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**"CRYING OUT OF RECOGNITION": EXPERIENCES WITH A MEDITATIVE
PRACTISE**

by

Susan Bedford, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
August '93
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ISBN 0-315-89765-1

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**"CRYING OUT OF RECOGNITION": EXPERIENCES WITH A MEDITATIVE
PRACTISE**

submitted by Susan Bedford, B.A.

**in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

This thesis records the experiences of individuals who practise sudarshan kriya. It is an ethnographic piece which uses an emic perspective and focuses on phenomenological issues. The phenomenology of the researcher and the informant are included in the treatment of ritual.

It is my thesis that experiences derived from ritual practices such as meditative techniques are meaningful for the experiencer and may result in new views of the self and the world. In order to understand such experiences the meditation practitioner develops an experience-based lexicon to access the subtleties of her own phenomenology.

Various theoretical approaches to ritual are outlined, including the biogenetic structuralist framework and analysis of the researcher's phenomenology. Attention to issues of voice are theorised. Research on meditative practices is critiqued and a case made for the use of qualitative methods for such research. Transcribed interviews with meditation practitioners are organised into themes of the author's selection. In conclusion, themes, methodology and theoretical approaches are summarised.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis records the experiences of individuals who practise sudarshan kriya. It is an ethnographic piece which uses an emic perspective and focuses squarely on phenomenological issues. The phenomenology of the researcher and the informant is included in the treatment of ritual.

It is my thesis that experiences derived from ritual practices such as meditative techniques are meaningful for the experiencer and may result in new views of the self and the world. In order to understand such experiences the meditation practitioner develops an experience-based lexicon to access the subtleties of her own phenomenology.

In chapter one, various theoretical approaches to ritual are outlined. Included are the ones most useful to this particular fieldwork, the biogenetic structuralist framework and analysis of the researcher's phenomenology. Attention to issues of voice are theorised.

In chapter two, research on meditative practices is critiqued and a case made for the use of qualitative methods for such research. Chapter three includes analysis of the author's

phenomenology and a selection of transcribed interviews with practitioners, organised into themes of the author's selection. Chapter four concludes the project with a summary of the themes, methodology and theoretical approaches chosen.

A major part of the project involved the researcher becoming familiar with the meditator's experience-based lexicon. Terms included in the transcripts are listed in a meditator's lexicon in the glossary.(p.117)

CHAPTER 1 THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RITUAL

The development of a science appropriate to the complexities of human behaviour and to the structure of society invites a debate over method, or the ways in which to think about the key issues in the social sciences. A major trend in Western culture is empiricist science. This concerns itself with narrow definitions of the object. This is reflected in the words of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who wrote,

"I believe that I shall succeed in having it recognized...that there are laws as well defined for the development of the human species as for the fall of a stone." (Bernard, 1988:18)

Such an approach of immutable laws may not be appropriate for the internal experience of an individual. Individuals constantly interact with other individuals and the researcher. Thus the nature of knowledge and research in the social sciences becomes a complex interactive equation. There is a natural division of sciences. Natural science seeks to understand external relationships. The human sciences seek to understand social phenomena and their relationship to the processes that gave rise to them. The natural world simply exists, whereas the human world is constructed through meaning. It is however possible to place constantly changing subjects into cultural patterns that may be studied, in the manner of the empiricists (Parsons, 1965:45).

Human sciences must be objective but the methods used to do so need not be the same

methods as those that are used in the natural sciences. To attempt to apply laws similar to those of natural science to social science may be problematic because in the social sciences we have an aware observer studying an aware object (Parsons, 1965:40). The development of rationalistic and scientific knowledge has cast humans in the role of both subject and object (Foucault, 1971:19). In the face of "scientism", it is necessary to remember that, in fact, many discourses are possible (ibid:21). It is accepted ideas that make possible a limited range of thought in the field of knowledge. This results in the inclusion of things that are appropriate to say within a particular field of meaning and the exclusion of multiple other viewpoints.

Dilthey's solution to the issue of "scientism" was to suggest that social sciences (modelled on the lines of natural sciences) were not possible at all. He suggested that what was possible was human studies, or "Geistwissenschaften". Each of these studies was to have appropriate methodologies. The debate known as the "Methodenstreit" stemmed from a conflict over method, i.e. whether to use hard science's positivistic methods or to use human science's interpretive\qualitative, experiential methods (Bryant, 1985:66) with subjects.

One must carefully consider method when research deals with an area that is experientially private, for example those areas of life that are internally experienced by the individual and are not manifestly apparent to another. Whether one should approach this topic from the viewpoint of logical positivism or from the interpretative\qualitative approach of human science is the core of the "Methodenstreit" debate. The debate points to the difficulties that arise when the analysis of humans is required, since here both ends of the

subject\object relationship are knowing, wanting, meaning-seeking subjects. Dilthey points to the nature of men and women's quandary. They are both conditioned by nature and at the same time are required to act on nature (Bryant, 1985:66). Attempts to explain individual experience through the use of laws similar to those found in physics is radically different from the approach of "Geistwissenschaften" which attempt to deal with relationships of reality as experienced by the mind. It differs as well in the type of methods used in a qualitative approach (Bryant, 1985:66).

The debate over methods in the social sciences continues. However, for the purpose of research in experientially private realms, qualitative methods may be more suitable as they allow for the meaning\seeking quality of both human subject and object to be reflected in the research process. Although results are not representative of the majority of a population, an analysis of the meaning of an experience for an individual is facilitated through the use of qualitative methods, whereas the use of quantitative methods in the experiential area tends to overlook the meaningful nature of these types of experiences.

Throughout the history of anthropology, theorists have dealt with religion and ritual in diverse ways - from the rationalism of Durkheim (Durkheim, 1984:11) to the psychological functionalism of Wallace (Wallace, 1970:15). With each successive wave of theory, there have been attempts at examining the phenomena of religion using different perspectives at different times, with each perspective working as a tool to perform a different theoretical task. At times ritual has been approached as a social phenomena and at other times it has

been approached using a phenomenological perspective.

Within the discipline, theorists such as Morgan (Morgan,1964) developed the parameters while Durkheim (Durkheim, 1984:119) and Weber (Weber,1976:36) refined the analysis through their recognition of the power of religion as social force. Freud (Freud,1964:37) added another dimension of understanding by viewing religion as essentially neurotic and Malinowski (Malinowski,1939) countered this argument with a view of religion as offering some psychological comfort. Religion was theorised phenomenologically with the insight of Wallace, focusing on ritual (Wallace, 1970:238). Then in the 60's Turner (Turner,1968:282) began discussions about the concept and symbology of the liminal state. Insights from the transpersonal movement in psychology through the work of individuals such as Tart began to influence the creation of "transpersonal anthropology" (Tart,1990). These scholars studied transpersonal phenomena cross culturally. With the development of the biogenetic structuralist framework, Laughlin added neuroscience to the theorising of religion by developing models drawn from neurophysiology. Thus another level of analysis was added to the experience of transpersonal states. The discipline of neuroscience in tandem with anthropology provided an opportunity to explore the neural concomitants of experience.

Initially the theoretical contexts of biological evolutionism and cultural evolutionism were used in the anthropological analysis of religion and ritual. Early anthropologists maintained their own Eurocentric notions of faith while providing theories about the faith of other cultures. They subscribed to the comforting notion that their faith was the most highly

developed (Harris, 1968:199). "Primitives" were thought to be unable to understand modern religion. Religion was seen as appropriate to the level of evolution attained. Smith as forerunner of the structural functionalists focussed upon the social functions of ritual practises in his "Religion of the Semites" (1889).

Tylor understood modern religion to be a development from "primitive" forms. Religion and ritual were analyzed as manifesting hierarchically ordered forms that move from lesser levels of rational expression to ever higher forms of rationality with atheism as the implied highest result. Frazer's work "The Golden Bough" also followed this line of analysis. According to Frazer's theory, modern religion was more highly developed than the more "primitive" forms. Morgan however gave up all attempts at analysis of religion, relinquishing the issue by stating that religion and dreams were irrational phenomena that the rational mind could not understand (Harris, 1968:438). Spencer (Andreski, 1971:209), Tylor (Tylor, 1946:18) and Lang (Lang, 1971:83) tried to explain recurrent religious phenomena through basic ideas and natural phenomena (Harris, 1968:438) but these attempts could not explain particular religious experiences.

In modern religion the uncertainty of the human condition had to be acknowledged, and prayers offered to alter the course of cause and effect. This offering of prayers could alleviate uncertainty. Malinowski's theory of magic was that it was functional in giving apparent control over the uncontrollable, thus easing the anxiety inherent in the human condition (Stark, Bainbridge, 1980:121). It could also be employed to explain cause and

effect and in this sense was viewed as a form of "primitive" science that advocated a fallacious correlation between cause and effect.

Durkheim's "Elementary Forms of Religious Life" analyses religion by shifting the focus from issues of religious evolution to societal impact of religion. Durkheim did not give up on religion as "irrational" but rather analysed it as a collective phenomenon. He recognised the religious forces that were at play in society in the form of religion's moral authority over societal members. He found that phenomena were classified by human societies into the "sacred" and the "profane". The result was that religion was able to encompass all of reality (Lessa, 1979:35). However no explanation was made of the variations in religious experience. The theorising of religion as a social force in the tradition of Durkheim does not include individual experience of religious phenomena in its analysis.

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, rather than perceiving society as something imposed upon the individual, were concerned with the function of "social facts" in satisfying the needs of individuals or societies. Malinowski developed the school of functionalist thought which focused attention upon individual needs, while Radcliffe-Brown developed structural functionalism where attention was focused on social structure.

Edward Sapir (1884-1939) defined cultures as either genuine or spurious. The criteria for genuine culture was the provision within the culture for providing spiritual satisfaction through a transcendence of culture itself (Sapir, 1968:323).

Analysis of ritual phenomena continued with Marx and Engels' treatment of magico\ritual phenomena as a homeostatic function of the societal system which, in reality, was a "false consciousness". In Marxist analysis religion was considered to be another form

of production (McLellan, 1990:89). Traditional Marxist analysis was thus applicable to the phenomena of religion in the same way that production could be analyzed. However, Marx and Engels' theories were unable to account for the relationship between ritual details and the material conditions of life.

The approach of the neo-Freudians (Kardiner, 1945:23) shed new light on the socialistic conceptions of religions vis-a-vis their functionalism. A new element, the analysis of Kardiner (ibid:46), had to be added to the basic theories of anthropology. This school derived inspiration from Freud's "Future of an Illusion" (1928) which saw religious phenomena as illusory, with concepts of the deity in a particular religion being based on the parental relationships of childhood.

The neo-Freudian analysis at the basis of the Kardiner school of thought had the potential to break through, beyond the historical/deterministic agenda so far utilised to analyze religious phenomena. The approach was able to deal with areas of analysis unsuited to Marxian conflict theory or Durkheimian functionalism. Kardiner's use of neo-Freudian analysis suggested a basic personality structure responsible for religious phenomena.

