efficient and productive manner. He is also able to quickly solve problems and to enjoy the work and have greater job satisfaction. Another benefit is that the practitioners create effective leadership with democratic norms. The meditators are able to accomplish great tasks with relatively less effort.

Thus we may say TM is beneficial for the world at large and creates through the mind waves that make the city life better by reducing crime, and reducing the levels of traffic accidents and injuries. The rate of homicide goes down, terrorism declines and international conflict is contained and what ensues is a peaceful world. Thus the potential of TM is revolutionary and it is being further realized in the postmodern world on a daily basis.

Further Reading

Roth Robert, 1994. *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation*. MUM Press, (Online)

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1963. *Science of Being and Art of Living*. MUM Press

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi on the Bhagavad Gita. MUM Press

References

[http:// encyclopedia. the free dictionary.com/transcendental+meditation](http://encyclopedia.the-free-dictionary.com/transcendental+meditation)

[http:// transcendental.meditation. on www.net/](http://transcendental.meditation.on/www.net/)

[http:// skepdic.com/tm.html](http://skepdic.com/tm.html)

[http:// www.tm.org/discover/benefits/body.html](http://www.tm.org/discover/benefits/body.html)

Unit 24

Hare Krishna Movement

Content

- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Aims of the Movement
- 24.3 Structure of ISKCON
- 24.4 History of ISKCON
- 24.5 Modern Yoga: Yaga as Chanting
- 24.6 Srila on Lord Krishna
- 24.7 Devotion and Surrender
- 24.8 The Eight Mystical Perfections
- 24.9 Types of Devotion and Devotees
- 24.10 Conclusion
- 24.11 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- give the aims of ISKCON;
- provide the History of ISKCON;
- explain modern yoga and chanting;
- the place of Sri Krishna in ISKCON;
- talk about the eight mystical perfections; and
- describe types of devotion and devotee.

24.1 Introduction

Hare Rama, Hare Krishna is a highly visible cult since their members sport a shaven head with a top knot, wear saffron dhotis and take out ecstatic progressions in the streets sometimes even the main traffic thoroughfares. Here they beat the tablas and tamboras and chant the 'Hare Krishna' mantra while dancing, singing, and twirling around. This may give the layman an impression that nothing serious is involved. Nothing could be further from the Truth. The Hare Krishna's as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) is popularly known is a very traditional movement but has been given added colour and spread in the west and east. The Hare Krishna's are strict about their vegetarianism and do not consume alcohol and have high moral standards. They have to live a celibate life with many hours of devotional service to Lord Krishna who is to them the Source of Devotion. The Hare Krishna trust Lord Krishna as God and worship him as such.

Hare Krishna or ISKCON is based on a long lineage of masters who have handed over the succession from master to disciple for a long time. Theirs is thus a *parampara* a tradition of teachers. There are in it four "disciple successions" which are known as *sampradaya*. The Hare Krishna's

belong to the Brahma Sampradaya which it is believed was formed by Lord Krishna himself. In this sampradaya there are many branches and fragments and ISKCON society belongs to the branch set up and founded by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the 16th century.

24.2 Aims of the Movement

The idea is that all the Vaishava teachings should be passed intact to the main disciple or the new teacher who in turn has the responsibility to teach, develop and transmit the Vaishnava teachings to future generations. A prominent devotee becomes known as an *acharya* who are the main teachers of the sect both actually and theoretically. Some of the main acharyas include:

- 1) Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu
- 2) The Six Goswamis of Vrindaban
- 3) Bhakti Siddharta Sarasvati Thakura
- 4) A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada

ISKCON stands for the “International Society for Krishna Consciousness”, and this was founded in 1966 by Swami Srila Prabhupada. Since 1966 ISKCON has become a world wide society which has 10,000 temples, devotees and a number of 2,50,000 “congregational” devotees. ISKCON is more popularly known as the Hare Krishna movement. ISKCON runs 350 centres, 60 rural communities, 50 schools and 60 restaurants all over the world. It is clear that the scale of the movement is very great as to run all these centres and temples is no mean feat especially since Srila Prabhupada is no more. The main mission of ISKCON which describes itself as a nonsectarian, monotheistic movement is to comprise the well being of society by teaching Krishna consciousness according to the Bhagavad Gita and ancient scriptures. There are in fact seven aims of the movement to which we now turn. The seven aims of ISKCON are:

- 1) firstly to propagate spirituality and spiritual knowledge to society as such. It is to educate people spiritually so that the breakdown in values is balanced out and world peace and unity is achieved once and for all.
- 2) the second part of the goal is to propagate and create Krishna consciousness as this is revealed and indicated in the Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagvatam. We should note that Bhagavad Gita is the basic text which ISKCON subscribes to and teaches from as it is directly related to Sri Krishna.
- 3) thirdly the aim is to create a solidarity among societal members built around the worship of Krishna. Building up the awareness that each member of society is part of Krishna the Godhead and therefore brothers and sisters who should live in peace together in the worship of Krishna.
- 4) the fourth aim of ISKCON is to encourage and teach about the Sankirtana movement which is a group chanting of the name of Krishna. These follow the teachings of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu the teacher of the lineage after Sri Krishna.
- 5) ISKCON also aims to instruct a building which is very large where Krishna lila can be enacted.
- 6) ISKCON teaches a simple and natural life.
- 7) finally to achieve these aims the ISKCON aims to and has published books, magazines, pamphlets etc.

ISKCON believes in the Vaisnava philosophy. It is pointed out that inquiry into the nature of absolute truth is the start of the spiritual life. So far as ISKCON or Hare Ramas are concerned the Supreme Godhead is Krishna. However, it is also recognized that Godhead has different names including the names such as Vishnu, Rama, Jehovah, Buddha, Allah and so on. The main aim of this Gaudhya Vaishavism is to develop love for Godhead the Supreme.

To understand oneself according to this philosophy is to make oneself fit for being spiritual minded. To be spiritual minded self understanding is very important. Without an understanding of the self it is not possible to travel inwards towards the Godhead. However as the tradition points out for this to happen much effort has to be made under the tutelage of the spiritual master who has perfected the art of spiritual knowledge. This, it is pointed out as being a procedure similar to learning anything at all – a master is a must without whom there is no spiritual growth. The group chanting of maha mantra “Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare” was popularized by Sri Chaitanya. This mantra is believed to be best for self purification in Kali Yug age. Before we go on we must say a word about the structure of the ISKCON organization. First of all there are the communities who practice the Krishna consciousness in the privacy and security of their homes. The work and life however, in a community are with group chanting, family, gardening and so on.

24.3 Structure of ISKCON

On the other hand those members who are attached to temples are undergoing training to function as people who would conduct worship and propagate the faith. That is to say they are clergy and would be involved in ministerial work for ISKCON. There are some people who work to coordinate the ISKCON rural communities programmes. Now, in 1970 Swami Prabhupada convened a General Body Commission (GBC) to help manage the expansion of ISKCON. Before leaving his body in 1977 Srila Prabhupada has already requested that after his death the governing and decision making powers be handed over to this GBC. Thus, it is the GBC which is responsible for ISKCON's plans, strategies on how they are to fulfill the seven point charter of goals mentioned earlier. The methods for arriving at a consensus do involve the right to vote democratically and consultations with the important people in the Temples and so on.

Another part of the ISKCON structure is what is called the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT). Srila Prabhupada was a tireless writer and in about 12 years he produced 70 volumes of works. These were mostly translations of Sanskrit treatises and copious commentaries on them. This trust was established in 1972 and is today among the worlds largest publishers and distributors books on Indian Philosophy and religion. Till the present the BBT has published over 500 million books and magazines in over 60 languages. This gives us an idea of the scale of ISKCON's operations. The structure is simple yet effective. The power of Srila Prabhupada thus now vests in the GBC and the responsibility for missionary work rests with the clergy which also under training. All important decisions are proposed in the GBC. Where there is any contentious issue democratic voting is necessary and is taken recourse to. We must not undermine however, the role of the community groups in rural areas. These are in many ways the backbone of the entire movement because the chants and Krishna consciousness is very effective in a quiet atmosphere in a rural setting. As such the rural communities become the invisible hand of the movement while urban communities are more visible in the ISKCON.

24.4 History of ISKCON

Before we proceed further it is important to know something of the history of ISKCON. The international society of Krishna consciousness was promulgated by Srila Prabhupada in 1966. The philosophy of this movement is that of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. This is basically a tradition of devotion or Bhakti based on the wisdom of Bhagavad Gita and Srimad Bhagvatam. As regards the theoretical and ideological constructs of ISKCON these were presented and codified by the 15th century philosopher and saint Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu along with the six goswamis of Vrindaban.

The devotees regard Sri Chaitanya as a full and total reincarnation of Lord Sri Krishna. Sri Chaitanya built up the Bhakti movement greatly and the Bhakti movement flourished all over India. He was a great complier of sacred literature and under his personal guidance many hundreds of sacred books and literature were compiled. These were connected with the philosophy of Krishna. The line of Sri Chaitanya and the six swamis of Vrindaban stretches down to Srila. The 19th century theologian Bhaktivinada brought Krishna consciousness in the modern world. His son Bhaktisiddharta Sarasvati Goswami became the guru of Srila and entrusted him with spreading Krishna consciousness.

ISKCON's is basically an Indian philosophical orientation and in order to indicate this the specifically directed ideas involved in it are distinctly Hindu. We then take as our point of departure some frequently asked questions and their answers according to the ISKCON's view point. This will help us build up a base for further explorations into what ISKCON stands for and how it has interpreted the Bhakti element of Hinduism which is associated with it.

The questions to which Hare Krishna gives the answer include,

- 1) Why do negative things happen to good people?
- 2) What is karma?
- 3) Can bad karma be reduced through meditation?
- 4) How can I do my duties if everything is predestined?
- 5) Is everything already determined by God?
- 6) Is everything predetermined?
- 7) Why does not God control our senses?
- 8) Will Bhakti take us back to Godhead?
- 9) If God is merciful why did he create evil?
- 10) If we go to heaven will we ever return?
- 11) Do we have control over our desires and thoughts?
- 12) How can we have faith in God?
- 13) What is the position of ISKCON with the respect to Jesus Christ?
- 14) Is animal sacrifice valid?
- 15) If we do not follow Krishna consciousness is our life a waste?
- 16) How to recognize a spiritually realized master?
- 17) How can we identify a person who has seen the Truth?

- 18) Can all self realized persons be a master?
- 19) Are only acharyas representations of God?
- 20) When and how does a devotee feel the necessity of a living spiritual master?
- 21) Is the relationship between disciple and guru eternal?
- 22) Does true love exist in this world?

Such and many similar questions are frequently asked questions. The document does not record the answers but it is obvious that a study of the tenets of the yoga of Krishna consciousness will allow us to answer these questions for ourselves as students. Towards the fulfillment of this and we will provide the exposition of ISKCON on the philosophy and sociology of living in this world. A study of that will answer all these and similar questions.

24.5 Modern Yoga: Yoga as Chanting

In the Gita Sri Krishna outlines a method of yoga which is called ashtanga yoga as it has several parts to it. It has eight parts to it and one must sit in a certain posture, observe dietary restrictions, control the inflow and outflow of the breath. The yogi must concentrate on the heart chakra after completely stilling down the mind. One must concentrate on Vishnu as sitting in the heart. Astanga yoga system demands very many preconditions and one has to develop first of all a sense control apart from many other regulations and then as mentioned there is breath control and thought control. Then, only is it possible to visualize Vishnu as seated in the heart. When Arjun heard Sri Krishna expound this form of yoga he was taken aback and was quite frankly skeptical about his ability to follow the eightfold path of ashtanga yoga and told Sri Krishna that the yoga he was expounding was impossible to perform. Not only were the restrictions and rules difficult the very practice of asana or posture takes years to perfect. Without a perfected asana it is difficult to practice all the exercises for control of senses and breath so that concentration and meditation can be attained.

Box 24.1 Ashtanga Yoga

Srila Prabhupada points out that in reality the eightfold path of ashtanga yoga is not impractical. Srila Prabhupada points out that were the astanga system of yoga really impractical then Sri Krishna would not have described and propagated the same. Thus, according to Srila ashtanga yoga appears to be impractical although it is not really so. It is pointed out by Srila that what is easy and practical for one person/man could very well be an impossibility for someone else. It is all a matter of relativity. In this particular discourse in the Gita as elsewhere Arjun is the common man with his share of problems and responsibilities. He cannot afford to cut himself off from society and sit down and meditate in isolation in a cave or the jungle.

Arjun as Srila points out is not a scholar or a mendicant. He is fighting in the Mahabharata battle and is doing his duty as a warrior and has many problems on a day to day basis and that's why the eightfold system of astanga yoga is not practical for him.

Astanga yoga is impractical for the common or the ordinary man. However, it is or can be practical for the renunciant who has left his responsibilities of family and the household behind and can meditate uninterruptedly. Thus, Srila asks the question that although the system of astanga yoga is

relevant who can practice it in the present age? Though Arjuna was a warrior and from a royal lineage he couldn't conceive of doing the astanga system of meditation. How much less so the common man? Srila is quite categorical in this judgement and points out that if the system is attempted only failure can result. This is the reason why Arjun finds himself unable to accept the astanga yoga. It is clear that the ordinary man cannot go out into the jungles or caves and sit practicing this yoga in the Age of Kaliyuga. The Kaliyuga has created cut throat competition in every field of endeavour and seeks to throttle the spiritual in man. In every field there is contention and conflict. In the age of Kali to even sit down legs folded is a difficult feat let alone the various requirements of an astanga yogi. As Srila says "The present age is characterized by a bitter struggle for a short duration of life in which the bliss of the Lord is never realized." Srila points out as Kaliyuga will progress the span of life will get even shorter and man's struggle to survive will get even more intense and humiliating. The good qualities of heart and mind will also get scarce and compassion be a mere word in the dictionary.

Srila points out that in the Kaliyuga most people are not serious about self realization even if the method is easy to let alone methods that are difficult. The method is difficult (astanga yoga) not only in terms of the activities it refers to but also because it demands many gymnastic feats which are not possible to accomplish for the common man. Thus Srila is concerned with the salvation of the ordinary man who is unable to latch on to anything which is out of the ordinary. How can the common man be approached by an uncommon method. It became obvious to Srila that the system of astanga yoga was not suitable to the common man. If Arjuna a most extraordinary warrior found that he could not cope with the various requirements of detachment and length of duration for realization then obviously it is a system meant for very few people who had the most extraordinary abilities. Srila points out that the time span of human life is reducing from the Sat yuga to the Dwapar yuga to Treta yuga and so on as such the sixty or seventy years assigned to man in the Kali yuga is not sufficient to struggle with astanga yoga for the goal of self-realization. Srila says humorously that even though Arjuna had a thousand years to live he felt astanga yoga as impossible to perform. Arjuna had better facilities but he refused to accept this yoga. In history Srila points out there is no record of Arjuna ever having used this yoga. As such this system is practically impossible in the present age of Kali. Some rare individual may arise and make use of this yoga but this is not generally the case. Srila points out if this was the case five thousand years ago what must be the condition now in this Age, in the present day. He feels that all attempts to popularize this system in the present day through various schools and societies are futile.

Now we have pointed out adequately that astanga yoga system is impractical, the bhakti yoga system is recommended for the present age. It does not require more than a genuine interest in spirituality and no special preconditions. Even those without education or training can join in the chants of the Kirtan. Thus, Srila points out that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu has announced that only bhakti yoga is practical in Kaliyuga. The means of deliverance in Kali yuga is chanting the name of Hari. Srila points out that the effect of chanting is felt immediately as the person begins the chants. Any other yoga method does not produce such good results. In other systems it is difficult to know whether one is progressing or not but in chanting we can tell we are making progress. It is a yoga system through the means of which a person can find liberation with relative ease in this very life itself. The restless mind always flits from one fancy to another and is extremely restless. The chant of the Hare

Krishna quiets down the mind and makes it steady for devotion. The chant automatically fixes the mind on Hari and the yoga system attains its goal quickly. This is very beneficial since the name of Krishna and chanting it quickly leads to Krishna consciousness. What is important to note is that this Krishna consciousness requires constant chanting and practice in chanting. As has been said “one has to concentrate the mind steadily and constantly on the form of Vishnu”. Thus, it is a question of ‘chant and be happy’. In the words of George Harrison the la Beatle who was a member of ISKCON we can quote:

Everybody is looking for Krishna

Some don't realize

That they are, but they are

KRISHNA is GOD

The source of all that exists

The cause of all that is

Or ever will be

As God is unlimited

HE has many names

Allah- Buddha – Jehovah - Rama:

All are KRISHNA, all are ONE

Be serving GOD through

Each thought word and DEED

And by chanting this Holy Names

The devotee quickly develops God-consciousness

By chanting

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna

Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare

Hare Rama, Hare Rama

Rama Rama, Hare Hare

One inevitably arrives at KRISHNA Consciousness (The point of the pudding is in He eating!)