At the core of his analysis was the contention that primary structures of society such as family organisation and child-rearing practises influenced the development of the basic personality. However conflicts rooted in the basic personality needed to be resolved through secondary structures, such as religion and ritual. Conflicts were due to the nature and mode

of functioning of the primary structures as they impinged upon the individual (ibid:45). The beauty of Kardiner's system was that it was an attempt to find a causal explanation of magico\religious phenomena.

This projective system was a departure from former theories in that it interpreted the outer world in terms of experience in ontogenesis. Kardiner took Freud's theory of experiences as having a projective value and used it to develop a theory of early experience in which the adult psyche was projected into myth and religion. Benedict expanded this idea into an understanding of culture patterns which she saw as systematic expressions of personality on a large scale. Each culture selected certain characteristics and rejected others and worked the resultant personality into a distinctive whole (Benedict, 1959:24).

Bateson centred his contribution to theory around concerns with a new ethnography, which dealt with the treatment of a single theme from a variety of interpretations. This describing of a multiple vision of reality was an escalation in the complexity for dealing with ritual phenomena. Formerly ritual phenomena had been analyzed from one viewpoint. Bateson created the possibility of many interpretations of the ritual.

"At the most concrete level there are ethnographic data. More abstract is the tentative arranging of data to give various pictures of the culture, and still more abstract is the self-conscious discussion of the procedures by which the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are put together" (Bateson, 1958:281).

This working together of the many levels of interpretation of ritual expanded analysis of ritual from the use of one perspective to the use of many perspectives.

Another departure from the earlier theorisation of ritual phenomena came with the work of A.F.C. Wallace on "Revitalisation Movements". The tradition of analyzing ritual phenomena in terms of societal structures continued as Wallace defined his "revitalisation movements" as an attempt to construct a more fulfilling culture (Wallace, 1972:476).

This revitalising movement was not a slow cultural change but a new gestalt. However, included in Wallace's concept of the "mazeway" was the notion of a personal construction of reality. (Wallace, 1970:19). The mazeway is the individual's model of society, culture and body. The individual was seen to be continuously acting to reduce the stress at all levels of the model. When under stress, the individual could either change the mazeway or maintain the old mazeway and tolerate the stress to the old system. The loss of a meaningful way of life resulted in major stress to the mazeway. Revitalisation was the changing of the mazeway so that reality and the model are able to work together, thus reducing stress. According to Wallace, when a group was performing this function it was defined as a revitalisation movement. If a group is effective at reducing stress, its practices may be integrated into a mainstream expression of religion. Wallace's system, with his conception of the mazeway and attempts to deal with stress over the loss of meaning in life may be applied to individual experiences with ritual. The model is applicable in the cases where ritual experiences provide meaning.

The change in the mazeway and the working of reality together with the mazeway in order to reduce stress, may be a model that is applicable to the use of ritual practices by

individuals. Individuals may be using such practises to modify mazeway. When this happens then the group in which the modifications originate may be called a "revitalizing movement".

Wallace understood ritual phenomena to have both societal and phenomenological outcomes. His concepts of the "mazeway" and "revitalisation" allow elements of the ways in which to think about ritual phenomena as societal (in the manner of Durkheim and Marx,) and personal (in the manner of Kardiner and Freud) to merge in one system of thought.

Within the discipline of sociology, concern with understanding religion and ritual has raised several issues. To the sociologist in the 1970's secularisation was inevitable, yet the U.S. continued to be religious. There was an interest in religion and a plethora of alternate religions became available. The sociology of religion developed its own models. Glock and Stark (1965) developed such a model that analyzed religion as a means of adapting to relative deprivation. Stark and Bainbridge (1980) developed a theory of religion that understood religion as to act as a general compensator, an I.O.U. taken on faith (Stark Bainbridge, 1980:121) to compensate for rewards that were desired, but not yet obtained.

A criticism of the theoretical approaches of the sociology of religion is that the experiential nature of religion and ritual tends to be neglected. In the work of Stark and Bainbridge there is a concern with the institution of cult and its development. The experience of the ritual and meaning derived thereof is not theorised. The focus in the Stark Bainbridge model on seeking reward and compensation (I.O.U.s) has been criticised as applying the concerns of

this world to the concerns of other worlds(Wallis, Bruce, 1984:26). This assumption was based on the work of Durkheim, Marx and Freud (ibid:14). Such parameters are not always applicable to an individuals story about his\her experiences with ritual.

This reductionist approach may not apply to work that attempts to focus on experiences of otherworlds. The emphasis of the model on the expectation of a reward does not apply to individuals discussing private experiences and the results of such experiences in terms of changes in the self and view of the world.

The anticipation of reward may not be the sole motivating factor for such experiences. Thus the motivation of reward seeking should be part of the analysis of such experiences but not the sole focus for analysis. These experiences or Altered States of Consciousness (ASC's) have, as a rule, not been included in the analysis of religion undertaken by sociology of religion. The desire for the experience of ASC's is a basic drive and for some individuals there is a need to meet that drive. (Bourguignon, 1973:11).

Within the discipline of anthropology Van Gennep theorised three phases of ritual: the separation from the group, the liminal period and the passage of achievement (Lessa, 1979:235). But with Turner the theorisation of ritual experience was further developed. He focused his attention squarely on the potential for experience within the liminal phase between ritual states that brought about the change to the new state. This state had been resolutely ignored since the beginning of understanding of ritual phenomena. These phases were critical

transition points which all societies marked with ritual. By focusing on the transition from social structure to the liminal phase, Turner theorised that it was possible to analyse the foundations of culture. Thus with analysis of the liminal phase, theorisation of ritual phenomena became more open to the phenomenological.

Claude Levi-Strauss and Jean Piaget were responsible for clarifying the analysis of ritual. Levi-Strauss emphasized structures of mentation, over culture details. Cultural universals existed at the level of structure which was derived from the fundamental processing of the mind. The structures existed as mental models.

"...the emergence of culture remains a mystery to man. It will so remain as long as he does not succeed in determining, on the biological level, the modifications in the structure and functioning of the brain, of which culture was at once the natural result and social mode of apprehension"(Levi-Strauss, 1976:14).

Levi-Strauss' work mandated the analysis of ritual along semiotic structural lines, seeking for universals that were rooted in the functioning of the brain. Piaget added to the knowledge in this field with his outline of the development of cognitive ability. This was achieved through a series of stages leading to the usual adult Western level of "formal operational" development, which is a level of abstract adult thought.

"...compared to concrete thought, formal thought constitutes a new equilibrium, one that can now be analyzed from the two perspectives outlined: the extension of the cognitive field that it entails, and the coordinating instruments operative in its functioning"(Piaget, 1958:245).

Though this is the level of thinking commonly held to be one of the highest levels obtainable for adults, it is suggested that ritual may aid the development of adult formal operational thought and beyond. (Given, 1992:6).

An issue in the sociology of religion that needs careful definition is that of conversion and conversion experiences. Beckford (1978) suggested that religious conversion follows the guidelines of a religious organisation. As example, the conversion experiences of Jehovah Witnesses follow the central ideas of that organisation's rationale and structure (Beckford, 1978:249). A distinction needs to be made in the conversion literature between belief and experience. Does change of belief constitute conversion or does experience of some other reality constitute conversion? In Beckford's example (1978) it would seem that a change of belief system paralleling the structure of the organisation constitutes conversion.

Greil however, analyzed the role of predisposition in the conversion experience and suggested that cognitive style may be a variable in the conversion experience (Greil, 1977:115). It was close personal relationships that usually accounted for the conversion experience. This model seems to take more into account the experiential nature of the conversion experience as opposed to a change in a set of beliefs. A clear statement of how conversion is defined whether experientially or as a change in belief system or as a combination of both may clarify some issues that surround conversion experiences. There may also be other factors contributing to a conversion experience such as predisposition to peak experiences, and an individual's personal threshold for such experiences that need to be part of the analysis (Armor, 1969:48).

An aid in the discussing of experiential realities was developed by Baruss and Moore (1992). They created a consciousness survey and as a result of the survey developed a scale

with which to measure beliefs about consciousness and reality. This scale created ranked categories for experiences such as "physicalism", "religiosity", "meaning", "extraordinary experiences", "extraordinary beliefs", "inner growth" and "transcendentalism". Experiences could be slotted into categories such as "inner growth". The fit however between categorisation and experience will at all times tend to be tenuous due to the problem of representation of experience.

Tart's contribution to the area of ritual studies was his analysis of altered states of consciousness, including experiences derived from meditative practices. Tart showed that meditative practices were both a phenomenological reality and a remedy for stress, though they were not to be seen merely as tools for stress reduction(Tart,1990:215).

Neurophysiology was the next stage in the theorisation of ritual within Laughlin's theory of ritual experience (Laughlin:1983,1979,1974). Such a theory provides a useful model for an individual's experiences of a meditative practice. Biogenetic structuralism provided a template into which experiential material with meditative practices may be placed. The template provided models of experience and their cultural encoding. The biogenetic structuralist framework was a tool with which one was able to talk about the functioning of practices. It was a language used to discuss how ritual functions in order to allow major changes in the consciousness of an individual. Such models may be used not as validation of the practices but rather as an explanation of the functioning and (ultimately of the importance) of practices for the changes in the individual's consciousness. These models may also be used for cross cultural analysis of transpersonal data and abstraction of

universals from such data.

The biogenetic structuralist template for experience recognises experience as arising at every moment of consciousness. Experience is organised into phases which are radical shifts in its organisation, for example the shift from the hypnopompic state to waking state. Whether or not these are the types of functioning that are usually experienced through the cultural entrainments the individual has received, he still has the ability structurally to experience all of them. However, he may have been trained to disattend certain types of experience. Thus such experience recedes from conscious awareness and a particular type of functioning results.

The North American mode of experiencing the world is termed monophasic by Laughlin, (Laughlin,1983:41) which is to say that the individual ego is bound up with experiences that are from a single range of phenomenological phases.

Between each phase of consciousness there exists the experience of the "warp" state which customarily is disattended in the monophasic mode of experience. As a result of the warp state neuronal structures that had composed the previous phase of experience are disentrained. If, through the use of symbolic mechanisms the individual is trained to attend consciously to the warp then this experience may be opened up to the conscious mind to become a cognized phase. The warp experience then has a set of markers so that the individual may enter that state at will by re-experiencing the set of markers

(Laughlin,1979:7).

The framework of biogenetic structuralism can be used to discuss how meditative practices through the phenomenon of "symbolic penetration" affect the nervous system (Laughlin,1990:189). Laughlin suggests that the use of devices such as a mantra employed during meditation and the attention on the breath used during yogic breathing may act as a "driver" such that the awareness of the "warp" state of consciousness overtakes awareness of the usual "phase" state of consciousness. I would suggest that the focus on the breath during the meditative practice of sudarshan kriya, which informants in this project practised, acts as such a driver, shifting awareness from the exterior symbol to penetrate the core process and thus cause re-entrainment.

"Any symbol of great potency then, will move through more than one set of neural fields or structures, activating structures of an "unconscious" or "unconditioned" kind, and connect these in such a way as to produce changes or transformations in the overall organization; transformations which will typically provoke attendant physiological changes" (Webber, 1980:42).

Retuning of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) can subsequently take place. "Flow" experiences may result. "Flow" experiences may arise due to the discharge of both the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems at once. This discharge radically alters phase consciousness (Laughlin,1983:22). It is this shift from phase to warp that allows experience of radically different states of consciousness.

Laughlin explained how neurocognitive structures underlie the concepts of cause and meaning. The brain constantly attempts to provide meaning (not truth), and via

neurocognitive structures imposes order on experience, or the relationship between object and event. (Laughlin, 1992:3) Laughlin added another level to ritual experiences - the neurocognitive underpinnings of experience itself. He pointed out that science itself is underpinned by the neurocognitive structures of the scientist's perceptual model of reality. Thus it is necessary for the researcher to become increasingly self-reflexive, through the theorisation of her own state of consciousness. This question is paramount in science as it matures. "...discipline after discipline, as well as the philosophy of science and mathematics, have come to view the process of enquiry itself as problematic... There have emerged... a shift from a concern with objectivity to a concern with subjectivity - that is, with the role of perception and cognition in scientific inquiry" (Laughlin, 1988:30).

The subjectivity of the researcher is determined largely by cultural conditioning.

Concern with the subjectivity of the researcher is also felt by post modern trends in anthropology. These trends in anthropology pay attention to the voice of the informant, as well as the subjectivity of the researcher. Historically the Boasian text tradition in North America has concerned itself with the voice of the speaker in collecting of data bases (Darnell, 1992:42). I would suggest paying attention to the voice of the speaker in such manner, but particularly in the area of ritual experience. If the ritual state is being described in the words of an individual and anthropology wishes to favour the voice of the speaker, then descriptions of ritual states must be taken into consideration.

Part of the concern with voice centres around whether or not the anthropologist is able to speak for the experience of another. It is also concerned with the subjectivity present throughout all ethnographic writing. (ibid, 1992:46) This parallels the demand of Laughlin

for a science that is self-reflexive. The ethnographer cannot speak for the experience for another, especially within the sphere of ritual experience. Thus theorisation of the consciousness of the ethnographer is called for. It is necessary for her to map out her own consciousness.

Current theories of ritual experience suggest that anthropologists are better able to theorise about ritual experience by experiencing the ritual and attending to their subjectivity. This is what may be termed "Thick participation" (Given, 1992). Geertz described a type of ethnography that he termed "thick description" (Geertz, 1973:7). This "thick description" resulted from understanding the symbolic impact of each item described. Each item is part of

"...a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms" (ibid:7).

Thick description allows the many layers of meaning attached to one act to be revealed. I would suggest that "thick participation" allows the ethnographer to experience something of the nature of the ritual state of her informants, so that she may come to know the meaning of such states and be able to ask the right question relative to the informant. "Thick participation" also implies that the anthropologist may access the specialised lexicon used by informants to represent their experience.

The anthropologist, through participation in ritually produced states of mind, constructs a link between the daily life of waking consciousness and states of consciousness that are induced by ritual, so that understanding of the ritually produced states of reality may be

gained for all participants in the endeavour. This is important for the discipline because it suggests methodological alternatives for how anthropological fieldwork may be done. By using "thick participation" as a method new information on ritually produced states of mind and their meaning results. As the ethnographer experiences something of the nature of the ritual state of his informant, he empowers the voice of the informant who reports experiences of ritually produced states of mind. This facilitates the mapping of such states of mind.

Anthropologists need to be aware of their own cognitive relativity. In order to be aware of types of cognitive functioning other than ones' own, one needs to recognise the validity of one's informants cognitive styles. If there is some concordance between ones' own interior experience and the experience of the informant, one will be sensitised to issues that are important to the informant and thus one may be able to ask appropriate questions. One may also have some notion of cognitive relativity if one allows oneself to experience other cognitive styles. We see true participant observation when the researcher attempts to have an experience similar to that of his informant.

To adequately use the biogenetic structuralist template the investigator needs to practise the technique that she investigates (Tart,1990:213), remembering that she needs to keep an eye on her own phenomenology. Without an experiential base there is no possibility of getting beyond intellectual concepts. Unfortunately few ethnographers explore other culture's institutionalised ASC's even though most cultures have a cosmology of multiple realities.

"The presence of institutionalized forms of altered states of consciousness in 90% of our sample societies represents a striking finding and suggests that we are, indeed, dealing with a matter of major importance, not merely a bit of anthropological esoterica. It is clear that we are dealing with a psychobiological capacity available to all societies, and that, indeed, the vast majority of societies have used it in their own particular ways, and have done so primarily in a sacred context." (Bourguignon, 1973:11)

It is only through the study of knowledge gained from altered states of consciousness cross-culturally that a Transpersonal Anthropology will develop. Thus ethnographers skilled in experience and research with ASC's will be necessary to the development of this field. A researcher's experiences with ritual states of consciousness enhance the context within which informants may converse comfortably with the researcher about their ritual experiences. By extrapolation, if the consciousness of the ethnographer is included as a product within the ethnographic process, then a new science which has been termed Anthropology Plus (Laughlin, 1990:348), will emerge. This reflexivity on the part of the researcher as theorised by Laughlin is also the demand of the post-modern writers who have recognised the need for reflexive scholarship. However there is a tendency to fail to recognise the implications of researching the consciousness of the researcher and the necessity of opening oneself to "...experience more of the vast range of possible cognized environments among humans on the planet" (ibid:348).

Some of the insights from the tradition of the sociology of religion such as Greil's theorisation of the conversion experience will be of use with analysis of data. Baruss and Moore's theoretical approach to the data on the meditator's experiences will be used.

Biogenetic structuralism will also inform this work. Aspects of this framework will be

used with data collected during fieldwork with meditation practitioners. The researcher will theorise her subjectivity by discussing her experiences with meditative techniques. The post modern attention to voice will be recognised through an analysis of the meditator's discourse about their experiences.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: THE CASE FOR QUALITATIVE METHODS

The thrust of this thesis is to examine the experiences that result from the ritual practice of a meditation technique and its impact on an individual's view of the self and the world. In this chapter I will present a critique of the quantitative methods used for measuring results of meditative practises and I will argue for the use of qualitative methods to research the meaning of ritual states for individuals.

Research on meditation has tended to use positivist science to examine physiological changes during meditation. One objective measure that may be taken of such experiences is to document physiological changes that occur during meditative practices. Evidence suggests that physiological events that are specific to meditation do occur. However one may ask whether such measures do justice to the meditator's experience. For example, analyses which measure only autonomic reactivity may ignore informants statements about their experience. If a state of relaxation is being measured, then this does not do justice to meditator reports and is not a measure of the nature of "spiritual experiences", nor their meaning for an individual, or of the psychological and sociological impact in their life.

"In the bulk of this vast research literature, meditation is treated in the same way that aspirin is used to treat headaches. Relieving some of the stress of contemporary life is fine, but it is a minor side effect of meditation, which is generally intended to transform a practitioner's mind and being in a spiritual direction." (Tart, 1990:215)

The science project that measures physiological changes in meditation reflects only one scientific approach. There are other complementary scientific explanations possible, and Tart suggests the possibility of developing a state specific science, wherein the state of consciousness of the researcher is part of the research paradigm (Tart, 1975). This thesis represents an attempt to operationalise a model for transpersonal research such as that outlined in *Anthropology Plus* (see page 26).

One positivist approach to the arena of meditative experiences is to use measurements such as EEG which measures changes in brain functioning during meditative states. However while EEG measures can provide some fascinating insight on the meditative experience, they and other physiological measures only tell part of the story of the meditative experience. Wilber suggests that a physiological measurement is not a measurement of a state of consciousness. "Ken Wilber (1983) has suggested that the use of the EEG to monitor higher states of consciousness is misguided when empirical physiological evidence is advanced as "proof" of transpersonal states." (Echenhofer, Coombs, 1987:167)

Another issue to consider when using methodological positivism in areas such as meditative experience where the information has a noetic quality that is hard to convey is the imposition of the world view of the researcher on the experience of the informant. If the researcher creates categories such as attention, memory, imagery, emotions, time sense, etc for an experience, (Brown, 1988)(Gelderloos, 1989), then these are the researcher's categories and not the informant's categories based on their construction of reality. A Western psychologist who typologises meditation may not use meditation techniques. A cultural base common to both researcher and subjects and reference to the hermeneutic framework may be necessary to validate any practise. The theoretical approach chosen may cause a particular

type of description of experience to result (Feyerabend 1962,1965) The researcher may then be unable to reveal anything about methodologically private experiences when using their own conceptual framework. There is a tendency for research to impose the world view of researchers on subjects and to accordingly reflect their conceptions about reality. However, qualitative research allows for a framework in which the world view of the researcher is acknowledged and brought to the foreground. There, the impossibility of ever achieving objectivity is recognised. It becomes obvious that the paradigm of the researcher who uses a theoretical framework and chooses observational categories will influence the way that experience is viewed. For example William James saw in the case of the German mystic, Suso, a case that was "...distinctly pathological..." (Sannella, 1987:22), whereas C.G.Jung believed Suso was experiencing a state known as the "kundalini process". James' perception came from his approach to spiritual experience as concerning pathological elements, while Jung was concerned with development of the individual and kundalini. (Sannella, 1987:22). In ways such as this the concerns of the researcher will influence the interpretation of the experiences collected.

The goal of research is to be value-free, but the actuality is that it is always value-specific. Recognising this reality and articulating it may result in improved research. To allow for as value-free research as possible, individual practitioners of meditation should allow themes about their experiences to emerge during research and organise them into categories that reflect their experience.

Typologising meditative experiences (Doblin, 1991:3) makes an assumption that such activity is undertaken only for the results in the form of certain experiences. For example one study attempted to evaluate a technique by its results through a typology of mystical experiences.

"Three different methods were used to create numerical scales quantifying the experiences of the subjects in terms of an eight category typology of mystical experiment designed by Pahnke especially for the experiment. "(Doblin, 1991:3)

This embodies within it certain assumptions such that any activity may only be undertaken with results or anticipated results as goals when possibly there are activities that are performed, particularly those such as meditation that ideally should be undertaken without anticipation of the outcome.

Research may make assumptions about meditation such as the fact that the individual should desire changes to be caused by meditation practice. Meditation then is conceptualised as a phenomena that gives rise to changes, while the purpose of the practise of yoga is to link the individual in union with the self, which is a change in awareness. If meditation is practised for the purpose of achieving results then these outcomes will not be obtained. If one focuses on the end products of meditation one's attitude to meditation is less conducive. Different cultures will use a different epistemological framework which results in attention being paid to either phenomenology or the use of physical measures. An epistemological framework specific to the West may result in measurements of "results" rather than in the detailing of phenomenology. This is often the case with much of the research in the area.