With this we end this section on the necessity and efficacy of chanting for liberation in Kali yuga.

24.6 Srila on Lord Krishna

ISKCON is visible for its public devotional chants and shaven headed dhoti clad dances. However, there is a serious social ideology and philosophy behind the actions of the devotees. They are celebrating Krishna the Supreme Godhead, in song and dance. Let us see what Swami Prabhupada has to say about Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna he says is the Supreme Absolute Truth. Srila points out that in his exposition of the Sankya Philosophy Kapila the atheist could not find god in the elements of nature. He examined each one and found that God was not in them. When Kapila could not uncover the unmanifested soul in the basic elemental structure he concluded

that god did not exist. However, in the Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna rules out this atheist philosophy and its position that the unmanifested soul is non-existent. He establishes that all material elements are well within his control. (Gita 7.4).

Box 24.2 Devotion to Krishna

Srila Asks who is Lord Krishna and what is his original form. He feels we should know all about Lord Krishna's glories so that an urge to worship him arises in us and we become his ardent devotees. For this a great deal of information and zeal is required as well as discussion of the great philosophical truths which is what strengthens the mind and makes it razor sharp. It is only when one is steeped in the knowledge of Sri Krishna that he or she can be devotional to Him. While Kapila retarded spiritual progress with his atheism and non recognition of God Lord Sri Krishna revealed the Truth for all time to come. He pointed out to Arjun that he is the source of both the material and the spiritual. He pointed out to Arjun that he is the source of both the origin and the dissolution of both physical and the spiritual universe.

Srila feels that this has to be understood for the science of devotional service if this truth is understood a deep love for the Father and Mother of creation Sri Krishna arises. Now, Srila points out that Lord Krishna is the supreme male Godhead and therefore, there will automatically be His female counterpart to complement him.

The Supreme Person Lord Krishna is not subservient to Prakriti or Nature. Srila points out thinking about Nature is not enough we must ask "Who's Nature is it?" That is to say Nature has to belong, it cannot exist without someone or something to whose authority it is under. It cannot exist on its own. Srila notes that Prakriti is the same as sakti and sakti cannot exist in a purposeless state. Thus if we can latch on to the secret of nature we will be able to seek out our origins because sakti too must belong to its owner, the reason for the existence of sakti itself. Thus the search for the understanding of sakti is actually a search for the innermost self. Srila points out that Upanishads and similar Vedic scriptures state that Brahman is the Absolute Truth, and possessor of vast multifarious energies. Brahman is believed by Srila to be the "effulgence" of Krishna's body. This means that for Srila Lord Krishna is beyond the Brahman and Brahman itself is part of Him. That is why he is regarded as the Supreme Godhead. Lord Krishna is defined as "indivisible, infinite, limitless, truth." The main energy that parades the universe is called Brahman and this covers anything and everything that is possible to conceive. Every conservable power, creativity or intelligence is in this state of pulsating powerful energy which is never reduced and never depleted. It is a state of completeness in which all creation plays a part but the Lord is supreme in his bliss in his security and warmth of Sakti's womb. Srila points out that the materialists are unable to conceive the wonder of the lord. Similarly, those who are fond of spinning out theories regarding the origin of the universe are themselves confused greatly deluded. For these people to conceive of an All Powerful Godhead is incomprehensible and they are unable to register the power and the glory of the Lord. Both these types of people Srila points out are in a sad spiritual condition and it is Lord Krishna himself who has revealed the Truth about Himself in Bhagavad Gita. All being creatures are a product of the Lord Himself, they are a part of His spiritual energy and are superior to those creations which are material and cannot move think and so on. However, this does not mean that the living creatures are in any way on the same level as the one who has created them. We should not forget that while the creatures have been born due to the spiritual power of the Lord they are not equal to Him.

Reflection and Action 24.1

Observe the worship at an ISKCON temple. Make note on the latent points in your notebook.

According to Srila the Jiva principle is setting and keeping everything in motion. The jivas try to overpower nature and to use it in many ways giving way to a multifarious creation. The fact is if the jivas did not operate on the material world these world be no progress. It is only when energy vivifies and transforms material powers that they are able to yield dividends. As Srila puts it very succinctly “matter cannot organize itself”.

It is clear then from the foregoing that there is some super Energy some super Sakti which is controlling and running the universe with its vast planetary systems all running together in relative harmony. How do seeds sprout or the geyser water come out of the earth? The mountains and valleys with their vegetation, flower and fruit are all such as to give a clear inkling that there is a Supreme Organizing Intelligence and this is Lord Krishna. He is the master of all Realities and the only Divine Reality in the world. However, it must be stressed that matter itself is inert and incapable of creation. It is dead and has nothing beyond a binding energy is it.

24.7 Devotion and Surrender

Sri Krishna Srila tells us is that the jivas are a superior energy which are the forces that exploit the mankind nature. The power of the jiva deriving from the Lord Krishna it does not have hardly anything in common with material nature, and energy. This is just, Srila points out, just as the marine creatures have little to do with land. Srila points out that the close affinity between the material and the spiritual is in fact an illusion and imaginary. The jivas born of spiritual energy have a tendency to always try and control material energy. In fact this attempt to control and direct material energy led to the creation of the atomic bomb and its throwing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, to control nuclear energies negative effects is not wholly possible and this shows that when the jivas forget the Lord and begin to think of themselves as the Lord grievous actions result. This is the result of the ego of the material and is not connected with spirituality at all.

However, all energy can be used in the service of the Lord Krishna especially in the performance of sacrifice. In fact sacrifice itself is the basic premise of right karma where the results are not coveted but the worship is coveted. Srila points out that in the Vishnu Purana these are described 3 types of energies. These are

- 1) the spiritual potency
- 2) the living creatures and entities
- 3) ignorance

This spiritual potency we find all goodness and wisdom and truth and beauty and all that is good resides in it. It is the source of all that is wonderful and happy and in fact is the real nature of the saints and great souls. On the other hand the living entities and creatures are such that they are not able to discern the reality and in trying to do so they tend to become perplexed and confused. The energy of ignorance also reigns widely in the world of men which makes them do things which they would otherwise not do. The anomic elements in society which lead to conflict and the various local, regional and international levels are the result of

ignorance. We find that it is due to ignorance that the world is in turmoil and misery. Thus it is the chanting of the name of Krishna and the Hare Rama mantra which lead out of ignorance and towards light. Thus will mean that the confusion of the individual will recede and he will become a capable devotee who will work in the spiritual light of the Supreme and away from the dark forces of evil.

Everything in the world is an interaction between spirit and matter. It is an interaction between the Lords superior spiritual energy and the Lords inferior material energy. The material energy is known as the "field of activity", also called 'kshetra' and the energy of the spiritual is called "knower of the actually field" or the Kshetra-jhana. All life is a product of the interaction of the 'field' and the 'knower of the field'. That is, it is an interaction of the kshetra and kshetrajhana. Both these energies are controlled by the supreme Godhead Lord Krishna. He is to be recognized as the ultimate controller of all action and interaction. He is the ultimate cause of the creation, maintenance, and annihilation of the universe. This has been explained as Srila points out in the Gita itself. It is pointed out that all life has its source in inferior and superior energies. Yet the Lord is both the origin and the dissolution of all living things. Lord Krishna tells Arjun that he is the Greatest Truth beyond which there is nothing. The Lord points out that everything rests on him "as pearls and strung on a thread." Thus we must acknowledge the Lord for what He is: the master of our destiny and the ruler over life and death.

Srila points out that Sri Chaitanya was of the insight that the Lord and his energies are both one and different. According to Srila Prabhupada the deepest and most secret Truth is that Lord Krishna is the Supreme Absolute Truth. If we do not perceive this Truth then we will be classified as materialists who have blind sensual cravings. Lord Krishna explains this in the Gita when he points out that deluded by goodness, passion and ignorance the world lives in confusion and does not know the Lord who is beyond goodness, passions, and ignorance. He also points out that to go beyond delusion is very difficult. The only method in fact to do this is surrender to the Lord Krishna. The Vedas also point out this Truth that the Lord is Perfect and there can be no increase or decrease in the energy of the Lord. The Vedas say that only the complete can produce something that is complete. As such the Vedas say that the Lord remains whole even though the whole of creation emanates from him and is supported by him. Whatever is produced of the complete whole is also complete in itself. Thus no matter what is produced by the Lord he remains in "complete balance" and there is no disturbance, in the cosmic mind.

The path of devotion is a difficult one and has in its way many by lanes. Maya the Lord's power of Illusion fools everyone at every turn of the road and makes them fall on the path. The way out of this conundrum is surrender to Lord Krishna for only then will he accept us and guide us back to the Godhead. Not surrendering to the Lord is a gross sin. Thus it is only the science of Krishna Consciousness that can release the world from the hands that are forcing the world into an ever tighter situation so far as lasting world peace is concerned. The chanting of Krishna's mantra will certainly change all this quickly and completely.

Srila has pointed out that the path of Pantanjali which has eight parts to it and yogi's following this path master it until they are immersed in deep consciousness or Samadhi. In their drive for the goal of perfection they are able to withstand the worst of all privations and difficulties. When they finally emerge from their trials and tribulations they have mastered a state of consciousness which cannot be disturbed by any outward changes in condition and fortune. Srila says that in this perfect condition nothing

is fearful not even death. Lord Krishna says about such yogis that it has been recorded that they are (Bhagavad Gita 6.22).

Being thus, he never departs from the truth

And on gaining this he feels there is no greater gain

Established in such a situation, he is never shaken

Even in the middle of the greatest problem, or difficulty.

24.8 The Eight Mystical Perfections

Talking of this verse Srila says that when the spirit is detached and one is established in Samadhi then the spiritual self is perceived and the yogi perceives the intense bliss of Brahman as is it were absorbing the yogi. He becomes the possessor of what Srila calls "eight mystic perfections". That is he develops supernatural and mystical powers due to his spiritual practice. The eight mystic perfections are told by lord Krishna in the Srimad Bagavatam (11.15.4-5). They are given here to indicate the kind of mystic cosmology is believed in by the Hare Krishnas.

- 1) The first of the eight mystic perfections is called *anima* and comprises becoming smaller than the smallest. This is not only a physical quality or power but also implies that attribute of humility where the self is placed last before the self of others.
- 2) The second mystic perfection is *mahima* or becoming greater than the greatest. Again this not just a physical power but also the capacity of the sage to tower over ordinary men due to the depth and clarity of their wisdom.
- 3) The third mystic perfection is *Loghima* or becoming lighter than the lightest. Again this not just an ability to walk over water but to embody a personality which is very unobtrusive as Jung would put it has hardly the trace of a shadow, and is therefore very light and buoyant in its mood and temperament. As we are seeing these powers develop through the spiritual practice of Patanjali yoga.
- 4) The next mystic perfection is that of *prapti* that is of acquiring anything that one desires. This again comprises not only of being able to get or materialize anything they desire. It also refers to the fact that the yogi can get anything he desires but he desires nothing and thus has all he wants, his wants being satisfied and under his control.
- 5) The fifth mystic perfection is that of *prakamya* in which any object can be enjoyed. This is a very real mental power but is also refers to the fact that the yogi has the power of concentration and imagination which becomes acute in such accomplished yogis.
- 6) The next perfection which the yogi develops is called *isita* or the ability to manipulate *maya* itself and create cities and palaces in the field of conscious reality. On the other hand it means that such a yogi understands the lures of *maya* and is not trapped in them. *Maya* is a power that keeps even the best of yogis in its thralls and prevents their spiritual progress.
- 7) The next mystic perfection of the Patanjali yogis is called *vasita* which implies the yogi has gone beyond *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* and is established in his *dhyana*. Having overcome these three material modes the yogi is not trapped in the relatives of good and bad and develops objectivity of perception.

- 8) The last of the siddhis or yogis power that the yogi gets from Patanjali yoga is the ability to obtain anything from anywhere. Here although the question of the ability to materialize is obvious it is also pertinent to note that the psyche is what is the arena of power and the yogi is after spiritual realization. As such, these kinds of power are usually not used.

Reflection and Action 24.2

Talk to ISKCON devotees about mystical perfections. Are they at all common? Write down in your notebook.

These powers are the products of his yogic practice and this has often led to some yogis who have mastered one to more mystic perfections or siddhis to pretend they have mastered the rest of them as well, and it may well be pointed out that such impatience and restlessness are impediments to Samadhi.

On the other hand for the Karma yogi such siddhi are impediments to Samadhi. The karma yogis mind remains fixed on service to Lord Krishna. He is constantly chanting the mantra of Hare Krishna in his mind. Doing this his mind and heart remain fixed on the goal and Srila says he is always in Samadhi, which is the ultimate goal as it unites us with Krishna consciousness. Being in Krishna consciousness his bliss is supreme and cannot be described and is inconceivable.

Srila feels that Patanjali yoga as a path does not measure up to the devotional chanting and service of Lord Sri Krishna. However, Srila is quick to point out that no work on the spiritual path is lost and that one gains by every effort. The yogi may not reach his goal in one lifetime but he is sure to reach it in a future life. All the karma and spiritual progress will be accumulated and accredited to the next life. However, when a materialistic person dies his wealth is all left behind and he does not have a spiritual bank balance. It all becomes "null and void". As concerns the Hare Krishna devotee his deeds are beyond the level of mind and body. His is a Krishna consciousness which transcends all others and makes for a happy journey back to the God head Sri Krishna who is the common goal.

At this point we must discuss devotional service to the lord. When a man works he usually has some selfish goal in mind and hopes for many rewards. But this is not the work which can be called devotional or sacrificial. If a man works devoting everything to Lord Sri Krishna then his work will not carry the germs of future Karma and his acts will transcend matter. The man of sacrifice is such that he does nothing unthinkingly and always dedicates each and every action to the Lord. By doing this he is attaining proximity to the Lord and is washing himself clean. If a man thinks "I will work and become rich" this is not an act of transcendence or sacrifice. This is simply a selfish goal and has personal motives and as such is an action which does not have much spiritual worth. Thus Srila says that we must follow Sri Krishna's advice dedicate everything to Him from the smallest to the greatest actions. If a man say "Everything I do, every breath I take is devoted and offered to Sri Krishna" then this attitude is called the attitude of sacrifice. From the attitude of sacrifice flows the action of spirituality that is true and pure. Such a person is dear not only to God but to all his near and dear ones. Sri Krishna warns his devotees that nothing is possible in this world without spiritualized action. Thus it is said in the Gita that the person who works devotedly and is a pure person who controls his mind and senses. Such a person is never entangled in work even while he is working why? This is simply because he is sacrificing everything and every action to the Lord.

On the other hand is the person who is inclined to enjoy the pleasures of the senses and to gratify them. The spirit of such people starts to fall into lower and lower forms of consciousness; and each action of theirs binds them to their bad karma more and more. This is not a case of the Lord favouring or not favouring certain souls but a consequences of the Laws of nature. Those who are struggling against material things and sensations constantly strengthen their spirit for Moksha the ultimate merging into the pure soul of Brahman whose very core is Sri Krishna himself. Thus to forget God while living in this world is no less than a calamity because this means that a person is doomed from the start. Sacrifice requires god awareness and god consciousness. The Bhagavad Gita (5.14) points out that the spirit in this body is not responsible for creating activities. He does not make people act nor does he create the fruits that accrue to action. All these things are done by the modes of nature acting upon each other.

24.9 Types of Devotion an Devotees

We may point out there are various types of action and various types of people. They may be divided into

- 1) Sattvic guna
- 2) rajasic guna
- 3) tamasic guna

The people of the Sattvic guna have purity of purpose and are god fearing people. They do not want to fight and compete for every little thing. They also don't want to claim superiority of thought or action. They are not proud and vain. Such people of humble and pure disposition are such that they always strive for Sri Krishna and always dedicate their action to Him.

The rajasi are the hedonists and the tamasic guru people are lazy, indolent and slothful. How then can such people hope to attain peace of mind and salvation? To clarify all these points Krishna says that a man must be a karma yogi. A man who acts for the sake of doing good actions while at the same time renouncing the fruits of such action. Krishna says that (Bhagavad Gita 5.29).

Those in full consciousness of Me, Knowing Me to be the ultimate receiver of all sacrifices and austerity

Supreme Lord of all planets

The well wisher of all living beings

Attains spiritual peace.