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A questionnaire as constructed by a researcher may reflect more of the researcher's experience of meditation than the meditator's experience. Assumptions about reality during good ethnographic work should be recognised so that the ethnographer may do his research from a standpoint of the awareness of epistemological alternatives.

"Tacit assumptions about the world find their way into the theories of every academic discipline - literary criticism, physical science, history and all the social sciences. Ethnography alone seeks to document the existence of alternative realities and to describe these realities in their own terms." (Spradley, 1979:11).

I would suggest that this may not occur with the use of a tool such as the Profiles of Meditation Experience (POME) which is used to explore phenomenological and psychological fields of meditation. (Maliszewski, Twemlow, Brown, 1981). Research indicates that subjects express dissatisfaction with a linear\quantitative approach such as questionnaires like the P.O.I., when asked to conceptualise their meditation experience. (Compton, 1991). The way a question is formulated predetermines the possible answers. By choosing one question over another, the possibilities available for human experience are categorised and possibilities are therefore reduced. The categories may not reflect the actual experience that occurs for a meditator. Using a dichotomous assumption in research methodology may distort the nature of informants experiences if this is not consistent with their worldview.

For instance, an example of how categorisation of experience by a researcher may inadequately reflect a meditator's experience is seen through categorisation of meditative experience as either "work" or "play". Different meditative practises may have a hermeneutic wherein the meditator may view his meditation as a serious endeavour or as a mode of play or both. There is a distinctly Western conceptual distinction that divides activity into work and play. To conceptually divide reality in such a way when researching meditative practises may be influential in the conceptualisation of the researcher being accepted by the informant when answering questions. The researchers must ask themselves whether these practises are conceived of as work or play by the practitioner. An Eastern view of life is that all phenomena are manifesting merely for the play or sport of the Divine.

"...a transformation from unity to unity, whereupon Brahman ...throws itself outward for the millionth time losing itself in its manifestations for the sport and play of it all." (Wilber, 1980:99)

Research should allow for the contrast of such radically different conceptions of reality with that of the West's work ethic. The researcher should not suggest to the informant either conception of reality, or the possibility of making such a distinction between two major conceptions of reality. The ritual sphere, which would include the practice of meditation, is one in which work and play become one and the same. "...the gods play...The rise, duration and destruction of the world is their game." Ritual is both earnest and playful." (Turner, 1979:29) An openness on the part of the researcher to either conception of reality in this ritual sphere is necessary to contrast alternate realities with daily realities.

When researching meditative experiences the researcher may ask herself whether she

holds any unstated, assumptions of a Calvinist hue that would colour the questions posed with the researcher's belief that the meditator's time has not been productively used. A researcher may assume that practices are a form of work whereas a practitioner may hold the attitude that practices are play. This major distinction that each may unconsciously understand, (accepted as "myth") (Barthes, 1972:131) may result in the researcher and informant speaking from different perspectives. If the researcher holds the authority to categorise experience she may categorise experience according to her worldview and not that of the informant's.

My research suggests that meditative practises may function to release previously unexperienced mental structures that have formerly been kept from the conscious experience of the individual. These structures that are parts of the self may arise in meditation in the form of "makyo" images (Suler, 1990). These images only arise when internal psychic functions are de-automatized due to experience of altered states of consciousness during meditative practice. The nature of these experiences would be overlooked through quantitative measurements, but may be reflected through self-reporting during qualitative research techniques. As there may be as many experiences in meditation as there are individuals, images may be overlooked in categories defined by a researcher who happens to neglect any one particular function.

Conceptions of the self at any point in history may be subject to rapid change. According to Foucault, current Christian/Freudian notions of the self may be altering. (Dreyfus, Rabinow, 1982:257). Conceptions of the self may vary from person to person and

certainly vary from culture to culture. During research there is a need to contextualise informant's meditative experience vis-a-vis their notions of the self. Do they conceive of themselves as a person who is

"...bounded,unique,...a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively ...against other such wholes" (Dolgin, 1988:483)?

If so does the researcher conceive of herself in the same fashion? If the two do not subscribe to a similar construction of the self they may speak from different experiential standpoints.

Experiences of alternate states of consciousness such as those described as "the Void", or "the oneness at the basis of life", may result in the removal of the conception of the self as held in the West.

"Completely gone is any view of the self as a permanent, impermeable, seamless entity (or ego). Gone as well is a cognition grounded in the belief that the phenomenal world is anything like solid and fixed"(Laughlin, 1983:46).

In such types of experience the brain neural structures which are responsible for experience are re-organised so that neither subject nor object serve as a paradigm. Rather, a new paradigm is created from the whole - the flow of experience. The neurocognitive patterning of experience ranges from a partial view of reality to a whole that includes subject, object and the process of interaction between the two. Such experiences may be described in terms of "...a grand unification happen(ing) in the consciousness. Our perception changes...We merge with what we see and hear."(Shankar,1990:14). The cultural-specific hermeneutic that describes reality as part of the whole may need to be expanded to include an experiential reality of Oneness. The use of quantitative methods may not reflect the reality of such experiences which reach beyond one particular cultural hermeneutic. Thus qualitative

methods may be chosen instead to allow the voice of the experiencer of such realities to speak about ways such experience may be meaningful for her as an individual.

It is necessary in this type of research to explore the state of consciousness of the anthropologist as researcher. Few ethnographers have actually reported on their experience of altered states of consciousness in the field. This is in the face of the fact that most human societies include a cosmology of multiple realities (Bourgignon, 1973:11). Thus an ethnocentric bias exists toward the West's orientation to the mode of cognition that deals with outer exploration. In order to research experiences with meditative practices, there is a need to recognise the cognitive equivalent of cultural relativity. Each style of cognitive functioning needs to be seen as true for that setting and one cannot suggest that only one style of cognitive functioning is the best in all contexts. It is not possible to hold to one positivist notion of a cognitive relation with reality.

However even if the ethnographer does involve herself in experiences of altered states of consciousness there are obviously limitations to the researcher's experience. There is a need for the researcher to acknowledge how far her meditative experience goes and admit she has no claims to experience beyond a certain point. The problem with generalising experience goes beyond levels of competence with a technique. It is not possible to generalise from one's experience to any other person's experience. However the researcher may identify her point of experience as her epistemological standpoint. Having identified this, knowledge may be grounded from that state. This may prevent her from misreading and crediting herself

with understanding phenomena that may in fact be quite beyond her experience.

An analysis of the experiences during the researcher's practices may be very important as the researcher will tend to act from her assumption of what an experience is. An analysis of the nature of the researcher's experiences with techniques and their hermeneutic, both in the past and present, is necessary in order to reveal exactly what the anthropologist is bringing to the research situation. It is advantageous to have a researcher who practises meditation, while at the same time necessary that the researcher not become overly attached to the particular view of reality which she is researching (Laughlin, 1979:14). The advantage of the researcher who is attempting to partake of the same experience as her informants is that she may be able to see through cultural filters. She may then be able to understand the structures that are universal.

Despite the researcher's ability to use a meditative technique in order to understand the nature of another's experience of meditation, another person's experience will never be like her own, nor will they behave as she might. (Rasmussen, 1974:8) One can only experience one's own life or meditative experience and one cannot know another's life or experience. We only have the intersubjective articulation of experience. When recording the recounting of another's experiences, we must not assume that the informant constructs meaning out of experience in the same manner as we do. This assumption may result in the belief that questionnaires can give insight into meditation experiences. A categorisation of experiences in any form makes major assumptions about the nature of another's experiences. These

assumptions may not be held by the informants. Thus a distorted view of their experiences may result, shaped by the categorisation of methodologically private experiences into another human's view of what experience may be.

We believe that our world representation is the actual world rather than a model whose perception is tempered by moods. The model leads us to believe that we perceive the world as it is, not as a representation that changes constantly due to the nature of our moods.

"Each of us believes so firmly that he perceives things as they are themselves...the opportunity is incessantly offered to us to ascertain that our inner states, our moods, are in charge of our view of things. But in spite of this evidence, we live persuaded that our problems are situated in the real world and not in a world representation, a verbal world."(Hart, 1970:161)

This lack of awareness of the representation of things may cause problems in the research of inner experiences, since the internal representation of the experience may be taken to be the experience by the informant. The researcher has no right to disavow an informant of this belief. The researcher may not be aware of the nature of the model's representation of experience and thus the research will become an exercise in awareness of the representation of experience by the researcher. In writing and recording these experiences the researcher may do well to remember that he is dealing with experience, filtered through feelings. All one can record is the nature of the representation that is given to one, never the experience, remaining aware at all times of one's tendencies to represent experience.

The nature of the individual's dialogue with himself about all his experiences, whether inner or outer, may be exceedingly important for the effect of experiences on the individual.

It is suggested that what one tells oneself about events is the basis of emotions and actions and not the actual event. This "self-talk" may account for positive changes associated with practices such as meditation (Zastrow, 1988). If this is the case, it may be very important to record in the informant's own words his recounting of his experiences. As a result of meditation and hermeneutic strategies the individual may be creating meaning from bare experience.

A researcher needs to be aware of the interests and ideas that she holds so that she does not exercise hegemony over the ideas expressed by his informants. As the position of researcher is one of inherent power, a researcher must be aware of what interests she is bringing to bear on the research problem, or her interests will be promulgated due to the nature of her power. It is necessary that an attempt be made to state her interests. If an interest is at play the researcher must be aware of the fact that such interest may be acting through her during the research process. If the researcher can remain aware of her interests and state them, better research may result.

The authority of the researcher to represent another as she chooses may be circumvented by the creation of a negotiated text wherein the researcher does not solely create a text that represents another. The "author" must realise that all she may achieve is "...a morally charged story about that". (Clifford, Marcus, 1986:100) A voice may be crafted for the other through a negotiated dialogue (Crapanzano, 1980:11).

The informant must be allowed as much authority as possible in the formation of the research. Any structuring authority being held by the researcher needs to be laid bare for the scrutiny of informant and reader of the final product. If such negotiations are allowed to occur in the production of a text, then a product which takes into account the power relations in the researcher\informant relationship may result. The project of awareness on the part of the researcher needs to be maintained throughout the research process so that the researcher does not lose sight of the notions of spiritual practice she holds or the ways in which knowledge is constructed for readers about others.

Another's experience may often be opaque to us. In order not to pretend to know what is happening to another and represent it as if one knows, we must represent the voice of the researcher as well as that of the subject and so reveal the opacity of one human's experience to another. This opacity is then exposed for the full view of others. Experience may be recovered and reflected upon.

"An act of reflection is a movement which momentarily halts the stream of consciousness by establishing a priority among the occurrences, selecting some as significant and rejecting others as irrelevant." (Rasmussen, 1974:11)

At least one may manage to halt the stream at a particular point and pay attention to the experiences.

The language used to describe such experiences may depend on the framework in which practices have been learned and the interpretation of such experience will depend on the

ritual context of the practice.

"No matter how skilled one is in communication, one always recognizes a discrepancy between direct experience and experience communicated vicariously to others using some form of symbolic expression." (Laughlin, 1988:42)

Attention to each individual's hermeneutic needs to be paid. The dialogical mode may be the best way of revealing another's hermeneutic, that may otherwise be hidden by the researcher's hermeneutic.