Thus it becomes clear that action that is rajasic or tamasic is strictly to be avoided by the devotees of Sri Krishna. The rajasic man in who the guna of all intoxication, pleasure, thrills and gluttony are predominant can never conceive of dedicating his life to the good of the people and the best of humanity. However, it is true as we pointed out there are different types of people with different types of dispositions. Krishna consciousness is also not possible for those people who are not willing to put in any effort to improve their lot and face life as it comes and do their best in the name of the Lord. Thus yoga which means union with the Lord is possible only after withdrawing from the world and meditation before taking action. Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita (6.1)

A person who is not attached

To the outcomes of his work

Who works with renunciation

Is a true mystic

Not he who lights no fire

Or performs no duty

The karma yogi knows it is due to the Lord that he is acting and that it is the three material modes that act and interact upon each other. Therefore, he renounces the actions he does by dedicating them to the Lord. His mind is always on Lord Krishna and the mantra of Hare Krishna always raises his Krishna consciousness. As such he is always in a clear calm and relaxed mood and is always cheerful. His Krishna consciousness has recalled that the Lord shines equally on everyone just like the sun who gives his rays to everyone without discrimination. They the real karma-yogis are the true devotees of the Lord. They have through their ceaseless and untiring efforts dedicated everything, even their bodies to the Lord what to say of mind and spirit. They have in fact attained perfection. In such a state they develop supernatural powers and abilities to understand.

We now cover Srila Prabhupada views on devotion to the Lord as per his interpretation of the Bhagavad Gita. According to Srila the message of the Gita is very simple and easy to understand. According to him the message of the Gita is such that there is no room for alternative interpretations or understanding. That is to say the message of the Gita, according to Srila, is universal and not applicable to some one country or a local context. So also the devotees of the Lord are spread out all over the world and not restricted to one country alone. These devotees are according to Srila a class apart and form a superior spiritual fraternity of those who follow the teachings of Sri Krishna. Thus, as Srila notes "God is not the monopoly of any particular group" or class. The message of the Gita is a universal message to each and every soul and can be followed by each and every soul also. Lord Krishna has unequivocally declared this in Bhagavad Gita (9.2) that through worship of the Lord even the minority and weaker sections of the society can gain liberation.

Srila is at pains to point out that certain portions of the Gita are deliberately interpreted in a capricious manner especially the teaching regarding caste divisions. According to Bhagavad Gita (4.13) Lord Krishna points out that the various division of labour is created from material conditions. He points out that the four divisions of society are also created by Him. Srila points out that there are four divisions of society according to the Gita and there are:

- 1) Intellectuals
- 2) Administrators
- 3) Merchants
- 4) Labourers

These divisions of labour should not says Srila, be determined by birth but by merit.

This is the same as when one becomes a high official by merit and not by birth right alone. In the world of three modes of material nature (rajas, tamas, sattva) social classes have always had a presence. As such Srila points out that birth should not be the criteria to determine caste or class. The four classes he says were created according to the qualification of a person. Srila points out that just as some essential services like that of medicine and doctors are available in all country similarly the four classes (as Srila refers to these divisions) of men are to be found in all

cultures. As things exist today the son of a doctor may not become a doctor; similarly the son of an administrator may not become an administrator. In a similar way the offspring of the four classes of men does not imply that the future of these children is fixed permanently and automatically as their parents. Thus, the whole notion of caste is questioned by Srila so far as its usual interpretation is concerned. We should not feel that caste exists in one country or what that caste should imply. The divisions of society as promulgated by Gita are the same everywhere in the world and in all countries. Srila is critical of the hereditary approach to caste where in each caste the only option to the progeny was the same occupation as the parents or the father. This 'restricts' the Indian culture and is a very narrow minded approach to the four classes of man. Srila feels much harm has been done by this and notes that the proper propagation of brahmanical culture would have benefited the world greatly.

Srila points out that varanashrama-dharma, which is what comprises the four spiritual orders and the four spiritual classes is binodal: it is either demoniac or transcendental. The two are diametrically opposed to each other. The social divisions are universal. Srila points out that a person with scriptural knowledge can pinpoint and discuss the four classes. Thus the four classes are seen everywhere and in all societies. The intellectual is present in all societies and makes the ideological climate of the society in which he or she is working. On him or her depends on the direction in which the society is going to go. The administrator too is present in each society and sees to it that all aspects of society interact and go together. That there are, no injustice administration and inequities in distribution. So also the merchant is in all societies not just the Indian subcontinent and ensures the smooth running of trade and business. The labourer too, is present in all societies and helps to construct buildings, dig trenches, and take up the physical maintenance of the society and its various material artifacts. Thus, it is a gross mistake to think that "brahmanas and the other three castes" exist only in India. The scriptures have pronounced that in Kalyuga everyone is born a Sudra. It is then the merit alone which counts.

We must note here that what Srila is giving to us is what may be termed as a transcendental view of caste in which the country specific nature of the phenomena is called to question. However, it is better as sociologists to keep in mind that the caste or jati reality still exists in India. We can talk about caste but we must distinguish it from varna. Thus, there are only four varnas or classes but there are thousands of castes or jatis which exist in India both rural and urban which are the basis of major decisions like marriage.

24.10 Conclusion

The situation can then be aptly described as one where the wandering souls, according to karma find better or worse situations facing them. In Sri Caitanya-charitamrta (Madhya 19.151) the Lord says, that it is according to their various types of karma the living entities are moving around in the creation of the Lord. Some of these souls get an elevated consciousness and in others the consciousness gets dimmed. Of many millions of these wandering souls only those who are fortunate get in touch with a real spiritual master by the grace of Lord Krishna. By the mercy of the spiritual master and the Lord the seed of devotion is available in the Bhagavad Gita. It is the duty of everyone to render him loving devotional service. In doing this all the other subsidiary duties are also subsumed.

24.11 Further Reading

Bhaktivedanta A.C. 1992 *Bhagavad Gita, As It Is*. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Shinn, Larry D and David G. Bromley, 1985 *Krishna Consciousness in the West*, Buckwell University Press.

References

<http://www.harekrishna.com/col/books/KR/lon.html>

<http://www.harekrishna.com/col/books/RP/rtw/prai-dev.html>

<http://www.harekrishna.com/col/books/Php/RTW/Krs-abs.html>

<http://www.harekrishna.com/about/philosophy/html>

Unit 25

Radhasoami Satsang

Contents

- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Sant Mat: Some Aspects
- 25.3 Patron Guru and Founding Masters
- 25.4 Formation of Individual Satsangs
- 25.5 The Naam, Mythology and Cosmology
- 25.6 Other Radhasoami Sects
- 25.7 Further Teachings of Radhasoami Sect
- 25.8 Ruhani Satsang
- 25.9 Conclusion
- 25.10 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- Provide salient features of Sant Mat;
- Describe the Life teachings of the patron guru;
- Give details about the teachings and techniques of Radhasoami Satsang; and
- Outline the teachings of other Radhasoami Sects.

25.1 Introduction

It would be better if we began our presentation of the Radhasoami Satsang with a given background in spirituality to provide us the right perspective regarding Sant mat the approach that we will be talking about. Spirituality is the area which we are concerned with and not specifically religion which covers a wide canons of rituals and litanies. Thus we must make a distinction between religion and spirituality because Sant mat is concerned with inner practices of a spiritual nature and it is not specifically a religion through it has its religious side to it. On the other hand religion is a body of data which has many facts, rites, rituals and beliefs which impact upon the followers of that religion. Religion follows domestic prayer rituals, has festivals, an ordained priesthood, and is either converted into or born into. Sant mat is based on spirituality and there are spiritual practices to elevate spirituality. There are few rituals but they are different in that they are inner practices and do not have outer but inner significance.

It is clear then that there is a relationship of 'inner' and 'outer' between spirituality and religion. In our case spirituality is the inner core, the esoteric side of religion and Sant mat is at the core of religion. The place of Sant mat is not conflictual with any religion or any specific religion, it is simply the practice of spirituality which has come down to us over untold ages and has been reformulated according to various saints and mystics many of whom set up movements to popularize the Sant mat. Others remained in small groups or communities not preaching and proselytizing to the masses but pursuing their spiritual interests quietly

and out of the public eye. So we can now locate Sant mat as part of the ancient traditions of spirituality typified by a master and his disciples all of whom are ultimate allegiance to the master and their co disciples and often live as a community.

Attached to these spiritual movements are other institutions like educational institutions and hospitals. The disciples are encouraged to serve the master and the movement in any possible way including complete surrender of body mind and soul to the master. It can then be seen that is type of movement is such that total allegiance is what is expected as is the case of secret societies. The guru/masters word is law and it cannot be contravened by any disciple. Again there is a minimum amount of various types of dhyān or meditation which has to be performed by the disciples. An important aspect of such spiritual communities is that there is a great emphasis on “Satsangh” or “Sangat”, that is the company of the followers or disciples. This is to socialize the disciples into talking about the wonders and achievements possible with the help of Sant Mat meditations. Satsangh also has the meaning of the discourse of the guru listening to which is one of the ways of ascending the hierarchical ladder of Sant Mat spirituality. The food to be taken too is strictly vegetarian and there has to be an abstinence from meat alcohol and narcotic drugs.

Thus what we are talking about here is a total lifestyle. We will concentrate upon the Radhasoami Math or Satsang in Beas, Punjab. There are two other Radhasoami Satsangs both in Agra U.P. at Soami Bagh and Dayal Bagh respectively. As for Soami Bagh Radhasoami Satsang it does not believe in proselytizing and as such it is of limited numbers. Again relative to Beas the Dayal Bagh group is limited in numbers. However, as regards the spiritual lifestyle and practices there is a great deal of similarity although they are not identical by any means. So then we speak of Radhasoami (Beas) we will be shedding the light on the Radhasoami movement as a whole although as we noted there are differences and divergences also in these groups.

25.2 Sant Mat: Some Aspects

Radhasoami (Beas) has been described as Sant Mat which can be translated as the Path of the Masters. A path which has to be followed and trodden upon by the disciples of the Master and the Master has to be a living person. The emphasis on the living master is most important in Sant Mat. We can then say along with Maharaj Charan Singh that Radhasoami Satsang Beas is a way of God realization while living in the body the effects of which impact upon the daily life of the aspirant in a most positive way. Radhasoami Satsang provides practical training in spirituality. Charan Singh notes that the Satsang is not a religion because it does not have any fixed outward signs and symptoms like priesthood and temples, dogmas and rituals. This is true in a limited sense only since belief patterns, dhyān, darshan, initiation (diksha) and so on do have a reflection of dogma and rituals. But clearly this is not so reified as in the major religions of the world. The method consists of turning the attention inward while at the same time taking care of all the various responsibilities that are to do with living in the world—that is responsibilities towards family, relatives, friends, community and so on. The Sant Mat points out that all misery in the world and all the sorrow and pain of living is because there is a separation of mind intellect and the supreme self or God. It is pointed out by Radhasoami Satsang teachings that the world of matter is not the real home or abode but simply a passage that is undergone on earth. It follows correctly and logically within this belief system that unless the separation from the Supreme is bridged completely sorrow and misery cannot abate,

let alone be eliminated. As noted earlier it is not at all necessary to search for this spiritual union anywhere apart from the human body itself. In this teaching then the body itself is regarded as sacred and the true place of worship. It is the temple of God.

Another principle is that the teachings of the Saints are similar all over world and time and space do not make a difference to these teachings. It is held that these teachings are universal in applicability and have been used since time immemorial. Not only this the teachings are held to be true for all time including the future.

Sant Mat Methods

At this point we would like to introduce the methods which are used by the Radhasoami Satsang to help elevate the spirit.

First is the repetition of the name of the Supreme and this practice is known as *Simran*. As ever the idea of repeating the names of God is to make the vibration of the body come in close synchronization with the ultimate vibration of God and therefore create an all around benefit to the devotee.

The next technique that is taught is meditation on the form of the Master who is in fact the reflection and representative of God on earth, as believed by his disciples. The meditation on the form of the Master also means that the radiant quality of the Master when meditated upon creates great spiritual waves and uplifting currents in the mind of the meditator and thus creates a feeling of bliss and happiness for the disciple.

The third technique is listening to the “unstruck sound” or word that creates spiritual alignment as this spiritual current is moving through the body all the time. This sound has a melodic aspect to it and washes away the impurities within the mind and intellect and spiritualizes them with the help of meditation on this current the soul of man rises higher and higher until the whole of it is absorbed by the Supreme or God.

With the help of these techniques the soul is able to free itself of bondage, misery, sorrow and attachment to worldly objects and man is able to live in the world without blemish and with detachment. This is in fact one of the signs that the meditations are being effective on the disciple.

Box 25.1 Initiation and Meditation

As regards the diet of the Radhasoami Satsangi the prescribed food has to be lacto vegetarian, and to lead to a moral responsible life. There is to be no usage of tobacco or narcotics in the life of a satsangi. The satsangi is not required to give up life in an active occupation and must work for a living. Further the Radhasoami initiation is a secret and personal experience and must not be revealed to anyone. Further we find that the spiritual revelations during meditation experiences are also to be kept secret and not to be shared with anyone as this can set up competition among the disciples and is also a good to personal variety or even personal depression if the meditation practices are not going well. This could well mean that the spiritual ascent of the disciples breaking this rule could be stymied.

There is yet another significant fact about Sant mat and this is that the master and his group of satsangis are against accepting money for any Sant mat activities. A true saint according to Sant mat perception never accepts money from anyone including the disciples. This is a correct principle since the acceptance of money from a disciple or anyone else means the loss of objectivity in personal dealings.

25.3 Patron Guru and Founding Masters

The patron guru or first and founding master of Radhasoami Satsang was called Shiv Dayal Singh or “Soami ji” to his disciples. He was the first one to introduce the “new” spiritual discipline in Agra in the year 1861, in north India. This new spiritual method was known as “Surat Shabd Yoga” or the yoga of the sound current. Through Surat Shabd Yoga the spirit is able to concentrate all its energies for spiritual life and for spiritual liberation. In fact it is the means of leaving bondage and reaching out beyond sorrow and misery. The meditation techniques of Surat Shabd Yoga have to be awakened by a living master and only then do they become proactive and effective in meditation and be of real help to the disciple. Thus the initiation by the living master is the key to the beginning of spiritual life and is able to go beyond the negative forces of Kal which rule the lower regions of the mind and drag down the senses of mankind. Thus the contribution of “Soami ji” is recognised as the founder of Radhasoami Satsang by all the branches of the Radhasoami movement.

Now before we go on to tell about the Radhasoami Beas masters, that is the masters who are recognized by the largest branch of the Radhasoami faith let us dwell a bit on the meaning of the name itself. According to the masters Radhasoami is divided into two names that is Radha and Soami. Note that the second word is “Soami” and not “Swami” although it is sometimes spelt that way. Radha is the name given to the atman or soul and soami is the name given to the Lord. So the Radhasoami teachings are those of a way a path to the realization of the Supreme and which involve a method or methods by which this can be done. Turning now to a description of the Radhasoami masters we find that all branches of Radhasoami sect owe allegiance to and recognize Soamiji Maharaj as the founder master of the Radhasoami sect. After Soamiji Maharaj the different sects in Agra and Beas have their own lineage of masters. We are concerned with Radhasoami (Beas) as it is by far the largest sect having an estimated 2 million followers in India and the world over. To continue Soamiji Maharaj was the first and universally recognised master of the Radhasoami's. He was the first to begin the teachings of the faith that is known as the Radhasoami today. The parental name of Soamiji Maharaj happened to be Seth Shivdayal Singh, and it was only after he had declared his mission that his followers began to call him Soamiji Maharaj. The mother and father of Shivdayal Singh were pious and godfearing and were the close devotees of the master Tulsi Sahib, who hailed from Hathras in India. He was born on 25 August 1818 in Panni street in Agra and was an unusual child who was interested in the spiritual from very early childhood and it was on seeing this unusual trait of Shivdayal Singh that Tulsi of Hathras initiated him into Sant Mat at the tender age of six years itself. This is highly unusual because Santon ki Shiksha is usually initiated at a much more mature age when the devotee can put in time and effort at the spiritual practices that the initiation into Sant Mat requires if any spiritual progress is to take place. Shiv Dayal Singh as we said was an unusual and spiritually archived child hence this early age of initiation to Sant Mat by Tulsi Sahib of Hathras.

Tulsi Sahib and Shiv Dayal

Tulsi Sahib had seen something very different in Shiv Dayal and had initiated him because of this perception. Shiv Dayal practiced the Surat Shabd yoga (which we will discuss in a later part) for well over 15 years and became a great spiritual adept and later he had the urge to share his gyan with all those willing to follow the instructions that were required to do so. The Satsang was started on Vasant Panchami in the spring of the year 1861 when he was in his forties and he continued to head the Satsang for 17

years until his death on June 5, 1878 in Panni Street where he had been born almost 60 years ago. Soamiji had named his approach to spirituality as 'Satnaam Anaami' at first but on the suggestion of a close follower he decided to call it "Radhasoami" and ever since then the spiritual approach has/ had the same name. Radhasoami philosophy has influenced and sparked off movements which have taken its philosophy whole or in part. Soamiji described his approach to spirituality in books which he wrote in two parts called "Saar Vachan Chhand Band" and the second part was called "Sar Vachan Vartik".