Despite the fact that representation of experiences is all one may deal with, qualitative methodologies still allow for investigation into the meaning of experiences for an individual in his terms. Through the use of the in-depth, unstructured interview and the dialogical mode in reporting of data the researcher may be able to record better representations of the experience of an individual and how that individual creates her understanding of what spiritual experience is. Experience may be recorded without the imposition of another's conceptual framework on the material generated. Interviews can be focused in a general way in order to allow conversations to emerge. Through such methodologies individuals may be allowed to generate their own categories and concepts.

However it should be remembered that during qualitative research in an in depth interview, the nature of the "story" told to one researcher may be radically different from that told to another researcher. During the recounting of experiences the function of "secondary revision" or of secondary equivalence structures (Wallace,1970:10) may function in the re-telling of experiences. Freud's notion of secondary revision (Freud,1953:499) is a

re-sorting of the material of dreams into a meaningful whole. Dreams may be revised in major ways by this psychological function for assimilation by the conscious mind. Freud postulated that there was a similar function in the waking state of consciousness. He describes it as follows:

"This function behaves in the manner which the poet maliciously ascribes to philosophers: it fills up the gaps in the dream structure with shreds and patches. As a result of its efforts, the dream loses its appearance of absurdity and disconnectedness and approximates to the model of an intelligible experience. (Freud, 1953:490)

I would suggest that with the recounting of meditative experience there is a function of this nature that re-structures and re-orders the experience for the interviewer.

"It is the nature of our waking thought to establish order in material of this kind, to set up relations in it and to make it conform to our expectations of an intelligible whole. (Freud, 1953:499).

For each interviewer the re-structuring done by this function may differ. With each interviewer the informant may perceive a different construction of what is intelligible and acceptable and so vary his recounting. During this there may be a tendency to conflate the recounting of the experience with the remembrance of experience and experience itself.

However for the researcher it is necessary that experience be distinguished from remembrance and remembrance from recounting.

"A clear distinction between religion experienced and religion remembered is thus an important analytical tool for understanding some otherwise difficult to understand phenomena. And not the least of these is the problem of the relation between belief and action"(Geertz, 1968:110).

What an experience comes to be understood to be depends upon a gradual accretion of layers of belief and experience. A story varies in the telling, even if the telling is to the same person. I suggest that each time an experience is recounted another layer of reality is added

to the initial experience.

However, this recounting function may be more than a mechanism for recounting experience in intelligible form. According to Freud it may be a censor that reconstructs experiences into a hermeneutical framework that makes "sense" in terms of the individual's world view and her culture's world view. This function disallows the appearance of elements in the experiences recounted that make "no sense"; in terms of the societal norms or in terms of what is expected by the interviewer. The individual's censor allows more or less material to be conveyed depending upon how receptive the individual perceives the interviewer to be to experiences that make "no sense". It is these "expectations" to which we constantly subscribe that will define how an experience may be retold. An awareness of the difference between these will clarify issues.

Spiritual experience may be remembered in day to day life. This to-ing and fro-ing between spiritual life and daily life may change the quality of the daily life. It may be impossible in this piece of research to distinguish between spiritual experience and the effect of recalled spirituality because experience spills over into daily life and affects it. Thus the story told to the researcher may be an inextricably interwoven conflation of belief with experience.

Despite difficulties with power relationships and the conflation of experience with remembrance and recounting, the strengths of the qualitative methods used to record

meditative experiences is that they will be able to reflect the meaningful nature of these experiences for the individual. Qualitative methods emphasise the voice of the informant and require awareness on the part of the researcher of the role their experience plays in the structuring of the research. The limitations of this method are time constraints, which make it necessary to give up the interviewing of large numbers of meditators. Thus conclusions that represent the majority of meditators cannot be made. The breadth of such techniques is necessarily sacrificed to the depth gained through the interviewing of a small number of informants.

The research project herein presented, primarily took place during two meditation retreats. One occurred in June '92 in St. Mathieu-du-Parc in the province of Quebec and the second took place in August '92 in Crewe, England. Each retreat was one week long. The informants for the project were participants in these meditation retreats. They agreed to discuss their experiences of meditative practices with the researcher. Permission for the research project was granted by Pundit Ravi Shankar, the meditation teacher who led both retreats. The organisation that ran the retreats was the "Art of Living" foundation, without whose co-operation the project could not have taken place.

Privileging the voice of the informant using qualitative research methods allows for recognition of experiences of altered states of consciousness. In a society that places emphasis on knowledge derived from the waking state of consciousness, the use of a methodology that allows for the recognition of knowledge derived from altered states of

consciousness opens the door to new epistemologies.

CHAPTER 3: THEMES FROM FIELDWORK WITH MEDITATORS

In order to research the nature and meaning of ritual states for individuals and the impact they may have on their views of self and the world, it is necessary that attention be paid to the phenomenology of the researcher and the informant.

The previous chapter outlined the argument for the use of qualitative methods for this type of work. Of the theoretical approaches mentioned in chapter one, the biogenetic structuralist template and the analysis of voice produced in the dialogical mode were found to be suitable for fieldwork with meditation practitioners. In this chapter, the author analyses her own phenomenology in order to explore biases that may exist within this fieldwork. Description of preparation for the field and field experiences is included. Selected material gleaned from interviews in the field is organised into themes and analyzed. Informants words are used to illustrate theoretical points and individuals wor'ts may be used to represent the words of others.

In this chapter the nature of the meditation experience for myself and for my informants is discussed. Through the use of in-depth methodology I was able to take the time to reveal how multi-layered experience and the recounting of experience is. I was also able to access details of the specialised lexicon necessary for the unfolding of this self knowledge.

I let my informants lead in conversations, so that they could render their experience into language for me. Any categorisation, organisation of material or use of authority as researcher on my part would have destroyed the creative process for my informants. The use of a structured interview would only have revealed my own reality construction. Each informant's style of construction of meaning is uniquely their own. Their "personality" expresses itself in their style of construction of meaning.

"Personality is the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being. It is an act of high courage flung in the face of life..."(Storr, 1983:195).

The construction of meaning out of life occurrences is an idiosyncratic expression of personality that may be revealed by qualitative method.

My personality is also embedded in the creation of this text. It has influenced what my informant would say and how he would say it. My conceptualisations of reality, as revealed in my questions, are not the only conceptualisations of reality, although my informant's answers to my questions may sound as if they accept my assumptions. They may not accept my "reality" but may only be able to answer by using my conceptual framework. Thus I have tried to listen to my informants, not ask questions, and comment now and then to encourage a flow of ideas.

My twenty three years experience with a variety of meditative practices may be seen as a preparation for work with meditators. However I wish to be realistic about my own understanding of meditation, not believing that my personal experience is the correct or only view. I need to remain aware of my bias at all times so that I do not create "myths" out of

material that I consider natural and assumed. As Barthes has characterised it,

"...the naturalization of the concept, which I have just identified as the essential function of myth is here exemplary...In the ...(mythical) system, causality is artificial, false; but it creeps, so to speak, through the back door of Nature. This is why myth is experienced as innocent speech: not because its intentions are hidden...but because they are naturalized." (Barthes, 1972:131)

I must remain aware that my experience with meditation practices is influencing the research from beginning to end and be able to admit my biases, especially with such a subject as an internal experience. I must as well be able to admit to having a world view that may be wrong. I may have naturalised my worldview to the point of unconsciousness. Thus there is a need to remain aware of the interplay of my world view with that of others. However, there is a relationship of power between the researcher who has authority (whether it is wanted or not) and the informant. The researcher changes the events that he wishes to research and then write about:

"... subversion of the event described, is in the final analysis masked ...by the authority of the author" (Clifford, Marcus, 1986:76).

I would like to forgo this authority to subvert events, if possible. However, I will declare my biases. In daring to write about such an intensely personal field as spirituality I must admit that all I will achieve is a story or an allegory.

"Allegory prompts us to say of any cultural description not "this represents or symbolizes that" but rather, "this is a (morally charged) story about that". (Clifford, Marcus, 1986,100)

If I remain aware of the fact that I am writing a story about another's reality this will result in greater clarity for the research project.

The sense of conversation derived from reading the text is an illusion because the

context, the environment, and the historicity are all missing. The words were directed to the researcher in an environment constructed around the idea of "interview". In speaking to another individual the informant would tell their story differently. Nowhere is the informant asked to address the issue of the reader of the text during the process of the interview. The informant, though comfortable with the researcher, may not have been comfortable with another reading his words. Many informants would have spoken without thinking about the audience for their words.

The text that I create from what I have observed in my fieldwork sits between the informants world and the world of those to whom I wish to speak. There is an intertextuality about the document I have produced. This intertextuality is the sum of the coordinated efforts of the individual, my words and the reader's (situated) reading of our co-produced record.

My bias towards the material consists of all my past experiences, particularly those with meditative practices and the like. I have been involved in the practise of meditation from my teenage years. During those years the "Transcendental Meditation Programme" was the meditative technique I practised daily. Later due to disillusionment with both the experiences I was having and the structure of the organisation, I decided to cease all practices. This period of absence from meditation was very beneficial as it allowed for much reflection. Subsequently I met another teacher who also taught meditative practices and became reluctantly involved with his techniques. I say reluctantly because my temptation to become

involved was greater than my reasons for not. However, I felt that there was something to be experienced that I did not want to miss. Thus I became involved with the practice of sudarshan kriya, which I have been using for five years.

The experiences I have had, both encouraging and discouraging with meditative practices, have contributed to the framework within which I analyze the information from my informants as I question them about their experiences. I believe that one of the most useful of my experiences for the purpose of research has been my disillusionment and subsequent re-involvement with meditative practices. This experience has given me insight into the deeply sensitive issues that may arise around the use of, and faith in the efficacy of meditative practises.

In particular, I would like to describe some of my own recent experiences with practices so that the context of the interviews may be made abundantly clear. This is not data for the purposes of my research but rather a description of the context for understanding that I bring to the research project itself. The hermeneutic that I bring to the meditative experience is underwritten by the types of experiences I tend to have with practices. During fieldwork with practitioners of sudarshan kriya, a meditative practise that purports to enhance awareness by focus on the breath, my experiences were difficult to classify. During the period of fieldwork in England in August of 92, I was on a silence retreat with a group of approximately eighty individuals who practised "sudarshan kriya", as well as other techniques. During one early morning meditation, while I meditated I became aware of what

appeared to be the form of a large multi- coloured snake that was coiled around and standing next to my person. Rather than feeling frightened during this "appearance", I recognized something familiar. I was pleased to see whatever was being revealed to me at that time. A day or so later during practise of the sudarshan kriya, I felt myself becoming timeless and beyond locality. When I wished to come back to the appropriate time and locale, I became anxious that I would not arrive back at the right place or time. I sat and watched as time frames clicked through my consciousness until I laboriously came back to the appropriate one. It seemed to be more by luck than good judgment on my part that I arrived at the right place and time.

During fieldwork, with a group of practitioners of sudarshan kriya, I met Pundit Ravi Shankar and spent an evening chanting and listening to him speak of spiritual matters. On my return home to the flat where I was staying in Montreal, I went to bed and fell asleep peacefully. Early in the night I became aware of a presence standing over the sofa where I slept. I knew that I was not dreaming and that there was, in fact, someone in the room where I slept. I was terrified and made myself wake up. I lay awake sure that someone was there and yet there was no one to be seen. I remain convinced that the person who stood in the room had been the teacher. From experience with meditation I knew such phenomena could occur. When asked about this experience the following day, the teacher said that when the heart is open this... (type of experience) can happen. As an ethnographer, I must say that this experience was possibly the result of my internalisation of the guru. The experience remains deeply important to me and was sufficient to motivate me to want to base life

decisions around it. It has enabled me to understand the desire of others to base life decisions around experiences with practices.

The final experience I wish to record that occurred during fieldwork, took place in October, during a retreat in Quebec with individuals who practised sudarshan kriya. This retreat was mainly conducted in silence, except for periods of chanting that took place in the evening. I found one evening's chanting to be particularly beautiful and moved to the back of the hall to lay down and listen. Up until that point I had been chanting but I felt so strongly that I may faint and not be able to sit upright, that I laid down. I then perceived with my eyes closed a column of white light around the front of the room where many people and the teacher sat. This light seemed to be a function of what appeared to be many voices who were also in the room. I lay unable to move but perfectly happy for quite some time.

I hope that it becomes clear from these types of experiences, which as a meditator I seem to be prone to, that my bias with respect to meditative practices is that they may provide deeply meaningful experiences for an individual. For the interviews my stance is one of co-participant in the experience of various phenomena. I believe these experiences may be blissful, important and thoroughly meaningful for the individual. Certainly such experiences have provided me with a drive to experience life as meaningful in ways other than material. I find life to be a spiritual journey in which many experiences may come to enlighten one. For myself the goal of such practices is a state of giving "seva" or service for humankind.

I talked to people so that they could get to know me and thus be empowered in the research relationship. I tried to remain aware of any biases that I held. I gave the informants enough description of my anthropological orientation so that they could understand the research project, but not so much that we could become embroiled in discussions that may have caused bias.

My mode of finding informants was designed so that they would not see me in an authoritarian role. Many, though not all, of the interviews were done in the environment of a meditation retreat. Rather than announce myself at a meeting and ask for volunteers, which I felt would be donning the public role of "the researcher", I decided to find my informants individually. Each mealtime during the retreat I approached a table, of ten or twelve people (meals were taken communally during the retreat). I seated myself at their table and joined in the conversation. I tended to avoid those individuals who were teachers or administrators of the organisation, so that I could prevent informants who were motivated to present the best picture of their experiences from participating in the research. Such participants would have biased the experiences collected. After a while I joined in the conversation at the meal table and usually by the end of dinner I introduced myself to one individual and requested their participation in an interview. I selected the individuals and my only criterion was their willingness to talk to me. I would usually interview these individuals a day or so later in any available quiet spot - a car, a tent, a public meeting room, my room or theirs etc.

Prior to the commencement of the interview I gave my informants a consent form to sign. This outlined the purpose of the research. The form guaranteed confidentiality and informed them that the findings of the research would be sent to the main centre for the teaching of practices in Bangalore, India.

The organisation that kindly allowed me to do my research during their courses was a Canadian charity, "The i and I Art of Living Foundation". The organisation's teacher is Pundit Ravi Shankar, whose ashram is in Bangalore, India. The practice that the individuals whom I interviewed were following was sudarshan kriya. This is a technique which is derived from the Hindu tradition and is taught in the West by the teacher or "guru". This practice involves the rhythm of the breath. It may be practised alone or in a group. When practised in a group a mantra is used in order to give rhythm to the breathing. This practice may be done for about ten minutes daily when alone or for longer periods of time, up to an hour or so, when practised in groups. Through participant observation I found that one's perception of the passage of time changes drastically during the group practice of sudarshan kriya. An hour session could seem to be but a few minutes.

The fact that I was accepted as a course participant assisted the research process. I was allowed to be in the retreat situation at the same time I was collecting data. This I feel facilitated the interview process. I was accepted by my interviewees as having experience in the same area of life as they were experiencing and I was not perceived as an outsider. Thus I felt a degree of trust developed between myself and my fellow conversees. I did not use a

structured interview format with my informants but rather allowed a conversation to take place. My position within the organization as a fellow participant helped these conversations to occur as part of the daily routine of the retreat. I believe I was perceived as a non-authoritarian figure.

All conversations were audio-taped. I did not feel that the intervention of a microphone interfered with the natural flow of conversation. Individuals on the whole said nothing about the presence of the tape recorder. After an initial pause and collecting of thoughts, the stories about experiences with practices and how individuals arrived in particular meditation groups at a particular point in their lives began. Individuals spoke of how important some experiences were to them, and how they changed the pattern of their lives due to the experiences. They spoke of their involvement with other meditative groups, the happy times with the people in such groups, and the needs that were not met within such groups. The stories were of intense interest to the conversees and myself and thus, I feel, the microphone and the fact that I was somewhat of a stranger did not impede our conversation. We enjoyed talking about experiences and practices that were not part of Western society.

I allowed my conversees to generate information, although I had set topics that I wanted to cover. These therefore were guided conversations or semi-structured interviews (Spradley, 1979:58). Many themes arose during our intense conversations. I was struck by the extremely idiosyncratic way in which experiences seemed to be expressed. In particular, I was awed at the beauty of the experiences told to me in comparison to my own rather

earthy appreciation of spirituality. It was not without difficulty that we rendered into a discourse the meditative experience for which there was neither a comparable context nor vocabulary in the West. We were consciously forced to develop an adequate language together in order for conversation to happen. On occasion we paused or turned the tape off while we searched for terms with which to continue our discussion. The fact that both researcher and informant had been subject to similar experiences allowed for the creation of discourse which otherwise would not have occurred. Despite the difficulties of putting into words experiences that are rarely talked about in the West, the language of the interviews achieved a beauty of its own, as individuals strove to find the analogies and terms to express what had happened to them during meditation.

AN INTRODUCTION TO A MEDITATOR'S LEXICON

My research method required that I immerse myself in the culture of the meditator and learn the language of a meditator's experience. In the same way that an ethnographer working within a cross cultural context begins the task of ethnography by making taxonomies of cultural terms for specific tasks or experiences, it was necessary for the researcher to become thoroughly conversant with the meditators' lexicon for describing their world. In order to do research with meditative experience, it is necessary to collect a taxonomy of consciousness and then use the words from that taxonomy for conversations with meditators. (A glossary of some of the terms that are quoted in the verbatim texts is included at the back)

The kind of text that results from conversations with meditators forces one to shift one's discourse from one's culture's consensus reality to the meditator's reality and to adopt the meditator's lexicon in order to achieve that shift. Certainly an initial difficulty for the researcher was the tendency of the mind when dealing in the abstract terms that denote meditative experiences, to drift into a meditative state while attempting to write about such states. This tendency occurred because the researcher practises meditative techniques daily and thus is susceptible to such experiences. However, with practise it became possible for the researcher to use the abstract terms to denote meditative practises without falling into meditative states of mind herself.

Another problem with research with meditators is the lack of a universal lexicon. The Sapir\Whorf hypothesis (Sapir, 1964:7) suggests that without the language for an experience the experience is less likely to occur. However one of the functions of the teacher of meditation, or guru, is to provide the vocabulary while assisting the student to produce the appropriate experience.

Having gained familiarity with the lexicon for the meditator's experience it was then possible to begin negotiated conversations with meditators. However, it should be pointed out that it was necessary for the researcher to practise the technique in order for the experiences to be understood.

The experiences that are documented here are a result of the practise of a specific technique known as sudarshan kriya, thus the conclusions within this thesis refer to the practise of this particular technique. Further research on other specific meditative techniques is necessary in order to document their particular experiences and lexicons.

THEMES

This piece of fieldwork required a year of study and interviewing prior to the actual project. I conducted the initial interviews at an ashram in Bangalore, India, using participant observation. The setting was a meditation retreat attended by Europeans. I participated in numerous meditation sessions and attended group meetings where instruction in meditative practices was given by the guru. During this five week stay in July '91, ten individuals of German, Dutch, American, Polish and Canadian origin were interviewed about their meditative experiences. The means of recording the semi-structured interviews was hand written notes.

Following this initial set of conversations, I expanded the project of recording individuals' experiences with meditative practices. As an experiment individual meditators were asked to keep meditation diaries. Four individuals kept daily records of their meditation experiences and though interesting material was generated, the material was too general to be of use in a research project. Two individuals were interviewed using in-depth interviews and this material, when transcribed, provided a more focused view of the meditator's experience. One individual was interviewed for a life history of his meditative experiences but was reluctant to discuss them. Therefore no material was derived from this source.

The pre-project period also served as a form of self-training, as through trial and error with meditators, I developed the skills necessary to ask personal, probing questions without losing the co-operation of the informant.

During this initial training period, permission was also sought and granted for the project to proceed. Verbal permission was granted by the guru first during fieldwork in India in July '91 and further confirmation was received during a conversation in Montreal in '91. Written permission from the guru was obtained in February '92. As a result of the background work, the choice of method for the project was an interview format using audio-tape. A list of questions were to be loosely followed, in order to cover certain topics. The interview was semi-structured so that themes could be generated by informants.

The series of interviews that form the body of this research were conducted on meditation retreats. One retreat took place in the province of Quebec during June '92, a second took place in Crewe, England during August '92 and a third retreat took place in the province of Quebec during October '92. The methods used were semi-structured interviews, participant observation, recording fieldnotes and the creation of a journal during these retreats. Some of the difficulties of the research project are best described by extracts from the journal kept during fieldwork.

June 16 '92

"Well frankly I want to go home! Forget all this emotional stuff - singing/devotion /people

sobbing in the background - my nerves are now totally on edge and I want to blame Punditji..."

June 17 '92

"So I feel better today - but I still haven't interviewed anybody so I am getting frantic, but there is no time to talk to anybody. I don't know how to organise it."

June 22 '92

"Well there seems to be no co-operation here - I've been to both Montreal and Halifax and have interviewed exactly no one. So the research is at a stand-still and yet I'm encouraged - I have never understood the path of spiritual development from inside my own body so well. As a research project on my own consciousness this is a splendid success..."

The problems are standard - no privacy - I am never alone, at night in Halifax I slept in a basement with two others. So when does one make notes - in a moving car (from Halifax to Montreal)?"

June 30 '92

"Well how do you research on a group of people who are in silence for several days? I can only watch and observe and soon I won't even write - it is against the rules. I must write afterwards."