Soamiji's discourses have also been published. He was a true saint and never accepted anything for personal use; rather he spent what he had for the cause. Soamiji Maharaj was then a mystic of the first water and was an embodiment of the highest principles of self-realization. To him the soul of man could be compared to Radha, and the goal of Radha is to be fused into her lord or Soami the endless eternal reality. The two names combined give us Radhasoami. At this point we must clarify that this Radha is not the Radha of the Indian tradition of Radha and Krishna which is a different from the Radha of Radhasoami. Soamiji insisted that his followers should desist from alcohol narcotics and be vegetarian as these substances create obstacles in the way to spiritual practices and meditation by exciting the senses and confusing the mind. Hence, they are taboo in the Radhasoami faith.

A most remarkable aspect of Soamiji Maharaj was that he was not interested in spreading the knowledge he was discoursing on and initiating members into. He went to the extent of forbidding any propaganda through the newspapers to attract disciples who he believed would come through their own interests and their individual karma. Apart from a high moral life Soamiji Maharaj insisted on a practice of 2 hours of meditation. Each devotee was expected to practice 2 hours of Surat Shabd Yoga. In short it was a pretty rigorous type of discipline which was expected from his followers. Despite these rigorous requirements by the 1850's there were several followers of Soamiji Maharaj. This group of followers expanded over the years and the popularity and acceptability of his teachings reached many thousands of devotees by his death in 1878.

Action and Reflection 25.1

Outline what led to the formation of individual Radhasoami Satsangs?
Ask Radhasoami members why all Radhasoami satsangs recognize Soamiji as Patron guru.

This was however, an event which led to the formation of several splits in Soamiji's movement and this was because he did not name or appoint a successor before his death in 1878. Once he had died there was for several years a kind of chaos because no successor had been appointed. Under these circumstances the disciples close to him each began to run a Satsang and be the head of that particular split group. There were six aspirants for succession and they led the Radhasoami faith. This split remains and it is because of this that the movement spread beyond the limits of Agra and became a national and later international movement in the field of spirituality, although there were variations in the teachings to an extent.

25.4 Formation of Individual Satsangs

Individual Satsangs were formed by close disciples of Soamiji Maharaj including Radhaji his wife, Rai Saligram, Partap Singh and other followers. A prominent disciple, Jaimal Singh however, went to Beas in Punjab and

established a Satsang there on the banks of the river. This Satsang became the one which flourished the most and is the most well known of all Radhasoami Satsang's today. The followers of the Beas Radhasoami Satsang are the most numerous and are more than the total of all the Radhasoami Satsangs across the world. It is without doubt the most popular of all the Satsangs. The founder of this Beas Satsang was Jaimal Singhji Maharaj as has been mentioned. Jaimal Singh was also known as Babaji Maharaj. The Beas Satsang was established by him in 1891 that is more than ten years after the death of Soamiji in 1878. This Satsang is now an autonomous body with no specific links with other branches of Radhasoamis. Jaimal Singh was a Punjabi Sikh who was much taken up and inspired by the teachings and the discourse of Soamiji Maharaj and had become his follower and disciple.

Some years after Soamiji had taken Maha Samadhi in 1878 and had named so successor he set up the dera or camp three miles east of Beas village, close to Baba Bakala town on the northern banks of Beas river. That area in which Babaji Maharaj settled down is now known, as it was then as Dera Baba Jaimal Singh. This is the contemporary center of Beas Radhasoamis. After the demise of Babaji Maharaj he was succeeded by Baba Sawan Singh who as the name suggests was also a Sikh like his guru. He was a native of Narangwal Village in the district of Ludhiana in Punjab. Again following the Maha Samadhi of Baba Sawan Singh he was succeeded by Baba Charan Singh. The headquarters of the sect was retained by these gurus as their headquarters for spiritual practices.

We find that Radhasoami Beas followers were greatly influenced by the bible of the Sikhs, the Granth Sahib. It goes however, to their credit that they do not try to bring in parallels with mainstream Sikhism. Nor is there any attempt to try and brings up compassion with their movement and that of Sikhisms 10 gurus.

Babaji Maharaj

When Babaji Maharaj established his dera in Beas he had built a tiny Shanty about 9 sq. ft. in area. At present in that same area is a large and beautiful colony which is calm, quiet and peaceful and a perfect place for Surat Shabd yoga.

Now Babaji Maharaj died in 1903 and it was Maharaj Sawan Singh ji who was now the Successor. Sawan Singh has as his priority the propagating the philosophy and teachings of the math. He was utterly successful in his efforts and started to draw as international following from Europe, North America, Africa and Asia itself. During the gurudom of Sawan Singh the Beas Ashram prospered greatly and over 1903-1948 the Dera grew all round both spiritually and materially in terms of devotees and the buildings. The boundaries of the ashram spread to thousands of square yards. At first on the property of the Dera there were tiny rooms which later transformed under Sawan's leadership into a beautiful and well laid out colony.

Sawan Singh and Charan Singh

Sawan Singh after a most fruitful time passed away in 1948. He was over 90 years old. In his will he gave his personal and private property to his family and the religious property he was responsible for to his successor who was called Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh ji.

This guru died after 4 years in the seat in 1951 and named Maharaj Charan Singh as the master. Maharaj Charan Singh himself died in 1990 but dictated two days before he died that his nephew Gurinder Singh

Dhillon would succeed him, and today he is the guru of the Radhasoami sect Beas.

The objectives which were followed by all the Beas gurus include spreading of spiritual knowledge as per the Radhasoami faith of Beas. They also arranged discourses to fulfill this purpose. Further a day and night kitchen or Langar was run by the organization to give free meals to the visiting mendicants and the followers. The Satsang was also made possible to the production, publication, as well as distribution of Radhasoami literature. Finally, the objective was to run a hospital near the Dera. A word about Radhasoamis in the West should close this section on the gurus of Radhasoami Beas. The Radhasoami sect prospered most in the U.S. and this country is known for its religious catholicity. We find that in 1933 Sawan Singh ji gave one Harvey Meyers authority to represent the faith in the US. James Replogle was asked to do the initiations in the Midwest and East, while Meyers retained the West Coast. Meyers had been a devotee of both Sawan Singh and Jagat Singh his successor. In 1951 when Charan Singh took over the seat the Radhasoami following in the US expanded very rapidly. Under his two forbear gurus the US initiates were in hundreds in Charan Singh's time they rose over 10,000 in number. Today there is a Board of Trustees which looks after the work in the US.

Gurinder Singh

The current master Gurinder Singh has done a lot for streamlining administration of the Satsangs and Seva. He has improved the Satsang in an all round manner. It is Gurinder Singh who has fixed the age for discipleship and initiation to the age of 25. The initiation instructions which had been printed have been greatly revised. Gurinder Singh ji also edits newsletters and has built many new centers for the Satsang world wide. He travels all over the globe to spread the teachings of the Radhasoami. This has added greatly to the already monumental popularity of Radhasoami Satsang (Beas).

The Spiritual Background

We now turn to that part of the overall underpinning which is common to the various different but similar sects of the Radhasoami faith. These have both borrowed form and been inspired by the medieval saints and mystics both Hindu and Muslim (like Tulsi, Dadu, Kabir etc) and are Sufi in their interpretations. Today some of the sects are trying to change the original terminology of the Radhasoami faith in order to reach out to a wider audience but here we will retain the original conceptualization as far as possible. However, we will also point out in the new terminology what the actual equivalents are. For example many times "God" is used instead of "Radhasoami Dayal" which is a wrong way of conceptualizing the latter as "God" is a specifically Christian usage and does not fit in with the social and mystical approach of the Radhasoami.

It is also to be noted that many discourses of the Radhasoami gurus were and are couched in commentaries or explanations of one or several of the complets or dohas of one or more of the mystic saints of medieval India and even Persia, like Shams-e-Tabre and Jalal-ud-din Rumi. As such the commentaries though similar are quite capable of emphasizing one or other of the aspects of the couplet though the general overall perspective remains the same or similar. This is definitely one important aspect of the Radhasoami teaching. The idea is that man is not the final destination but that part of the man, the soul has to seek union with the Supreme soul. It is pointed out that the body is comprised of specifically five elements which are earth, water, air, fire and ether. At the time of death or pralaya we find that these elements revert back to their original source.

Thus the earth part is absorbed into the soil as various chemicals bones ashes and so on and the water air fire and ether also rejoin the parent bodies of these elements in the environment. The mind of man goes to Niranjana or Kaal. Each of the elements which is released during death experiences a release as it rejoins its parent body and similarly it is pointed out that when atman is released from the cycles of transmigration it will experience a great sense of happiness, bliss, relief and contentment as it is going back to Radhasoami Dham to unite there in the presence of Radhasoami Dayal. Thus the whole purpose of creation is paradoxically to go back to the creator. The whole play on the cosmic scale and the human scale is to reunite the soul of man blissfully with the oversoul.

Box 25.2 The Inner Self

Many saints have expressed this return to paradise in many different ways. For example Jesus said "Know the Inner Self" and guru Nanak said and has opined that there must be a psychological or mental death before physical death obviates this. Now this does not mean that knowing the Father or knowing the self is some kind of mental illness or derangement. Nor does the "death before death" mean some kind of suicide. In fact what is being referenced to is the detachment of the mind and intellect from all the factors that keep it bounded. That is the death that the saints refer to in fact as liberation during the lifetime itself and such a saint is known as jivan. That is a mystic or saint who has realized Radhasoami Dham, the ultimate abode of the Supreme and has merged with it. Only such a person is in fact qualified to be a Sadguru because the spirit of a Sadguru like Soamiji is resting in the bosom of the Supreme. It is only because of this very important feature that they can teach, initiate, meditate and in turn liberate the souls of the devotees who have developed love devotion and have surrendered at the Holy Feet of Sadguru. Thus to die is man's ordinary fate and the elements go back to the elements. Yet the liberation of atman from transmigration is possible only by the compassion and Mercy of Sadguru.

Death of the type that is made of the purification of the mind from all gross desires and sensualities means that the atman has united with Parmatman. It is Sadguru who teaches this way of dying to the world and all its various attractions by teaching the method of meditation at the time of initiation. By initiating into the Naam and other meditations a new possibility opens up which is that man's liberated soul can truly enjoy being in the world without misery and sorrow. It remains diffused in the body mind and intellect but these have been purified by the penance of meditation, devotion and seva of the guru, by love of the guru and by keeping to the rules regarding vegetarian diet and the abstinence from all narcotics. Such a person is fit in fact to be a guru and is himself able to give the right instructions to bring about liberation in those who have entrusted themselves to his care. Just as Radhasoami Dayal is the power that is the father of all the creation so also he is the father of all mankind. Similarly, the guru in the Radhasoami tradition is in fact the father or parent of all his disciples and they are his children.

25.5 The Naam, Mythology and Cosmology

Now a word about 'Naam' or 'Word' which is so crucially important in the journey to Radhasoami Dham. What is this word and what makes it so important as a vehicle that will liberate the devotee when meditated upon. The word came into existence without any external agency. As has been said in the Bible, New Testament "In the beginning was the word, and the word was God, and the word is God".

Thus it is the naam or word which created everything from cosmic phenomena down to the smallest atom. According to Radhasoami philosophy the power of the word created many powers including God. Each of these has its own specific meanings and functions and the human soul has to go through these regions before it reaches the final goal of liberation. This power of the word has created for example the “nameless region” or the Anami Desh. It has also created Agam Desh or the inaccessible region. It has further created Alakh Desh or invisible region and so on. Each of those regions including Sach Khand are hierarchically arranged in an order of ascension from one to sixteen.

Now further the spiritual current coming from Anami Desh at Sach Khand and was called Satnaam. From Satnaam were created a further two regions called Bhanwar Gupha and Daswan Dwar and these regions had their own words and resonance to reach them. They in fact became the Naam which was suited for some types of meditation.

In other words we find that there is an elaborate mythology and cosmology of the ascent of the spirit to the ultimate goal and destination. Which each region that is described such as Bhanwar Gupha and Daswan Dwar has a name or mantra for it is only the Sadguru or his close disciples who can tell about it as we are not talking primarily in terms of physical structures but conglomerations of the consciousness. The sixteen created regions each has a mantra attached to it and there are many sects in India which do not go beyond the first few conglomerations of consciousness and establish a religion on that basis. This is called a cosmology, a mythology, or a philosophy of Sant Mat because this has to be taken on trust and becomes a fact to the disciple after he puts in many years of meditation on the Shabad itself. Even then this is a somewhat esoteric part of Radhasoami faith and it is only recently that mention has been made of it as it is liable to be misunderstood or simply be difficult to understand. Shabad or naam or word the Radhasoami faith declares is the very source of the world and is ultimately the reason for its ending. In the meanwhile it is Shabad itself which keeps creation going round. It has been pointed out that Shabad created two areas of consciousness the Trikuti (Brahma) and Sahasradal Kanwal. Radhasoami faith now links up the cosmology with the human body and points out that these are six ganglions or chakras in the human body from the back of the eyes to the top of the head, right up to the region of the paramatman. Again similar ganglions or chakras are present from the bottom of the feet up to the eyes themselves. It is felt by the Radhasoami that it is not very necessary to give vast and detailed descriptions of the six chakras in the bottom part of the body because the journey they are undertaking is of the six chakras from the back of the eyes to the Anami Desh. However, they do point out that those gurus and disciples who concentrate upon the lower chakras will obviously remain at a lower elevation, and can go at the most to Brahmas level. The disciples then get lodged during life or at the time of death at one or other of these lower ganglions or chakras. Radhasoami faith points out that at the onset of human beings death the atman begins to withdraw itself from the nails of the hand and the feet and starts traveling upwards towards the head. At this juncture it needs to be pointed out and indicated that Radhasoami faith talks of two types of death.

Two Types of Death

One type of death is the ordinary death in which the soul gradually withdraws and leaves the body by itself. This may be called automatic or unconscious death. The second type of death is a conscious death in which the satsangi retracts the soul through the practice of meditation and leaves the body. The satsangi is prostrate like a dead person but the

breathing and critical life functions go on happening. When this conscious meditational death occurs we find that the yoga practitioner or satsangi retracts his soul to begin the ascension within the body itself and reaches at first the Guda ganglion or Chakra also known as the rectal plexus. This is the chakra which is associated with Lord Ganesh who is the emblem and dispenser of all material comforts wealth and prosperity, the reason for this God being the first to be worshipped in any prayer. Ganesh Puja begins all other rites and rituals. At this center there is a four petalled lotus and this chakra contains the element of earth. Next the travelling soul reaches the Indri chakra or genital plexus. This chakra comprises of the element of water and is associated with the liquid. The master and mistress of this centre are Brahma and Savitri and this is the centre of creation, and it is Brahma who creates this world. There is in this region a six petalled lotus and this is what it is represented by in popular yogic descriptions. The soul traveller then goes further upward and reaches the centre of the Nabhi chakra or the navel centre, and this centre is represented by the element of fire. The God Vishnu and his consort Laxmi is the ruler of this centre. They are the ones responsible for the continuation of the world. This centre is represented by an eight- petalled lotus. The soul then reaches the Hridaya chakra or the Heart Centre. This is the chakra where Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati reside. They are the rulers of the Heart Centre. The onus of the ultimate destruction of the whole world vests with lord Shiva and Parvati and this centre is associated with the element of air. The soul traveller then enters into the throat centre or the Kanth Chakra. The ruling deity of this Chakra is called Adi Bhawani the mother of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Here, is a lotus with two petals. A sound is heard from this throat centre. While the person is still alive and the Eka Mai or Adi Bhiwani do not interfere with it.

Box 25.3 The 'Tisra Til'

However, the 'Tisra Til' behind the eyes is where the Radhasoami journey begins inwardly speaking. The idea behind this is that sitting in the fifth stage it is better to go on to the tenth stage rather than start from the first stage itself. Thus Radhasoami begin their ascent in meditation from the point where the ordinary mortal ends his journey. In this brief exposition of some of the mythology and philosophy of Radhasoami faith we would not have failed to notice that there is a great deal of logic and consistency in the approach. There is every awareness and understanding of traditional yoga as well as their relatively recent Sant Mat disclosures.

Till now we have been presenting the viewpoint of Radhasoami Satsang of Beas. This is not an objectionable procedure because it is the largest Branch of the various Radhasoami sects. Further, the differences between the sects is not very much and it has so far served us well. However, it would be more representative if we were to present the viewpoint of another Radhasoami sect as this would give us a better understanding of the Radhasoamis. It would also help us understand that there are several Masters among the Radhasoami sect as a whole but their followers are not the same numbers and that a choice exists for a would be devotee to choose which sect he or she would like to affiliate with. This would depend on several factors because the smaller branches numerically have the advantage that their guru is more available to them whereas in the larger sects numerically we find that the Master may be less available to devotees due to organizational duties which often call for extensive travelling. This means that the darshan or fact to face presence of the master is not available for long periods and available for only some parts of the year, say, on important festivals. Thus the Dera itself, the base of the sect may

not have the Master with them all through the year. This is because the Master at Beas for example travels throughout the world on his mission to spread the faith.