Despite the difficulties with the emotional impact of fieldwork and the lack of privacy to do research work as recorded in this journal, eventually two series of interviews were conducted. The initial series took place in June in Quebec and in August in Crewe, England where background information was collected on the individual and his current experiences with meditative practices. Eleven individuals took part in the initial interviews. In a second series I collected information about the relationship between meditative experiences and self-view and world-view in greater depth. This series took place in October of '92 in the province of Quebec. Five individuals took part in the second round of interviews, three of whom I had had conversations with in the first round. A total of thirteen individuals were interviewed.

The themes discussed in the following sections arose from interviews during fieldwork. Set topics were introduced into the conversations in order to elicit discussion, but topics were not raised in the same way to each individual nor in the same sequence. Informants were allowed to take as much time as was available to discuss each topic in full before moving to the next topic. Thus the major themes were introduced by the questioner but responses were allowed to develop through conversation with informants. Quotes from interview transcripts are used to illustrate informant's experiences. Their statements are used to discuss themes that arose around the issue of experience with meditative practices and the change in the view of the self and the world.

Topics introduced in the first round were:

- 1) The motivations for the initial involvement with the practice of sudarshan kriya.
- 2) The relationship with the guru
- 3) The experiences resulting from the practice of sudarshan kriya
- 4) The emotions associated with experiences resulting from the practices
- 5) The intellectualising of experiences after their occurrence
- 6) How the individual defines spiritual experience
- 7) The changes in the view of the self as a result of the experiences
- 8) The changes in the world view as a result of the experiences
- 9) How the individual makes the distinction between the experience itself, the experience remembered and the experience recounted
- 10) The use of language to discuss the experiences derived from practices

This choice was made by the researcher when deciding on the interview topics to pursue during fieldwork. The interview was open-ended. Once a topic was introduced to an informant the informant was allowed to elaborate and introduce other topics at will.

Text has been extracted from the topic material that was deemed to be representative of the experiences and views that arose during the course of both series of interviews. The assessment of that which was representative was made by the researcher.

All names have been changed in order to protect the informant's confidentiality. See

Appendix II for details of the gender, age and nationality of informants. See Appendix I for the interview schedules used in the first and second rounds of interviews.

THEMES 1: MOTIVATIONS FOR INITIAL INVOLVEMENT IN SUDARSHAN KRIYA PRACTICES

Of eleven informants providing reasons for their initial involvement with the meditative practise known as sudarshan kriya, eight became involved in this particular practice due to the influence of significant others who were either friends or family. This fits the Greil (1977) model of the influence of significant others on the conversion experience. However, in the sociology of religion literature which deals with conversion, a distinction needs to be made between a belief system and experience. The two are not necessarily congruous. Greil seems to be equating conversion with beliefs derived from one's social group.

"If one's beliefs are, in large part, at least, a function of one's reference groups, then conversion from one perspective to another can be expected to occur in those cases where an individual orients himself to a new reference group...(ibid:117)

Greil's model conceptualises conversion by taking only a belief system into account and thus this approach is of limited use with a practice of direct experience. In the case of individuals practising a meditative technique conversion it is not merely a matter of one belief system or another. This particular concept of conversion is not appropriate in the case of meditation practitioners. I would suggest that conversion here could be defined as learning a meditation practice, but not necessarily as espousing a new set of beliefs based upon the influence of significant others. The experience may or may not be concurrent with the learning of a set of

hermeneutics. Certainly however, significant others affect the choice of practise. Therefore I make a distinction between a belief system and a practice which gives rise to meditative experience.

The following are excerpts from the transcripts relating the stories of how individuals became involved in this meditative practice because of the influence of significant others.

Susan: Now if we look forward in time to when you first heard about Sudarshan Kriya. Was it a lecture that you went to?

Mary: Now let me think. At the time when I first heard about Sudarshan Kriya my sister in law was living with us. She stayed with us for a number of years and when she moved in with us she really started meditating. She'd learned a long time before but then she began meditating. She became very strong and she had a lot more contacts in the spiritual community than my husband and I did and she brought home a flyer about "Sudarshan Kriya" and asked whether I would be interested in doing this ...What did I think about it? She passed these ideas on to us.

Susan: When you heard about the kriya what was it that made you decide that I'm going to learn this and I'm going to do it. Anything in particular?

Kathy: I don't think I ever decided to do it. It just happened. Joe said there's this course are you coming? No! I said Joe I don't think I can come. He said yes you can.

The remaining three informants providing reasons for involvement stated that it was the teacher, Pundit Ravi Shankar, who convinced them to learn the meditative practise, through the influence of his presence on them. These individuals encountered the teacher usually in the context of public lectures held in their local area. One individual told a story about the effect of the guru on herself when she initially encountered him:

...By the end of that hour we were feeling pretty good. There's a kind of emanation that comes from Punditji that is very ..warms the heart. Everyone stopped talking ..and just sat in silence and then this powerful, powerful silence came from him and it filled the whole room just like as if we were in a sea. You could feel it in the air. It was so thick and tangible. Not like some emotional fantasy, a tangible thing that D... and I both experienced at the same time and lasted for I don't know how long, maybe ten minutes and then all three of us burst into laughter together, knowing that...I don't even know what and it was that experience that is a little bit indescribable. deep silence that penetrated in and around us that called us. We still weren't sure we wanted to take the art of living course but we did go back to see him in Santa Barbara and by the end of his week D.. was on his way up to Carmel to take the course.

Once involved in practices there is a tendency to continue to be interested in similar perspectives. As Greil states, individuals often hold perspectives similar to the organisation to which they convert. (Greil, 1977:116)

The drive to become involved in a meditation practice subsequent to earlier involvement in other types of practices was discussed by one informant as follows:

Susan: So what were you looking for ..?

Tom: I was stuck in my meditation experiences. They were real shallow, not very enjoyable. I wasn't looking for that. I didn't realise really that that was the condition that I was in. I was devoted to my programme and I was going to do it twice a day whether it felt good or not and so I had that mentality and I didn't realise that my experiences weren't very good any more.

From the conversations with informants it can be seen that the majority of individuals became involved with the practice of sudarshan kriya through the influence of friends. Even when an individual did not particularly feel a drive to experience the meditative practice they would still be influenced to become involved by friends. Despite their own lack of motivation to be involved they were not displeased with the influence that their friends had had on them.

THEME 2: EXPERIENCES WITH THE MEDITATIVE PRACTISES

One of the major difficulties when discussing meditative experiences was the lack of language with which to convey the reality of a phenomenological state. Meditators usually cannot talk to non-meditators about their experiences, nor do they often wish to try. As a meditator the researcher was enabled to enter discussions that would otherwise not have occurred due to lack of language and experience with which to conduct them. These experiences took place in the West, where there is a lack of vocabulary for dealing with varieties of mind states. A Westerner speaking to other Westerners about their meditative experiences encounters difficulties, but cross cultural communication on the transpersonal is even more complex.

During this particular research project it was necessary to allow meditators the full use of their own lexicon for particular types of experience. These terms were a necessity for the meditator in order to convey the reality of her experience. Only if the researcher had been exposed to and was conversant with this specialised lexicon could research proceed.

I would suggest that the reluctance of meditators to discuss their experiences with those who are non-meditators may be due to the non-meditator's lack of access to the meditator's lexicon. Ethnomethodology outlines the necessity of studying a population's lexicon in order to understand their daily routines and worldview. Garfinkle developed this approach which extended the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis. As Garfinkle has stated,

"The demonstrable rationality of indexical expressions and indexical actions retains over the course of its managed production by members the character of ordinary, familiar, routinized practical circumstances (Garfinkle, 1967:11).

In order to converse with meditators I first had to be very familiar with their terms and expressions for describing their experiences with meditation and in daily life. This was a necessary approach in this project in order to understand the meditator's world. I would point out that the meditators felt that the lexicon was rooted in particular experiences. The transcripts of interviews which follow contain such experience-based language.

Informants were asked to relate an experience which by their own criteria had been significant for them. Most individuals had had several years experience with meditative practices. The stories included experiences of a state of "oneness" where the boundaries between individual self and outer phenomena seemed to recede, a variety of emotions and sensations that arose during practices, visions, and an awareness of the "presence of God". (The term "presence of God" is used by certain meditators). The categories of experiences are derived from the verbatim transcripts and the words of meditators have not been paraphrased. The individuals were practising sudarshan kriya, and the practise is the basis for the majority of the described experiences. This practice focused the attention on the rhythm of the breath, in succeeding phases of fast or slow breaths. At the same time a mantra was recited.

The state of "oneness" with the rest of creation was described by three out of thirteen informants. This experience had a noetic quality for the meditator. It was experienced and

described in a variety of ways.

The following conversation describes in detail the onset of an experience and the effects in the individual's daily life:

Susan: As far as experiences go, are there any that stand out?

Corey: There are probably quite a few. There's been some quite remarkable. I'll focus on two of those. I know there's been occasions where I've been with him (the guru) and there's been a lot of people and I totally lose track of myself as a separate individual. Meaning that I don't believe that there's this person Corey looking out at a room of people, people such as you Susie and everyone else around me and Punditji as separate...My eyes are seeing the forms of Punditji and Susie and other people and I, even my eyes are seeing my body, you know my hands, my feet, my glasses my face but there's no identification at that, that's me or that other people, it's a feeling or experience of, at a fundamental level of a connection between everyone and it is a very peaceful, very fulfilling sensation to the body and to the soul, very complete very natural but it seems unusual when it comes because the normal state that I live is much more a feeling of separation of me and others and feeling that there is a real connection not there, except maybe in my mind, thinking that we should be one or are one, but there's no experience of that and so that experience comes fairly often these days and is quite nice.

If I allow myself to settle down that is, it's there most of the time and sometimes in the heat of activity in my daily life that intense focus will bring back a pattern of feeling very constricted and localised comes round me again. One thing I have noticed about experience is that there is just no contraction, no limitation, no constriction, it's a very open, full, complete, unbounded sort of sensation or feeling to my experience and there's also a feeling of time, it's not significant, that the past and future are not really a reality but a concept in the mind but all there is, is this, this moment which is unfolding and changing constantly. There's no movement in terms of a change, it's here, it's always now, that's just unfolding. ...time is linear progression from past to the current moment and the future and there is a real feeling about that. Whereas in these moments there's no sense of any time, any timeline of one changing event. And that's part of it too. It's like not feeling this way, it's like looking at a picture and looking at only a fraction of it and not seeing the complete picture. Whereas when I'm feeling open and this way it's like seeing a whole picture and even though that picture may be a landscape with a barn, trees and, you know, stream and people in it, before it would have been like being just focused on the stream or people and not realising that there was a bigger picture, that it was embedded in and at the time of the experience and there is no separation, fragmentation. It's just one event and that event stays within my sensory domain and I see, hear, touch, feel and taste, they all seem to be complete and one and even some vaguer feeling. Even things that I can't see, touch, taste, feel or think about can, somehow, they are all a part, more a very subtle intuitive level, that all of that is also part of the experience even though is not part of the sensory perceptions.

Another informant recognised a similar type of experience. She described "oneness" both within and without and the fear that may be associated with such an expansionary experience.