25.6 Other Radhasoami Sects

So, let us see how the Radhasoami faith is described by Dera Baba Bagga Singh sect of the Radhasoami Faith. While at Beas the Master is Gurinder Singh ji Maharaj in Dera Baba Bagga Singh the living master is Baba Kehar Singh ji. Again the lineage that is accepted of the Radhasoami Gurus is not the same as in the other branches each of which have their own lineage or family tree so far as gurus and their succession is concerned.

The Bagga Singh sect of the Radhasoami begins its exposition on spirituality by pointing out rightly that man in this world is in search for happiness in various different ways. Some people try to find happiness in material pursuits and others in spirituality. For some the route to spirituality is in self abnegation, asceticism, and self control which for others is in the pursuit of pleasure. However, the goal of these various different paths is happiness itself.

It is pointed out that not knowing the source of happiness or ignorance is the biggest problem which confuses people and make them come back to sphere one even after years of effort on whatever chosen path, whether it is the worship of idols, travelling long distances on pilgrimage or to try the retreat into a forest on a cave.

Sadguru and Naam

This lack of success says Kehar Singh ji of Dera Baba Bagga Singh is because we are seeking in the wrong place. The would be follower is trying to find realization in the outside world whereas the Supreme self or God, or the Radhasoami is in the mind body and intellect of man and not in the social world at large. It is imperative then that we look within ourselves to find God, or Radhasoami so that we can begin to approximate this vibration and holiness and the further we travel within the happier and more peaceful we will be. In other words, there has to be a coming together of the devotee and the deity if there is to be true realization.

It is next pointed out that this union with Radhasoami cannot be learnt by one in a method of trial and error but must be learnt form someone who has mastered the art and science of soul—in short a Sadguru or perfected Master. Only under the guidance of such a true Guru can the quest for realization really bear fruit. It is the Sadguru who gives the “Naam” and it is the power of the Sadguru on which the novice disciple leans upon heavily until he or she is strong enough to be more steady. However, the dependence on the guru in fact has to be strong enough to be called surrender at the feet of the guru to be successful. There are three aspects of realization of happiness and to realize oneness with Radhasoami Dham. These are the

- 1) Sadguru
- 2) Shabd
- 3) Radhasoami

These three forms are interrelated and we find that it is Sadguru who is the key catalyst to making a devotee or followers commence the journey. However, a person will not seek out a living master unless he or she is herself quite miserable and has tried several paths unsuccessfully. It is only when an individual is buffeted about by the misery and travails of the world that a desire arises within a person to find a way out of all the pain

and the sorrow. It is then alone that he goes to the Sadguru and prostrates at his feet and finds solace. The Sadguru and some of his chosen disciples then explain to the novice the true meaning of Sant Mat and how the spiritual practices prescribed are a journey to Radhasoami Dham the ultimate or God. When the disciple is ready and has understood he is initiated by the Sadguru or anyone who he has authorized to initiate into the spiritual practices of Radhasoami faith the main of which in Bagga Singh Radhasoamis is the Shabd-guru or the Word-God.

Aspects of the Sadguru

It is the belief in the Radhasoami Math that the Master is the physical embodiment of Radhasoami Dayal the final and total vibration in the Universe. The Sadguru is the physical representative and replica of the Shabd-Brahm which is Radhasoami. As such the guru is also known as the Perfect Master. It must be made clear at this point that Sadguru or Perfect Master does not necessarily refer to some physical trait or the shape and size of the body of the Sadguru. This is a reflection on the perfection of spirituality found in the person of the Sadguru.

Perfection of spiritual union with Radhasoami is what makes a master. Thus Shiv Dayal Singh ji or Soami ji as he was called lived only 60 years yet he was destined to be the common founder guru of all the Radhasoami sects and it was only after his death in 1878 that different disciples set up their own branches and began announcing their own gurus over time. As we know the most successful of the disciples of Soami ji Maharaj was Jaimal Singh who set up Dera Baba Jaimal Singh near the river Beas. Thus for his entire career as Radhasoami Master Soami ji's authority was unquestioned. However, the confusion arose partly because he had not named a successor before his death.

It is said in Sant Mat that the Master himself comes to the individual who is keen to distance himself or herself from the travails of the world. There is a saying that if man does not go to Mahommed, then Mahommed will come to man. This in general defines the situation so far as the guru shishya relationship is concerned. This is a tie which leads ultimately to union with Radhasoami Dayal the ultimate vibrational deity whose emanations of power light and sound are all over the universe. The Sadguru then does not promise immediate release from all worldly bondage and unhappiness. Rather the Karma of the devotee has reached a stage of refinement and of purity that he encounters someone or something that leads him to the Master who will explain the Sant Mat and initiate him into the spiritual practices. The pursuit of this meditation regularly and substantially leads to spiritual evolution. It must be pointed out here that unhappiness cannot be converted into happiness overnight and that spiritual elevation is a long process. To hope then for union with the Radhasoami Dayal in a few weeks, months or years is then a futile hope for most devotees. For most devotees, and according to the doctrine of Karma it takes several lifetimes to reach Radhasoami Dayal. The emphasis on Sadguru as the vehicle of spiritual release is very great indeed. In fact it is a point that cannot be overemphasized. Without Sadguru there is no Sant Mat, and without sadguru there is no liberation.

This point is stressed time and again in the discourses and the writings of all Radhasoami faith sects. However, is not enough to have found and initiated by a master there must be unflinching faith that he is the replica in human form of the ultimate reality which is Radhasoami Dayal. Thus faith in the master is a key concept in Sant Mat discourses and writings. It is this faith in the veracity and reality of the Master being the true representative of Radhasoami Dayal that is really very important for without

this there can be hardly and progress in meditation and other spiritual practices. This is only when faith awakens in a disciple that he is able to hook or latch onto the spiritual current or flow of the master and is then lifted upwards from region to region (spiritual) until he reaches the final destination Radhasoami Dayal. Thus without a real and true faith in the master no real spiritual progress is possible. This is being posited because there are some misguided devotees who think that being initiated means automatic liberation. This is not so.

Box 25.4 “ All Things Must Change”

Sant Mat tells us that this world and all worlds are destined to perish at some point in time. Everything keeps on changing and the Buddha himself pointed out that “All things must change” is an eternal truth, and in this situation the only solution is surrender to the Sadguru. This concept of surrender is another very important one along with that of faith. Only if there is faith can there be the possibility of surrender to the feet of Sadguru. The benefit of surrender to the Sadguru is beneficial only if it is not just a matter of verbalizing it. The devotee has to feel from within that the one thing that matters is to be one with the guru because to be one with the guru is to be one with the Radhasoami Dayal. True surrender is accompanied by love and devotion or bhakti. As a matter of fact Sant Mat is of bhakti and of sufi orientation and Soami ji of Agra was very fond of quoting Persian couplets to explain the concepts and knowledge of Sant Mat. He also composed poetry in Persian. He looked also like a sufi saint with his long beard, aquiline face, prominent straight nose, and piercing eyes. Thus, Sant Mat has elements of both the bhakti and sufi orientations.

Sant Mat holds that the only permanent fact in the Universe is the Word or Naam. All the rest is of a short duration and temporary. Only Sadguru and the Naam are the true help of the suffering souls and it is through the Grace of the guru that re-birth can be circumvented otherwise it is a case of endless transmigrations, moving from death to death without end. In a world of unstability the only stability is in the feet of the Sadguru. There is a story that is told by the Bagga Singh Radhasoamis regarding the situation that we have been talking about. A child goes holding the hand of his father to a fair. He enjoys looking at the various displays and the games that are going on and enjoys himself. In the midst of his celebration he gets separated from his father due to the milling crowds. He loses his grip on his fathers hand and is pushed away. The child begins to weep and shout for his father “Father, father, I want my father”. It is at that point that the child understands that the happiness he experienced in the fair was due to the firm clasp of his father (Sadguru) and not just the fun and frolic of the fair. Only the firm clasp of Sadguru’s word can give happiness nothing else.

25.7 Further Teachings of Radhasoami Sect

Before we go on to explore more teachings of the Radhasoamis we need to point out a few home truths. This is rather significant at this point because from what we have been discussing it would appear that the devotees have to leave the world and go into seclusion away from the eyes of the world and away from all responsibility of family life. This is simply not a requirement for all the devotees. Most of the devotees live a responsible life and must be monogamous or celibate. Further the disciples must earn their own livelihood and not live in a state of dependence. For reasons similar to that of regulated sexuality the Radhasoami faith is strictly vegetarian and no narcotics are allowed to any disciple. However,

we many indicate that Satsang or company of fellow disciples and also listening to the discourses of the Sadguru are very important for meditation to be successful. That is disciples lives worships and works around the guidance of the Sadguru himself.

Radhasoami Satsang Beas has explained the yoga that raises the currents of spirituality beyond Trikuti centre onto the Radhasoami centre as being accessible through the Surat-shabd yoga. This yoga is the yoga of the spirit current of the yogi linking up in meditation with the unstruck sound (Anhad Naad) of the eternal thereby attaining it beneficially. For the novice or the junior initiate this would be a difficult exercise but with yoga practice this would become easier and the ability to focus on the internal manifestation of the soundless sound of eternity or Radhasoami could be contacted beneficially.

Surat Shabd Yoga

The Surat shabd yoga of Sant Mat has as its goal the ability of the individual consciousness or the atman to contact the higher spiritual realms by means of the life-sound. The Radhasoami's point out that this life current is known by various nomenclatures in the scriptures including shabd, logos, naam, bani or audible life stream. The soul has to unite with the naam and hence the name of this yoga is Surat Shabd yoga. Surat means soul and shabd means holy word or naam. When due to yogic practice the two unite we have the practice of Surat Shabd yoga.

Action and Reflection 25.2

Contact and ask some members of the Radhasoami's to tell you the meaning of Surat-Shabd yoga. Note down your findings in your notebook.

Thus Surat Shabd yoga means that the soul of the individual is being united with the Divine soul through concentration on the divine sound. Now those individuals who could master this yoga and were capable of travelling in this current to the highest of spheres, indeed to Radhasoami Dham were given the title of Puran Sant, Sadguru Perfect Master and so on. Such terms describe individuals who have freed the soul from its gross entrapping and are in fact free beings. They imply that the person is a spiritual adept in dhyān and is there by able to guide individuals souls through the various existential planes of awareness and consciousness to the highest realm also known as the nameless abode or “Anaami Lok”, which is the source of all possible type of existence sensate or insensate. It is the ultimate destination for the spirit of man and Surat Shabd yoga is the method and practice to get to this goal which is a spiritual one. Thus in Radhasoami Math Shabd is the power that sustains the Universe and is responsible for the creations and installation of all spiritual powers.

The Shabd is also called the unstruck Music of the spheres because at each stage of spiritual ascension we find that there is a different type of sound and music. We have mentioned this in the earlier section that at each sphere or ganglion there is a different sound which is spirituality strengthening and uplifting.

It may be noted however, that the sound stream to be usefully and beneficially contacted has to be done through the means of a realized master. It is the power or shakti which the master passes on to the disciple which allows the initiate to focus for any reasonable time on the sound current. It is also the power of the master which helps the disciple progress spiritually and to avoid distressing hallucinations and depressing thoughts or exciting thoughts which distract from meditation. The method is there but it is ineffectual unless the master directs the disciple in the

inner spheres and protects him from the negative forces or thoughts which interfere with Surat Shabd yoga. Thus Surat Shabd yoga is a journey back to the source of creation with the help of an adept who has already diffused his soul into it and become a worthy and venerable master. The lesson repeats itself: nothing is possible without grace of a realized master. This because the Master puts us in touch with life-current which moves and flows within the body audible form birth to the end of the body.

Thus, Surat Shabd yoga is a meditational method which is followed by Sant Mat and several related traditions. In Sanskrit 'Surat' means soul and Shabd means 'Word'. Thus, Surat Shabd yoga means the attempt to yoke the spirit with the word and then to rise into the eddies of the sound current. The aim then is to realise oneself in practice. Radhasoami do not tell us very specifically the length and duration of the journey to the sacred centre of the Universe but it is clear that very few individuals would be able to master the ascension into the ultimate sphere in a short while. Thus there is no specific time limit to this ascent. Naturally, this will depend upon how much effort is made by each of the novices and how serious is the involvement in the Surat Shabd yoga. It is clear with Sant Mat's belief in Karma and rebirth that Surat Shabd yoga will improve the Karmas of the individuals and enable them to move toward a final spiritual victory over time. Time is thus an essential factor in the realization of oneness with the ultimate father.

Initiation by Living Master

Thus, initiation by a living master is the key to begin the spiritual journey in each life. This involves the regeneration of the naam and the living master enters into the Tisra til ganglion of the disciple. Along with sound current meditation is involved other spiritual exercises which include as we have mentioned in passing the sumiran or repetition of the holy words or mantra that is given at initiation to the disciple. It also involves dhyana which could be meditation or viewing of the inner master and bhajan or the listening to the inner sounds.

Radhasoami cosmology states that man or the initiate is an perfect replica of creation (macrocosm). As a result the microcosm comprises several bodies, each one which is made in such a way that it corresponds with some specific plane in the macrocosm. The initiates bodies develop over the cycles of time going from higher planes to those that are below; and conversely from those that are below to those that are above. These are the processes of involution and evolution respectively. These processes involve the revolution of Karma and transmigration to different states of consciousness Surat Shabd yoga then means that the initiate travels the microcosm and brings it into time with macrocosm with the help and guidance of a living Sadguru. Thus, the spiritual process goes on until there is perfect God-realization or the soul reaches Radhasoami Dham as the ultimate destination of the soul of man.

25.8 Ruhani Satsang

Surat Shabd yoga has had many teachers and many followers. However, in the case of those of the movements whose Sadgurus are no longer alive or did not name any successor and have only regents cannot be termed to be Surat Shabd yoga movements, either by themselves nor by those living Masters who teach this yoga. As such Sant Mat movements and Surat Shabd yoga require the presence of a living master. Let us now turn to a few related movements which have been influenced by Radhasoami Satsang the first of which is Ruhani Satsang. Sant Kirpal Singh the first guru of Ruhani Satsang notes that 'Naam' has been ubiquitous in religions

literature. According, to Ruhani Satsang 'Naam' is to be seen the same as Akhand Kirtan by Guru Granth Sahib
Music of the spheres by Pythagoras

- 1) Akash Bani/Sruti in the Vedas
- 2) Nada in the Upanishads
- 3) Logos/ word in New Testament
- 4) Tao in the philosophy of Lao Tze
- 5) Sraosha by Zooaster

There are similarities between Suarat Shabd yoga with the Quan Yin Method which is promoted by the Master Ching Hai. Again, there is the Master Path which is also similar to Surat Shabd yoga whose founder and the living master is Gary Olsen. According, to him several historical figures have featured in the Sant Mat movement. These include in their times according to him;

- a) Lao Tzu, b) Jesus, c) Pythagoras, d) Socrates, e) Kabir, f) The Sufi Masters Hafez and Rumi, g) The Ten Sikh Gurus, h) Tulsi Sahib, i) Radhasoami Masters, j) Offshoots of Radhasoami Masters like Sant Kirpal Singh. Thus, there have been living masters down the ages.

Ruhani Satsang is an offshoot of Radhasoami Satsang and Sant Kirpal Singh was its founder. He died in 1974 leaving his son Darshan Singh as the successor. The teachings of Radhasoami Math and Ruhani Satsang are similar. However, Ruhani Satsang requires that the initiates keep a record of the spiritual practices and experiences. On the other hand, Ruhani Satsang does not advocate the contemplation of the master during meditation like the Radhasoami Satsang which does not teach the keeping of a spiritual diary. For Kirpal Singh Ruhani Satsang is not an intellectual or philosophical system nor a system of ethics. It is rather a method by which the atman imprisoned in the body can be released so that it can join the oversoul. As in Radhasoami Math the Ruhani Satsang also advocates that the individual soul connects with the audible life stream or "Sound Current". This can only be done by an adept or master. As among the Radhasoamis vegetarianism and a simple moral life are advocated. Two hours minimum must be devoted to spiritual practice and a diary kept of all the spiritual progress and attainments as well as all pitfalls. In the movement of Kirpal Singh as is the case with Sant Mat and the Radhasoami movements we find that three factors are of the greatest importance:

- 1) Satguru
- 2) Shabd
- 3) Satsang

All three of these have been explained earlier and we need not go into it again.

Another similar movement to Radhasoami Satsang and Ruhani Satsang is Eckankar and this movement was greatly influenced by a book called "The Path of the Masters" by Juhian P. Johnson which was published in 1939. Johnson was an American who became a follower of Sawan Singh. Johnson was initiated in 1931 and joined Sawan Singh ji at Beas in 1932. Over 1933- 39 Johnson put down many of his experiences with the master in book form. Initially he helped Sawan Singh translate some his own work into English. He then wrote four further books on the wisdom of Sant Mat. His 1939 book "The Path of the Masters" outlined in detail the

“Santon-Ki-Shiksha” or teachings of the saints. This book was a beacon call to would be devotees and had remained the authoritative text for the same even up to 1955 both to Radhasoami (Beas) and Ruhani Satsang.

25.9 Conclusion

The Sant Mat is not a new approach to spirituality but rather it has come out into the open and available to any sincere adherent who wishes to meditate on reality. The world has indeed become a more accessible place over the centuries and this explains why more people today are aware of Sant Mat than ever before. However, it may be pointed out that a rendition of Sant Mat and Radhasoami Math which is part of this tradition, is not very easy because it is an experiential phenomenon that we are dealing with. It makes intellectual sense to read about the Sociology of the Satsang and to understand its philosophy but to really know what it is all about the aspirant would have to get initiated and to actually practice Surat Shabd yoga, dhyana, and bhajan under the guidance of a living master.

25.10 Further Reading

Johnson, Julian P. 1939 The Path of the Masters. Beas, Radhasoami Satsang.

References

[http:// www.geocities.com/radha_soami_satsang_beas/? 200631](http://www.geocities.com/radha_soami_satsang_beas/?200631)

[http:// www.answers.com/topic/surat.shabd-yoga?](http://www.answers.com/topic/surat.shabd-yoga?)

[http:// www.aors-dbbs.org/enter/introduction](http://www.aors-dbbs.org/enter/introduction)

[http:// www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radha_Soami](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radha_Soami)

[http:// www.geocities.com/eckcult](http://www.geocities.com/eckcult)

Unit 26

Sai baba of shirdi

Contents

- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Landmarks in Shiridi
- 26.3 Life of Sai baba of Shiridi
- 26.4 Early Teachings of Sai baba
- 26.5 The Assurances of Sai baba
- 26.6 Sai baba: Miracles and Parables
- 26.7 Further Miracles and Parables
- 26.8 Conclusion
- 26.9 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- relate the life of Sai baba;
- outline early teachings of Sai baba;
- describe the assurances of Sai baba; and
- know about the miracles and parables of Sai baba.

26.1 Introduction

Every major saint or religious teacher eventually gives rise to an organization after his death. These organizations/ charitable trusts then become responsible for disseminating the life and teachings of the saint, observe various festivals and rituals and pray or meditate on the message/ teachings of the saint. In some cases the teachings and rituals are explicit and in others it is implicit. In the case of Sai Baba of Shirdi the trust formed was called Sai Baba Sansthan. In our introduction it would be better to delineate first the various aspects of this organisation, the important spiritual landmarks in Shirdi itself. We will then go on to relating Sai Babas life and teachings as also the teachings in parable form. Suffice it to say at this point that Sai Baba of Shirdi is among the foremost holymen of India.

The Sansthan was created in 1922 in the memory and for spreading the teachings of Sai Baba. From 1922 onwards the Sansthan has worked in various ways to help the devotees of Sai Baba. Thus in 1990 a large building was made which could house 3500 at a time apart from having 560 rooms with the various facilities. In memory of Sai Babas miraculous healing powers the Sansthan has inangurated a hospital in Shirdi with modern equipment to help diagnosis of disease. The equipment is often donated by the devotees of Sai Baba. The Sansthan also provides through a 'Prasadlay' food for the devotees which is cooked in modern equipment and in free of smoke pollution. A canteen is open all hours of the day or night. The Sansthan has also published various photos and books on Sai Baba in various languages. Thus the Sai Baba Sansthan has been looking after and disseminating the teachings very actively and efficiently.

26.2 Landmarks in Shirdi

We would man like to mention some landmarks in Shirdi so that we can contextualize the life and teachings of Sai Baba. The first of these is the Samadhi Mandir where the mortal remains are enshrined. The mandir is built with stores and Babas Samadhi is built with marble slabs, which are surrounded by ornamentation. Just behind the Samadhi with two pillars of silver with elaborate designs. At the back of the samadhi there in an idol of Sai Baba sculpted with Italian marble, and installed in 1954. In nearby hall some of the items handled by Sai Baba are kept on display for the devotes. Pictures of Sai Baba are kept on the first floor of the mandir. These pictures illustrate the various aspects of the life of Sai Baba.

Temple worship begins early in the morning at 5 and goes on for 5 hours. Various rituals are also observed by the temple devotees and an important aspect is that on each Thursday and various festivals Babas photo is taken out from the palanquin and taken in procession.

Another important landmark in Shirdi is that of Dwarkamai. This is at the left side of the Samadhi Mandir and this is the space that Sai Baba lived in during his life. This was often the scene of healing with the saintly powers that Sai Baba had. When Sai Baba had arrived at Dwarkamai it was a dilapidated mosque but is now in good repair. Dwarkamai has a large stone on which Sai Baba sat and also a portrait of Sai Baba. There are two rooms one of which has a chariot and the second a palanquin (palkhi). In the room where the chariot is housed is also a small temple.

At the second level we find that there is a stone stool on which Baba took his bath. Here there is an oil painting of Sai Baba and a wooden Kolamba (wooden vessel) in which Sai Baba kept the donations (Bhiksha) brought from the village.

Another important place in Sai Baba Shirdi is what is called "Gurusthan". This relates to the fact that Sai Baba came in his teenage years as a young ascetics and sat below a 'neem tree' where he was first seen. This area is now known as 'Gurusthan' and the last renovation was made in 1941. Gurusthan has a small shrine on which is placed a photo of Sai Baba in front of this is shivling and the Bull Nandi. Closeby is Babas sleeping place called Chavadi and the wooden bed and chair belonging to Sai Baba are still there. There are several other features of interest in here and the neem tree how has branches going through the roof of the temple.

The next important landmark in Shirdi is the Lendi Gardens which were laid out by Sai Baba himself in his early years in Shirdi when he spent a lot of time laying out the garden. This is at a distance from Gurusthan. Sai Baba used to water the plants everyday as part of his Bhakti. The name of the garden comes from the drain that used to flow past. Sai Baba used to go to garden in the morning and the evening to ponder and to relax under a neem tree. There Sai Baba dug a pit into which he put a flame which he kept burning day and night. After his death a small memorial has been built in marble and the flame now burns inside a glass box. These are some of the very many memorable places in Shirdi which are in the memory of Sai Baba and his holy life.

26.3 Life of Sai Baba of Shiridi

We now turn to an outline of the life of Sai Baba which indicates quite clearly that he was an extraordinary saint. If this were not so he would not have inspired people all over the world to lead a spiritual life. In fact he is regarded by his devotees as a perfect saint who lived for his devotees curing hundreds of the ill with his spiritual healing powers. Sai Baba first

came to Shirdi at a tender age in 1854. He then left Shirdi and returned to Shirdi with a marriage procession in 1858 and then lived in Shirdi the rest of his life. No proper account is available as to what he did, before he came to Shirdi, where he was born, who were his parents and family of orientation. What was quite clear to all those he came in contact with was his extraordinary spiritual powers and compassion, which was the basis of healing powers. It is well known that the saints take on the Karma of those they heal upon themselves. This is because of their spiritual powers being used to create happiness the world.

Sai Baba entered into Shirdi as an ordinary person in a marriage procession. He was not known to anyone. Yet in Shirdi people began to address him as 'Sai' that is saint and Saviour. 'Baba' is an expression that is used for a spiritually evolved person. Soon, after his advent to Shirdi all referred to him by the name of Sai Baba.

Box 26.1 Advent in Shirdi

Sai Baba was first noticed near the village boundary while he was sitting under a margosa (neem) tree about 1854 deep in meditation. In his younger days Sai Baba stayed under this tree for a while and then left Shirdi and his readvent to Shirdi was in 1858 and there he stayed until his mahasamadhi in 1918. The second occasion in which Sai Baba entered into Shirdi was in fact a triumphant and all the people found him to be extraordinary spiritually evolved. Spontaneously the people of Shirdi began to refer to him as a saint and saviour.

At the beginning of his stay in Shirdi Sai Baba was detached and self absorbed walking on the boundaries of the village or meditating under the margosa tree. Gradually certain of the Shirdi villagers began to give him saintly recognition and regarded him very highly. One of the extraordinary devotees was a lady called Bayyaji Bai who used to trace down Sai Baba in the jungle near the village and the urge and force him to eat from what she had brought him. She would with motherly affection offer the food to Sai Baba and then return to her house. This went on for a while until the compassion of Sai Baba made him shift from the jungle to an ancient and broken down mosque on the boundary of the village in which he lived to the end of his days. In doing this Sai Baba sanctified the mosque and today it is one of the most popular worshipping sites in Shirdi. This mosque is called "Dwarkamai" or the abode of Lord Krishna.

Contrary to expectation Sai Baba was not simply an ascetic saint but was in fact fond of wrestling in his younger days. At other times he used to dance in ecstasy with anklets on his feet. In the company of devotees Sai Baba used to go into ecstasy and dance and sing in the midst of his deep state of divine joy. He used to sing in Persian and Arabic and often the songs of Kabir, another well known saint.

The dress of Sai Baba was very distinct in that he wore a long Kurta called 'Kafni' and had a length of cloth which was wrapped on his head so that it flowed behind his left ear. Sai Baba's habits were very simple and he used ordinary sack cloth to sit or sleep and went to sleep with a brick under his head. Hence Sai Baba had completely transcended the ordinary comforts which most human beings are obsessed with.

He was an ascetic and a 'fakir' so far as his personal habits was concerned. When questioned why he led this ascetic existence he replied that simple habits were better than opulent luxury. Outwardly Babas visage was handsome and he had a mesmeric personality. Anyone who saw him once (darshan) never forgot him and immediately became his devotee. As regards his behaviour this was usually compassionate but sometimes his

compassion manifested in rage which was divinely inspired and subsided like a wave soon after it manifested. Thus, this anger or rage was a divine manifestation which was not the 'anger' of the common man, who simply loses control over himself. Perhaps his mood was already preoccupied with saving his devotees and a show of rage or temper is also known as a method saints have used to test loyalty of devotees. Nothing negative can be imputed to this type of behaviour in the life of such an extraordinary saint such as Sai Baba.

Sai Baba used to go to various houses in Shirdi to beg for alms and it was his generous and saintly nature to share what he got with his devotees. Another feature was that he never stored food due to his unshakeable faith in the Almighty.

Sai Baba also kept a fire burning. This in fact was a sacred fire or Dhuni of which the Udi or ashes were of medicinal value when used by the devotees and its application on the forehead kept the mind calm and equipoised. He would also get Dakshina in terms of money on property from which in fact he was completely detached. Sai Baba never kept money or dakshina for his purposes but used to distribute the sum he would get daily to other needy persons, as the sick, disabled, elderly and impoverished. In his early days in Shirdi, Sai Baba laid out a garden after ploughing it. He himself watered the plants and looked after the garden, which was called the Lendi garden.

Sai Baba is also known as the "common man's god" since he himself was completely ascetic and lived, spent his time, and shared his food from alms with them. Further Sai Baba did not have any discrimination against any caste or class and freely shared his clay pipe (chillum) without orthodox caste rules being permitted to come in the way of this gregarious activity. This shows how humble and non discriminatory his attitude was towards people in general and devotees in particular. He often went to the extent of cooking food for his fakir visitors.

Sai Babas completely saintly attitudes and behaviour endeared him to the villagers of Shirdi who gradually began to worship him. Initially Sai Baba was not very enthusiastic about it but gradually he allowed this worship since it gave great peace of mind to the devotees, and onetime gave his blessings to the multitudes. The residence of Sai Baba Dwarkamai mosque was open to all devotees at all times to express their love and affection for Baba. His devotees cut across lines of class, caste, affluent, and poor. All were welcome as creatures of a common God.

Once the word about Sai Babas enlightened nature got around Dwarkamai and Shirdi in general had a large number of people and devotees visiting Shirdi for Sai Baba's darshan or spiritual seeing and contemplation. Shirdi itself once a sleepy village now became the hub of a great deal of spiritual activity. In fact some began to worship Sai Baba in Shirdi with a lot of expensive rites and rituals. However, Baba was detached from all these manifestations of worship and remained calm and collected. The devotees grew very many and by the time Baba left his body there were already very many believers and devotees of Sai Baba.

Today when Sai Baba is no longer in the flesh and blood with us many devotees consider looking at his picture intensely as the equivalent of viewing him in person. That is to say darshan now is seeing the picture of Sai Baba and offering genuflection and arti to it.

Baba performed many miracles and cures in his lifetime and always blessed his devotees with some ash from the Dhuni he kept lighted. This ash was known as Udi or sacred ash and had healing capacity and was used by devotees for all sorts of maladies to good effect.

So far we have been talking about the outward life of Sai Baba. However it was in his day to day teaching that Baba can really be discovered for the saint he was. As such we can commence with some of his sayings, incidents, cures and so on. The teachings which are like parables explain to us who Sai Baba was spiritually and how he taught in daily life. In fact nothing was too small for him to give blessings and faith to his devotees and they flocked to him for all their problems and he blessed them and spoke words of compassion. He did not want to be glorified in person.

26.4 Early Teachings of Sai Baba

Sai Baba gave his devotees pure and simple assurances in his lifetime which were of great benefit to their peace of mind and gave them great tranquility. Thus Baba assured his devotees that there would be no calamity in their houses in domestic life if their faith in him was strong and unshakeable. He pointed out that this assurance is given by Sri Krishna in the Gita. Baba further stressed that he was in touch with the devotees inner thoughts since he was established their hearts and was in fact in the heart of everything including the beasts and insects. Sai Baba in fact stated that he was the very embodiment of the divine- the mother of all possible creation, preservation and destruction of the universe.

Continuing in this vein Baba declared that the search for him should be not just outward worship but the enquiry and search within oneself. He made this clear when he pointed out that his consciousness, which is the All-Pervading consciousness, was within all creatures and thus attaining oneness with that consciousness meant that the seeker has gained oneness with all creatures and hence with Sai Baba who was All-Pervasive. Such an inner enquiry would remove all doubts of devotees since they would in their worship ritual and religion attain oneness with him. He advocated the mantra of "Sai Sai" or "Om Sai Sai" as words which had the power to lift ordinary consciousness to a transcendental level. However he did not posit any specific meditation posture for this simple mantra and therefore it can be repeated anytime, anywhere and as many times as the devotee wants to share the divine consciousness of whom Sai Baba was a representative. He himself claimed to be cosmic consciousness within everything.

Sai Baba left his body in 1918 but his spiritual self continues to help and guide the devotees. There is a story which gives an idea regarding this belief held by his devotees. The story is that a devotee called Navayanrao had Baba's darshan two times during the time when he was alive. Three years had lapsed after Baba left the body in 1918 when this devotee fell ill and almost died. No medicine or treatment gave him any relief. As a last resort Narayanrao prayed to Sai Baba and began to meditate on him continuously. Then one night Narayanrao had a dream in which Baba gave him darshan and the assurance that he would be well again and would no longer be bedridden and would be able to walk again within a week.

Narayanrao thereafter started getting well and could soon walk again. This goes to show that the work and influence of extraordinary saints goes on even after they leave the body. This is certainly true for Sai Baba whose mission continues and to his devotees he is spiritually still alive. Baba's statements form the main corpus of his teachings and the ingress into them indicates that Sai Baba could do wonders for those who were in any kind of suffering. Yet in each of the miraculous cures there is more than a story- there is a teaching hidden in them. Moreover, the statements Baba made in connection with his Divine status are such that they arouse a deep curiosity and reverence for Baba. Thus Baba has made it clear as regards behaviour that for anything to take place or any relationship to

exist there must be interaction. He advised that if anyone came to his devotees in search of help he should be treated kindly and politely no matter what or who the person was. All seekers should be treated with the greatest of respect. He advocated giving the needy people whatever they needed be it advice, clothes, food and water. He even went to the extent of saying that even if someone asks for money and you don't have it, even then he should be politely refused and not treated harshly.

In a similar vein Baba revealed his divine nature by pointing out that if all his divine activity was written and talked about all ignorance would go away from the minds of the hearers or listeners. The consciousness of material things, and material possessions would reduce greatly and finally fade away. In their place the spiritual consciousness would arise and devotion would become intense.

Apart from their personal prayers and meditations on Baba his devotees are busy in disseminating knowledge about Babas Leelas and miracles so as to remove the ignorance and bring in enlightenment. For Baba the devotee should not immerse himself or herself into worldly activity but observe the flow of the world as this would create detachment from the world and bring the devotees close to Sai Baba and create waves of devotion. Sai Baba urged his devotees to break down all barriers to devotion.

26.5 The Assurances of Sai Baba

We now turn to the assurances that Sai Baba gave to his devotees. These were originally written in Marathi by Shri Mohaniraj Pandit and translated into English. Our attempt here is to try and explain or comment upon these assurances by way of explaining them further. We will go one by one in this procedure and then try and give an overall statement. The first assurance is:

- a) No harm shall befall him who sets his foot on the soil of Shirdi.

This assurance has several levels or dimensions to it. In this the first level is that all those who come to Shirdi are assured of good health and happy mood during their stay in Shirdi. It is an assurance that any devotee or would be safe and sound on the sacred soil of Shirdi. We must keep in mind that while Sai Baba was alive Shirdi was a different place than it is now in the sense that so much of development and construction had not taken place and the facilities in area 1818 were not so good as they are now. There is however, another level to this assurance which relates to anyone who treads on the sacred vibrations left by Sai Baba in Shirdi. That is to say Sai Shirdi and its territory bestows protection to the devotees and that this protection would last beyond the stay of the devotees and visitors and give them a permanent benediction in life itself. This is the first assurance and it is an important one because it shows that Shirdi was and spiritually still is the home of Sai Baba. He spent sixty years in Shirdi and knew every corner of Shirdi. He had begged his food from all four corners of Shirdi and the dust and soil of Shirdi had rubbed on him and off him. Further Babas daily routine and ablutions also gave his spiritual powers to the soil of Shirdi. In fact Sai Baba made Shirdi a holy village and now it is a holy town. As such the assurance is that all those who set a foot on Shirdi will benefit spiritually. Let alone no harm befalling those who go to Shirdi there will be great good and happy fortune for those who visit and stay in Shirdi in order to visit the town of Sai Baba.

Let us turn now to the related assurance of Sai Baba to his devotees. This assurance is:

- b) He who cometh to my Samadhi, his sorrow and suffering shall cease.

Again, this assurance is of several levels and dimensions. The first obvious level is that when a devotee visits the Samadhi of a renowned saint there is an automatic connection with the vibrations of the Samadhi and that of the devotees. This is because Samadhi is a spot full of spiritual power and the mortal remains of the Baba lie there. As such rituals around the Samadhi such as the kneeling or the folding of hands in reverence, the Udi or sacred ash all create an ambience in which the devotees are entranced and feel a great flow and release of love and other emotions when they are near the Samadhi. Samadhi is sometimes the scene of great emotional crying, singing, fainting or jumping in ecstasy in the presence of the Samadhi. Their sorrow and suffering cease for they have found their guru and their Saviour in Sai Baba. Thus the assurance regarding the positive beneficial effects of the Samadhi of Sai Baba cannot be undermined. It is in fact the central feature of Shirdi so far as the holy spots are concerned. At another level the Samadhi and its darshan is good for anyone and everyone and it makes every one happy.

Let us now turn to the next assurance of Sai Baba keeping in mind that these assurances are all related to each other and shed light on each other. The next assurance is

- c) Through I be no more in flesh and blood, I shall ever protect my devotees.

This assurance from Sai Baba is a spiritual statement in which he promises his devotees that though one day he has to leave the earth and his body put into Samadhi he is spiritually still proactive so far as his devotees are concerned and will protect them. Here we point out that there is nothing in this assurance that is questionable because it is a known fact that great saints and realized souls continue to live in a spiritual body and very many devotees have had darshan of Sai Baba even after he departed in 1818 because he lives on in the spiritual body which is every bit able to help, energize, advise and bless the devotees who would pray to him. He would protect them from all harm befalling them. Thus, the fact that Sai Baba not being in a physical body does not prevent him from being in a spiritual body which will protect and help the devotees.

The next assurance or tenet that we turn to is that

- d) Trust in me and your prayer shall be answered.

In this Sai Baba is being very straight forward and there is no prevarication in this assurance at all. The simple method for prayers to be answered is to trust the guru. The guru in this case is Sai Baba and it is trust in him which will create the compassion of the Baba to fulfill the prayer. It is well known that devotees go to the saints and to their Samadhi when they have something praying on their mind. The numbers of problems in fact are so many and so diverse that it is really a simple way that Sai Baba has assured his devotees of their fulfillment. Part of the cure is the use of Udi the sacred ash and many who have used Udi with faith and trust have found that their problems are solved. Yet trust has to be in the guru and this creates a link between the vibrations of the guru and the devotee and then, through spiritual transfusion of energy the cure or the problems gets

solved. At another level simply trust can also help the beginner start on the journey. At some specific point he will be able to know that his trust has flowered.

We now turn to the assurance that

- e) Know that my spirit is immortal. Know this for yourself. We have been saying in the in the comments on the last assurance that the guru does not die when the body is buried or is cast to the flames. Thus the devotee has to realize that the spirit of the guru is immortal—that it does not perish with the body. However, this faith is very difficult to have and only the devotees who are realized souls themselves can have full faith in this tenet and that is why Sai Baba asks the devotee to know this immortality of spirit himself—that is by his personal experience. How can this faith in the immortality of the spirit be realized by any devotee? It is naturally through meditation on “Om Sai Sai” and the darshan of the picture and visit to Shirdi if possible. Though there are many temples now to Sai Baba we find that ultimately a visit to Shirdi is always at the back of the mind of the devotee of Sai Baba. This is linked up with faith and loyal devotion. It is by seeing for oneself the Samadhi and the dhuni and taking of the Udi from Shirdi itself that ordinarily the faith in the immortality of the spirit arises within the devotee himself and he no longer has to be told that the spirit of Sai Baba is immortal.

We now turn to the next assurance and see what it means and what we can comment upon it to make its meaning clearer. It says,

- f) Shows unto me he who sought refuge and been turned away.

Sai Baba points out that he is a compassionate and affectionate guru and that he turns no one away. This is an open invitation for all people and would be devotees to approach Sai Baba with faith, trust, humility, affection, love and devotion. For while Sai Baba says he turns no one away who has sought for refuge it is also clear that Sai Baba as the mentor and guru has to be approached in the proper manner that is prescribed to approach him. For those who approach Sai Baba in the right spirit of humility prayer and hope the doors of love and affection open up and he or she is gradually helped over his or her problems or difficulties. We will in a later section show with the help of stories and parables how so many have sought the refuge of Sai Baba and here overcome their problems and difficulties. Some people again wonder that they have not seen Sai Baba how will he them help them? To these people it must be made clear that even the darshan of a picture of Sai Baba is like having darshan of a living soul.

We have turn to the seventh assurance of Sai Baba which we point out is related to the other ones. This is,

- g) In whatever faith men worship Me, even so do I render to them.

This is in fact a difficult assurance to comment upon except of course that it also exists at different levels. Thus it is clear at the first level that what matters is the purity of intention of devotee. Those devotees who are interested only in their material welfare will benefit materially. However, the real benefit for mankind so far as Sai Baba in concerned has to do with spiritual benefit. The devotees whose faith in Sai Baba has to do with spiritual enlightenment and with aspects of prayer, worship, and meditation, then Sai Baba will fill their lives with happiness and joy. Thus with what intention the devotee approaches the guru is of paramount importance as pointed out by Sai Baba himself. At another level we find that all devotees have their own attitudes and

intentions and some are more advanced than the others. Therefore, no one is turned away, no one is looked down upon, as has been made clear each one is dealt with on merit alone. However, it is clear those who come with purity will receive purity. Those with material hope will get succor. Those with spiritual intentions will get them fulfilled.

Action and Reflection 26.1

Read the assurances of Sai Baba. In which way are they important as part of his teachings? Write down in your notebook.

The eighth assurance is

- h) Not in vain is My Promise that I shall ever lighten your burden.

This assurance is a very subtle but firm promise that as the devotee progresses on the path his burden becomes lighter and lighter. The clouds of sorrow and misery go away. This is in fact the basic promise of the Sat Guru to his followers that as the days go by in Kirtan, Bhajan, meditation and prayer the guru is able to make the mind cleansed from all negative thinking and evil tendencies. As many marvelous things keep happening to the devotee he is assured that the Sai Baba is looking after him and has his blessing hand on his head. This is not a matter of speculation but happens to be based in fact and all the old devotees of Sai Baba are themselves witness to the fact that their problems have receded and indeed many have experienced miracles with the Udi from the dhuni from the temples or the joss sticks in the domestic puja place. Thus the journey for the devotee of Sai Baba is one in which his burden of suffering and sorrow becomes reduced daily and the burden becomes lighter and lighter until the devotee fuses with Baba.

We now turn to Sai Baba assurance that

- i) Knock, and the door shall open, Ask and ye shall be granted.

Sai Baba is telling the devotees that they must make an effort and knock, and the door shall open. They must ask and what they ask will be granted. In spiritual parlance 'Knocking' means chanting the mantra and meditating. Thus the way to open the door is to meditate on Om Sai Baba and to offer their time and effort in prayer and socially uplifting activities. They must lead a pure life and give what they can to the poor and the destitute. Indeed there is a story in which devotee fed a dog and Sai Baba later told the devotee that he had had a sumptuous meal. Thus to knock on the door means to lead a spiritual life in which there was the worship of Baba at the centre. Again the question of asking is one of asking in all humility and not in pride or anger. Sai Baba is a loving and affectionate saint and the way to ask him for anything must be in humility and prayer. As Sai Baba has said those who knock with meditation and affection and those who ask with humility, will have the door open, and get what they want.

Let us now turn to the assurance of Sai Baba which reads as below:

- j) To him who surrenders to Me totally I shall ever be indebted.

What can this assurance mean? At first glance it may seem paradoxical. Why should Baba be indebted to anyone who surrenders to Him totally? On deeper reflection we are able to understand this assurance. When a devotee surrenders to Baba totally he becomes an instrument of his knowledge and His mission in life. Such a devotee makes Babas work much easier and he is able to direct such a devotee to do good acts

and help achieve miracles. However the catch in the assurance is total surrender. There is no specific outward sign of total surrender to Sai Baba except the prayers and the meditation. However the devotee feels oneness with Sai Baba and his burdens are reduced bit by bit and then lightened completely. He becomes an instrument in the hands of Baba and this is why Baba expresses himself saying that to such a devotee, who has surrendered completely he himself is indebted. Thus, this is a two way relationship between devotee and guru. In fact with total surrender of the devotee it is the guru who himself feels indebted!

Baba points out here very simply that the goal of all devotion is to gain total oneness with the guru. Anything short of this is not good enough. In a way this assurance which is the eleventh assurance is a summary of what would happen if the other ten assurances were followed by the devotee and understood by him. Blessedness is a condition in which there is no division between disciple and guru and in which the spirit of the devotee has fused with the guru. There are stories of such blessed souls and we will turn to them soon. However, this point needs to be made clear. Oneness with Sai Baba— that has to be the goal of the meditations and actions of all of Sai Baba devotees. Nothing short of such oneness will do and the entire teachings and stories which relay these teachings are geared to rise up the spirit of the devotee and take him to the heights of spiritual bliss and realization. Indeed the devotee one with the spirit of Sai is ultimately a blessed person. We have given some observations and comments on the eleven assurances of Sai Baba to his devotees. However, this procedure may tend to see these assurances as separate and apart in themselves which they are not. This fallacy can be removed if we integrate the message of the eleven assurance in a running manner so that the assurances emerge as a message which is what they truly are. This method removes the idea that each assurance is distinct and stand apart which it is not so when the message is regarded as a whole. Let us then try to integrate the message of the eleven assurances of Sai Baba.

The assurances begin with the promise that no harm will befall anyone who set his fort on the soil of Shirdi. Thus, the essential backdrop is Shirdi itself but it may not be taken literally as Shirdi town but also all the Sai Baba temples may be regarded as Shirdi itself for that is where the spirit of Sai Baba lives. However, the importance of the Samadhi is available in Shirdi town itself for the remains of Sai Baba are covered in it and it is important to commune with that vibration so as the sorrow and suffering will abate and cease. Yet there is another fact and that is all Sai Baba temples do have some thought given to the Samadhi and many have a genuine article or two of Sai Baba which he used during his life and an area to bow down to His feet. The feet are the real Samadhi and bowing down is an act of offering prayer to Sai Baba. Thus when the devotee bows down the spirit of Sai Baba blesses and protects devotee who has come for his worship. It does not matter whether Sai Baba is in flesh and blood for he will protect the devotees who believe in him it is in this context that trust and Udi are every important for this is what leads to a protection and blessings of the supreme. However, the fact is that to engender trust we need to have some basic degree of realization of who Baba was and what was His mission in life. Only when this realization dawns that self-understanding dawns on a devotee. Further, Sai Babas message assures that no one is too low for him to accept, and that there is no one who seeks refuge in Sai Baba no matter what his caste, class, religion, creed or background who would not be granted refuge in his spirituality and spiritual effulgence. However, it is pointed out as a corollary

it is clear that the intention with which one approaches Sai Baba which is all important.

If the intention is bad and harmful that naturally no good is going to come out of it. Thus if a person tries to get some bad deeds done by approaching with such an idea then no good will happen to him or her. Thus Sai Baba is a saint but he cannot be prayed for anything except good purposes and good intentions for oneself or one friends and relations.

However, when it is a devotee with good intentions a pious person then Sai Baba promises to lighten his burden of sorrows, sadness and loss that all human beings in this world experience. In such genuine cases when they pray sincerely and meditate on Om Sai Sai their life becomes happy and fulfilling that is their burden is lightened. However, in the end Sai Baba promises that those who knock on the door of his temple will not go away in vain and all reasonable requests will be fulfilled whether it is recovery from illness or the request doing well in exams they will all be entertained. Thus, Sai Baba exhausts total surrender and says that the greatest blessing is to become one with him. This is the gist of the eleven assurances of Sai Baba.

26.6 Sai Baba: Miracles and Parables

We now turn to the teachings told in the stories related to Sai Baba and his devotees. These form an important and growing corpus of stories which is still growing. These teaching stories are drawn from Shri Sai charita a memoir which was approved of by Sai Baba himself and written down by one Hemadpant a close disciple of Sai Baba. Baba while sanctioning this work said he would help Hemadpant who would be an instrument for writing these stories. Which would teach generations of disciples about the virtues of humility and service, and on how to be happy in a simple life. These stories would also tell of how the early disciples gathered in Shirdi constructing "wadas" where the disciples could stay and have regular darshan of Baba. Further, we find there are accounts of how Baba with the force of his spirituality was able to cure all types of diseases with the help of his command and the Udi from the sacred dhuni which he kept lighted in the mosque where he stayed. There are also stories relating to the complex nature of Brahma-gyan which cannot be called by expenditures of money but has to be earned by the aspirant leading a spiritual life and adhering to spiritual disciplines as prescribed. We have taken these stories but are relating them in our own words and in brief for we would like to deal with the teachings of the stories also as this may not be very clear at the outset.

Hemadpant relates that around 1910 he went to the Masjid in Shirdi and saw that Sai Baba was diligently indeed vigorously grinding wheat in a pestle. Hemadpant was puzzled and wondered what Baba was doing grinding wheat. The news of this happening spread to the village and people gathered to see Baba pounding the wheat. In fact a few women forced their way into the front and pushing Baba away began to grind the wheat singing Babas Leelas. They felt that since Baba has no offspring or relatives they might be the beneficiary of the huge quantity of ground flour, and began dividing the flour into different portions. Baba who had been watching these proceeding now intervened and told the women that the flour was to be spread on the border limits of the village. It was later found on discussion this was done by Baba to contain the cholera epidemic that was raging through the area and this was Babas attempt to contain the epidemic.

Hemadpant is satisfied with relating the incident, which remarkable as it

is incomplete without some kind of documentary. When Baba started pounding the wheat and the crowd gathered there was a suffusion of cooperation and crowd purpose in trying to see what Baba was doing. In such, situations apart from the spiritual purposes, we find that sociologically the creation of a crowd lessens the feelings of anxiety and fear that exists wherever there is an epidemic, like cholera. As such the combining of the huge crowd in the village made them one in wondering what Baba was doing. The spreading of the flour all around the village outskirts has both metaphysical and medical value. Thus metaphysically the village was bound off by the magical spells and the magical effort that had gone into the grinding of the flour. On the other hand flour that is freshly ground has the capacity to be antiseptic to any new virus or bacteria. Thus in various different dimensions the story of the grinding of the wheat is remarkable since it shows us the faith and interest Baba's activities had started attracting about 1910 that is eight years before his death.

The other aspect is that Sai Baba did the grinding of something or the other everyday in the sense of turning the problems of the devotees into nothing for all of the sixty years that he lived in Shirdi.

Box 26.2 Telepathy and Clairvoyance

Now let us see another metaphysical side of Baba. When Hemadpant arrived in Shirdi, he got into a discussion with one Balasahib Bhate regarding whether a guru was at all required or not. This discussion went on far as hour when all the pros and cons were discussed. Hemadpant made the point of what is the necessity of a guru and that one must make the effort himself or herself. The discussion went on. After this discussion the group went to Masjid where Sai Baba stayed and Baba asked point blank what were the group discussing in the Wada and asked what Hemadpant had been saying. Hemadpant was much surprised at this observation as the Wada was a considerable distance from the Masjid. Thus Baba displayed powers of telepathy and clairvoyance in his observations and statements and was able to make out the inner state of the mind of the people who came for his help.

Another disciple Kaka Sahib Dixit after Hemadpant had left, picked up the discussion with the Baba and was told the story of a man wandering alone in a strange land full of danger (lions and wolves). When Dixit asked if a man takes a guide in this journey then Baba replied there was no danger. But on the other hand if there was no guide there would only be trouble of all sorts and the journey would hardly be completed.

There is a story of the young Sai Baba when he first appeared in Shirdi as very handsome, and seen sitting under a margosa tree practicing penance. This area with the neem tree was purchased by one Vinayak Sathe and he built Sathe's Wada on it and for long this was the sole resting place for pilgrims and disciples. Another wada was built Kakasaheb Dixit and finally another wada (a big one) was put up by Mr. Booty. These wadas were inspired by Sai Baba and were the areas where many disciples came to stay and the builders of the wadas were firm devotees of Sai Baba.

There is a story of how Sai Baba changed his appearance due to the loss in a wrestling bout. A wrestler named Tamboli lived in Shirdi and Baba and he did not agree on several accounts over which there was a fight, which Baba lost. Baba hence forth changed his way of living and his dress mode. He began wearing a Kafin, and wore a langot and covered his head with a cloth. He further began to use sack cloth for his asan and his bed and

began to wear torn clothes and rags. Wearing these rags he would give answers only when questioned. He was surrounded by devotees during the day and his possessions included a chillum, tobacco, a tin pot, flowing kafni, head cloth, and a short stick. The cloth on his hair was not washed for days. Here wore a waist cloth and sat in front of the Dhuni facing south, with his left hand resting on the railing.

We turn now to a miracle of Sai Baba very remarkable for its content.

The first is how Sai Baba used to light the lamps in his masjid with oil he got from shopkeepers. At one point the shopkeepers got together and made a decision not to give Sai Baba the oil for his lamps. When Baba begged for the oil they all answered him with a refusal to supply him the oil. Baba returned to the masjid and put in the dry wicks in the lamp. The shopkeepers watched in disdain and interest at what the Baba was doing. Sai Baba took a tin pot which has a few drops of oil, put water into it, gargled and put it back in the tin pot. Thereafter, he took water in the tin pot and filled all the lamps. He then lit them. To the surprise of all the lamps burned throughout the night. The shopkeepers relented and Baba told them to trust him in the future. This is a miracle which speaks of the power of a saint in using miracles to teach a lesson to the people who did not have belief in him. When the shopkeepers felt that Baba was wasting oil on the lighting of the lamps Baba showed them that this was a most important ritual and made oil out of water. Thus the guru should always be believed in and he should be trusted from the depths of one's heart.

There is a most interesting story about Sai Baba and the fakir called Javhar Ali. This incident happened five years after the wrestling bout with Tamboli. Javhar Ali had many disciples and came from Ahmednagar and stayed in Virabhadra temple. He was a learned fakir and could speak the whole Quran. He began to construct a Idgah near Virabhadra temple. A quarrel over this meant he left Rahata and then lived in the Mosque with Baba in Shirdi soon captivating the people with his learned talk he began to call Baba his disciple. Surprisingly, Babas humility was such that he did not object to this. He went with him to Rahata to live there. Though Javhar Ali did not realize the worth of Sai Baba, Sai Baba could see that the fakir had faults but still respected him. They stayed in Rahata but visited Shirdi. The devotees of Sai Baba went to bring Sai Baba back to Shirdi. When they reached the idgah Sai Baba told them that the fakir was ill tempered and unreliable and that they should leave without him before he returned. Meanwhile the fakir came and was very angry with the followers of Sai Baba for trying to take him back. After some discussions it was decided both Javhar Ali and Sai Baba should return to Shirdi. They returned and began living in Shirdi. However, one of the disciples Devidas tested the fakir and found that he did not come up to the mark. Devidas had come to Shirdi with the marriage party along with Sai Baba and he had been little more than 10 years at that time. He had grown into a fine dispassionate man of knowledge. Javhar Ali was brought into his presence and lost the discussion which followed and Javhar Ali left Shirdi in disgrace. He prostrated himself to Shirdi Baba after some years when the idea that he was Sai Baba's guru was gone. The question arises that why did Sai Baba go through all this confusing gesture with Javhar Ali when he knew from the beginning that he was inferior to him? These can be many reasons but some of them are to display the lack of egoism and also to test his devotees regarding their faith in him. It was also a massive exercise in humility by his own actions and that of Sai Baba's devotees that he was the real Satguru. Thus it was that Devdas the devotee who ultimately took it upon himself to denude Javhar Ali. This story shows the gentleness of Sai Baba as also his discrimination.

There are several stories about Sai Baba and his devotees. One important story is how an old woman Bayajabai used to track down Sai Baba in the jungles in his early days and give him food to eat. She used to take food in a basket on her head and walk about 3 miles, going into thick jungle in search of the fakir, and after hunting him out worship him. The Baba would sit quietly and silently in his asan. She would feed him on a leaf and at times feed him forcefully. She searched for Baba everyday and give him his noon day meal. Baba was so touched that he never forgot her seva service, till the end of his days. After a few years Baba left going to the jungle and lived in the village and took his food in the Masjid. Only then did Bayajabai stop going to the forest. Such examples of selfless service to the guru are most inspiring to the devotees and such devotion facing the danger of the jungle at that age was really an exemplary devotion by an extraordinary devotee to an extraordinary guru. We must realize that it was Sai Baba who inspired this devotion. Selfless service is the highest service and that was Bayajabai !

Among the accounts given of Sai Baba there is a humorous story about how Baba was once given a plank of wood by a devotee which he used to sleep on— but not on the ground. Instead he took the plank and hung it with rags and made a swing out of it on which he used to lie sown and sleep. It was a mystery how he used to climb upon it and then sleep. As the news of this airborne plank became known people started to crowd around trying to see how Baba climbed up and down from the plank. Later, Baba disposed of the plank and went back to sleeping on the ground itself. This shows that Baba was a most interesting person who had a childish sense of fun as is clear from the above story. Thus the picture sometimes portrayed of Baba losing his temper or being abrupt and rude to some people need to be balanced keeping this in account. It also shows that Baba had an inner life of his own. This is true also in the case of the Lendi garden which he built near a drain and watered it himself and would visit it two or three times a day to contemplate and be by himself. Thus the stereotype of Baba which is that of a somber sage sitting with one leg over the other is only one side of the story. The other side is that of a lot of amusing and happy incidents. Now let us turn to some stories of how Baba in his capacity as a leader and a medicine man who could perform miraculous cures simply by the rise of his spiritual powers and heal people with various diseases. Indeed Baba's fame as a spiritual guru had something to do with his capacity and powers of healing. It has been noticed that those who are highly evolved spiritually develop healing powers which they use to good effect on the needy persons and devotees. Let us see some of these cures which go to indicate that Baba did indeed have miraculous powers of healing.

26.7 Further Miracles and Parables

Let us relate the story of Bhimaji Patil who had in 1909 AD a chronic problem in the chest. Thus chronic problem developed into tuberculosis. At that point in time there was no remedy for tuberculosis and all the remedies that he tried failed. Having given up all hopes of getting well Bhimaji began to turn to God and prayed to him to help him get well. This was a case of remembering God in adversity. In prayer he remembered one Nanansaheb Chandorkar, a prominent devotee of Baba. Bhimaji wrote him a letter explaining the details of his problem and how long he had the malady, asking him what he was supposed to do. Nanasaheb said that now the only course left was to go to Shirdi and prostrate at Baba's feet. Bhimaji was taken to Shirdi and to Baba's masjid in the company of Nanasaheb and Madahavrao. Baba said this disease was due to previous evil karma and did not want to interfere. However, in his compassion

Baba changed his mind and told Bhimaji to stop worrying and being anxious and that his sufferings would soon come to an end. He pointed out that anyone coming to the fakir would not go back disappointed. Now while Bhimaji the patient used to vomit blood at intervals of five minutes it was noticed that this did not happen in the presence of Baba. Once Baba had uttered words of hope the situation with Bhimaji started to improve and the problem took a better turn. Baba instructed Bhimaji to stay in the house of Bhimabhai which was not very convenient but Baba had told him to stay there.

Box 26.3 Two Miraculous Dreams

While Bhimaji was staying at Bhimabhais house Baba induced in him two dreams which were the vehicle to cure him. In one dream Bhimaji witnessed himself as a boy who was being flogged for not writing a poetry lesson before his master in class. The second dream caused Bhimaji intense pain, indeed torture with the feeling of a heavy stone being rolled up and down over his chest. With this pain in dreams Bhimaji's cure was complete and he went home completely cured. He became a staunch devotee of Baba and often went to Shiridi to prostrate before the Baba.

It is clear from this cure that Baba had the power of projection and altering the flow of currents in the body that was ill and used many different methods including that of dreams to induce a cure. Indeed the cure through a dream or dreams is not as farfetched as it sounds and there are other anthropological accounts in which the dreams were used as curative after they had been projected into the deceased person. It also shows that Baba had powers to control and project dreams as spirituality while he was in the body itself.

Again in those days malaria was also rampant and a very dangerous disease. A devotee by the name Ganapat Shimpi suffered from this deadly malaria. It was a dangerous type of malaria and was resistant to medicines and decoctions. The fever would not go down so Ganapat Shimpi went to Shiridi and prostrated at Sai Babas feet. Baba blessed him and gave him a strange sounding task to do. He told him to give a black dog curds and rice in front of the Laxmi temple. Ganapati did precisely that and he found the rice and curd and the black dog in front of Laxmi temple. The dog ate the rice and curds and Ganapat got rid of his fever. Now in this case the cure seems to be farfetched and very strange but it may be pointed out that holy men very often use strategies and techniques which keep them out of the limelight. While it is obvious that Sai Baba was the person who cured the disease he made Ganapat do a certain ritual so that he felt that he had taken part in the cure. The cure comes from the spirituality of the master and the rest of the proceedings are in fact props for the cure that takes place.

Action and Reflection 26.1

Go through this unit carefully and point out the salient features of Saibaba's teachings.

Similarly, Baba cured many cases of chronic disease that are well chronicled and the cures that he did were always well disguised by infusions, decoctions, udi, and even smoke from his chillum. Had Baba wanted publicity for himself, he would have just had to touch the person or speak to him and he would have been alright. Thus he cured with the most unorthodox of procedures cases of cholera, dysentery, ear ache, tooth ache and even chronic asthma. However, there were cases in which his words themselves caused a cure. This was in the case of Alandi Swami

who suffered from a severe pain in his ear which disturbed him day and night and did not allow him to sleep. He was even operated for this but it did not become alright. He found his way to Shiridi to meet Baba and there Maldhavrao requested Baba to help out the swami regarding the pain in his ear. Baba simply said that god would clear the pain and after a week from departure the Swami wrote a letter to Shiridi that the pain and swelling had subsided and the surgeon did not think anything needed to be done. Thus Baba's words and his support moral and spiritual were so powerful that chronic disease like an earache and swelling would subside. As to how Baba did this it is clear that it was his spiritual currents that caused the pain or the disease to disappear. But many a time Baba used to provide a procedure so that people did not mob him and make him a medicine man.

Two final teachings now round up or account of Sai Baba. There is much more to the stories about Baba but in our account we must be content with these two further teachings which in many ways shed light on all that we have been pointing out.

The first is a story about how happiness and satisfaction is a inner condition and that inner satisfaction should be cultivated. A devotee of Sai Baba Das Ganu wanted to write a commentary on Ishavasya upanished which talks among other facts of knowledge about the relation between knowledge and practice. Das Ganu was quite perplexed at trying to explain or comment upon the upanishad so finally he went to Sai Baba and asked him to shed light on the subject. Baba did not give a direct answer but told Das Ganu that Kakasaheb Dixits illiterate maid servant at Ville Parle would solve his problems of philosophy on his homeward journey. Das Ganu left Shiridi for Ville Parle a Bombay suburb where Kakasaheb Dixit stayed. In that house the next morning he heard a girl singing a song about a crimson sari. Entranced by the song Das Ganu saw it was being sung by a young maidservant. Her job was to clean vessels and had rags on her person. On seeing her in this condition. Das Ganu asked a friend to give her a small sari which he did. The girl was very happy with this small sari. She soon wore the sari and danced and sang with happiness! However, the next day she put her sari into her box and wore her old and torn rags again; but her merry and happy spirit persisted. She showed no spirit of unhappiness or dejection. Das Ganu then realized that all our attitudes of happiness or unhappiness depend on the state of the mind that one is in. Das Ganu understood that man should gratefully enjoy whatever, God has bestowed upon him or her. In our present story the servant girl had nothing material so to speak but her mind was content with what she had Das Ganu got one of the main lessons of the Upanishad that it is the best attitude to be happy under any and all circumstances for the Ultimate Power of Reality that is God always does what is good for us. This story also shows us the most unorthodox way in which Sai Baba solved Das Ganu philosophical problem by directing him to the venue where this became clear.

The last story that we are going to relate and then close our brief account about Sai Baba is perhaps the most eloquent in terms of Sai Baba knowledge about the ancient scriptures. This story talks about a rich man who had no need of anything and idly thought that getting Brahma-jnana (God knowledge) would be a good and profitable enterprise. As such he decided to go to Shiridi and ask Baba to give him Brahma-jnana. This is exactly what he did. When he had prostrated before Baba he put forward his request. Baba was amused and told him not to be anxious as very few people came to him for Brahma-jnana while many came for requests of pelf and power. He promised to show him the intricacies of Brahma-jnana. The Baba began a divine leela and made the rich aspirant sit down

and sent a boy for a 5 rupee loan in the neighborhood at which he was unsuccessful. Baba deliberately created this situation knowing fully that the rich man had money but was unwilling to part with even five rupees. Yet he wanted Brahma-jnana and was even beginning to be impatient. Baba told him to surrender the five pranas, five senses, mind, intellect and ego if he were to realize Brahma-jnana. This took aback the rich man who was aghast at this turn of events. Then, Sai Baba explained further to the gathering.

Baba pointed out that Brahman is not realized by all in a single life or at a single time. Then, Sai Baba pointed out the qualifications for realizing Brahma-jnana. The first of these is an intense desire for spiritual freedom; the next is a feeling of detachment from worldly affairs. The third is to turn the gaze of the senses inward rather than outward. The fourth is purging of sins. Then, there is right conduct and adherence to dharma. Further, lies the territory of mind and sense control. Similarly, mind purification and a Sadguru are also essential. Finally, it is the lord's Grace that creates the right circumstances for a successful realization of Brahman.

The Baba turned to the rich man and told him that there were currency notes in his tunic and to take them out. He told him that unless he got rid of greed and desire for money God-realization was not possible. He told him to ponder what he had said and also that one can get only what one is qualified for. Although this discourse was directed at the rich gentleman all those who were present were also benefited and left after getting Baba's blessings. Thus Sai Baba was a saint who mingled with the people and did not avoid helping people in difficulty.

26.8 Conclusion

As can be seen from our brief report that Sai Baba was an extraordinary saint believed till today to be a sadguru, a guru who is literally perfect. However, although we have tried to give a portrait of his life and teachings it must be realized that it is important to live the life according to the teachings in the stories and the statements in the assurances. Sai Baba is still a mystery and as more accounts come to light and more documentary evidence is revealed Baba will come to be better understood and appreciated. As for now suffice it to say that Shirdi and Sai Baba are indelibly connected and the ultimate pilgrimage for the devotees of Sai Baba is the pilgrimage to his Samadhi in Shirdi. It is in Shirdi that the life and teachings are highlighted and many famous spots connected with Sai Baba come alive. The mosque of Baba, his samadhi, the Lendi Garden are there as are also many new sites and structures that have come up. Thus every Sai devotee would be keen to visit Shirdi in his or her lifetime, so that the blessing of Sai Baba comes with full force upon him or her.

26.9 Further Reading

Rigopolous, Antonio, 1993 *The life and teachings of Sai Baba of Shirdi*, SUNY Press.

Murphet Howard 1977 *Sai Baba, Man of Miracles* Weiser

Krystal Phyllis 1994 *Sai Baba* Weicer.

Raman Varadaraja 2001 *Rememberances and Reminiscences*. Xlibris Corporation.

References

<http://www.saibaba.org/assure.html>

<http://www.saibaba.org/sansthan.html>

<http://www.saibaba.org/saibaba.html>

<http://www.shirdi-sai-baba.com/shirdi-sai-baba.html>

<http://www.cosmicharmony.com/AV/shridisai/sh.sai.htm>

<http://www.saibaba.org/satcharitra/sai2-23/html>