Mary:...I guess there was one part where we became aware of the breath inside of us and outside us. It was almost overwhelming the recognition of the connection between us on the inside and everything else on the outside and how whenever I became aware of how large everything was around us, and how much we participate in that, it was almost overwhelming. I had to keep pushing myself not to stop because I was almost afraid of it. Do you know what I am saying...but I just continued letting myself go into it. After that session I came away with more peace and I was more able to accept what I do in life and what I am than ever before.

The final example of the experience of "oneness" or "unity" with creation was described by an individual for whom this experience lasted for several months:

John:...That was that so I went back home ...I just was in the state of awareness for three, four months ..just unshakeable peace ..I had nothing to base it...It was such an unshakeable experience that I felt that I didn't connect with the body, I connected with...my energy shifted, my identity and I felt more, come what may, it didn't matter...I was really busy, miss meditation got four hours of sleep a night and I wasn't tired or drowsy, I just watched

this body be tired or fatigued, it was like really joyful just to watch everything happen and then that experience just broke down...I felt one with everything, a stone, a rock or a tree or a person, I just saw this really from this deep level of the heart and then that crumbled and as it was crumbling I didn't care, watch the ignorance is coming back. But I was like it didn't matter, it didn't shake the joy that was in me and ... sometimes I'd get glimpses of that state and I never had that ...during the whole experience I thought this is it. This is what enlightenment is like,....such beauty, this is what it should be...I just felt all the love and growth

Experiences during the meditative practice of sudarshan kriya could also be characterised by a variety of states that arose during and after the practice. States varied from individual to individual and with each practise. Thus states associated with the practice fluctuated widely from one session to another.

One individual spoke of the peace that was experienced during practices. The theme of peace is one which arose in answer to general questions about experiences. It is one that individuals returned to again and again, as they tried to describe the sensation of peace and the meaning that they derived from this experience.

Susan: As far as your experiences go is there any particular experience that you would like to tell me about? It doesn't matter whether it happened during practises.

Mary: Isn't this a great time to be talking to people? Just this past week I can honestly say that this is the first time that I really felt the possibility of going beyond the physical. (tearful) After all these years. It's a little bit emotional, yeah. It was during one of our sessions, before lunch sessions, ...and words are not going to do this any justice at all. But I'll go through with it ... I felt...Very settled, very peaceful and ...I felt an enormous expansion. It felt almost like a physical expansion. You know, I wish, I'm just not a poet I guess.

Sensations were also described during the practices. The following is an excerpt from a conversation about an experience. The individual states how she felt at times very pleasant and at other times so full of physical sensation that it was difficult to bear:

Clancy:...I'll just keep going, so I continued so I moved through the fire that I felt moving through my whole body and suddenly it moved up into the head and it was as if there was a fountain, you know what sparklers look like? Like a fountain of light coming down, so it was like my whole head was a sparkler and I could see like a waterfall of light falling down, down and it was blissful. It was coming down from the top of my head and it was...my eyes were closed but it was as if I could see this fountain inner fountain, like a sparkler, cool light, like waterlight. It's just so funny to talk about this stuff...There's nothing really quite like it. So this waterlight was just flowing down and then thank God the session was over..

This particular experience continued with what might be described as a vision. The same informant as above continued:

Clancy: I thought that's pretty flashy. I'll try it again. Well the next day, again going through the body being on fire, again the light coming into the head but then at that point I saw here in the forehead a series of people, clear images of what looked like masters and the first master that I saw was actually ... Brahmananda Saraswati, just there, very clear. And then about ten changes of masters, I didn't know who they were. Each one with a different face..like a slide show and then the very last one was Punditji, as clear as if I had my eyes open, staring into my eyes as all of them were and here he was right close in front of me in my forehead as if I could see, staring in my eyes and his form changed...his eyes continued looking without wavering into my eyes but the form changed, around his eyes changed and he was Jesus, and he continued to look in my eyes and I watched the crown of thorns be put on his head and I watched him be crucified and I watched every nail go in and I watched every thing while he was still looking at me and my heart just broke.

Finally there was the informant who during conversations revealed she never had any experiences during her practices that were of any import. In fact, she disliked doing her practices but continued to do them. This individual's story of not experiencing anything is her experience.

Susan: Is there any one experience that you had as a result of doing the kriya that was particularly meaningful for you? During kriya or after kriya?

Teresa: No. Really no because I mostly have resistance to doing kriya. On one level, oh god! I have to do this again but on another level I love doing the kriya because I know that it's making me more, it's helping me be more calm and all the stuff. So there are two things, the whole opposite values complimentary. I hate it and I love it at the same time so I mean I haven't had any real experiences where some people see clouds and they see Shiva and all this stuff. I haven't (seen) anybody and I haven't seen any clouds, no nothing just either I fall asleep or I just breathe and I'm irritated the whole time, not irritated, but oh is it over yet? So I haven't had any real happenings during kriya. For me it's been more of an on going thing over time that I've noticed a change in the way I am, the way I feel. A change over time I've noticed that keeps me so it's not that bad.

In analyzing the data from the conversations about individual experiences, it became apparent that there was no one type of "peak" experience. The experiences were idiosyncratic, but followed a general pattern. These patterns arose as themes during the conversations again and again. The drive for such experiences was experienced by all informants.

I will use the biogenetic structuralist framework to analyze some of the experiences described above by meditators. This metalanguage creates models for discussing experiences

of altered states of consciousness. Phases of consciousness and the warp state between the phases are delineated in this metalanguage. Phases of consciousness are re-organised through the experience of the warp, which disentrains the previous experience. The warp which is ordinarily not consciously experienced becomes exposed to consciousness. It is possible to learn a set of markers for the warp phase of consciousness, such that the onset of the warp state may be recognised. These markers are recognised phase attributes. The opening of the awareness to the warp and its becoming an integral part of phase consciousness, results in the warp becoming a cognized phase (Laughlin,1990:144). Thus in terms of this metalanguage, a meditator's experiences during practices may be understood to be the warp state. Due to repeated conscious experience of the warp during meditative practices this warp becomes a cognized phase as the meditator's awareness is opened to the warp state during his/her practices. The marker for that state may be the recitation of a mantra, or the practice of a certain number of rhythmic breaths and the resulting onset of a particular experience.

Within this framework, it may be possible to analyze certain experiences as a re-tuning of the somatic system which distributes the flow of energy in the body via the trophotropic and ergotropic systems (Laughlin,1985:29). The trophotropic system is responsible for homeostatic balance in the body and the ergotropic system is responsible for constant adaptation to the environment. Each one inhibits the function of the other. It is the discharge of both the trophotropic and ergotropic systems at once that radically alters states of consciousness (ibid:22). Flow experiences may result from this discharge of both systems. It is possible that the distinction between external perceived object and the perceiver as

subject lessens during these experiences and retuning results.

The tuning of the trophotropic and ergotropic systems relative to one another is highly individual. The balance of the two is open to learning, which is termed "re-tuning". It is suggested that it is possible to change the balance through ritual.

"Some authorities have argued that ritual control of ergotropic trophotropic balance forms a basis for primitive healing techniques and for evoking alternative phases of consciousness...(Laughlin, 1985:36).

Using the biogenetic structuralist metalanguage, one may suggest that during meditative practices retuning of the somatic system in the body is occurring. This is one way of understanding the experiences of "unity", "flow", etc. as reported by the meditators. The peace that is experienced during practices may be understood as an example of hypertrophotropic tuning where the part of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) concerned with maintenance functions is undergoing a state of extreme relaxation.

It is possible to analyze Clancy's experience of light in the head using the biogenetic structuralist metalanguage as an example of hypertrophotropic tuning with ergotropic eruption. In the case of her experience both somatic systems are discharging energy at once. I would suggest that the visions she experienced may be the sensorium's homeomorphogenic representation of input from sense receptors in muscles, tendons etc.

"As the usual body image is replaced by flow experience, the visual system may become entrained to the process, thus providing the image of a radiant energy body ...The culturally conditioned expectation set of the practitioner will have a determinate effect upon the details of the vision and in particular the interpretation of symbolic material encountered.

(Laughlin, 1985:49)

I would suggest that Clancy was experiencing ANS retuning. Her "culturally conditioned expectation set" was the symbol of Christ crucified and for her this was the homeomorphogenic representation in the sensorium. Thus her description of the vision she experienced is her choice of language to represent the retuning of her ANS due to symbolic penetration. Symbolic penetration occurs due to techniques of symbolic evocation and results in

"...effects exercised by the neural system mediating a symbolic percept...upon other neural, endocrine, and physiological systems within the being" (Laughlin, 1990:190).

The symbolic penetration had been engendered by her practice of sudarshan kriya, which I would suggest in this instance acted as a "driver" penetrating to core processes.

Such cases of ANS retuning could be seen as resulting in changes in culturally predetermined ways of brain functioning. Types of experience such as "flow" or "oneness" are not usually part of the monophasic type of functioning associated with North American culture. The exposure to such experiences due to meditative practices may override culturally predetermined modes of brain functioning.

The nervous system is a theoretical construction which must be an incomplete concomitant of one's phenomenological experiences. One language to discuss the experiences is the biogenetic structuralist metalanguage. Such language provides a means to discuss the experience of powerful states that are capable of re-arranging one's life. It provides a means to discuss phenomena which it may otherwise be difficult to think about

due to the linguistic and intellectual limitations of cultures such as ours, which do not acknowledge the experiences of altered states of consciousness or the knowledge derived therefrom. Knowledge by definition in this culture is derived from the waking state of consciousness.

A metalanguage may be useful to some individuals in order to provide terms with which to think about their meditative experiences. Phenomenological models and lexicons are the best way to build larger phenomenological maps. Other abstractions will tend to be more limited when attempting to deal with knowledge from states of consciousness other than the waking state.

THEME 3: EMOTIONS EXPERIENCED DURING MEDITATIVE PRACTISES

The emotional content of experiences became apparent as conversations developed with meditators. Many of the deeply meaningful experiences were inherently emotional, thus individuals would speak about feelings that arose during meditation. Questions about emotional experiences were often answered with difficulty by informants and usually needed some discussion to elicit ideas, clarification and memories. For some individuals this question was impossible to answer because I believe they did not have ready access to their emotional states and did not customarily discuss them. However ten out of the thirteen informants were able to relate some information.

It became necessary for some individuals to use analogies about their emotional experience during meditative practises. These were likened to such phenomena as child birth, falling in love and sex. The following are examples using the informants' own words and analogies. One informant likened an experience to childbirth:

Susan: How about the emotional content of these experiences?

Agnes: I just float up. Sometimes I feel as if my arms and my legs want to float up and I get a lovely warm glow and it feels as though there's a light shining on me. It's like the nearest I could say, I've had three children at home and I didn't have complications ...and I

know it's sort of an effort having them pushing and pushing but that minute when the baby's born you know and that lovely gush of happiness and all over oh, that's what I feel. Unless you were a mum you wouldn't understand about that and unless you know ... you couldn't explain that to people. Its sort of hmmm. I only wish it would have happened earlier.

Another informant likened experiences to that of falling in love:

Susan: Any feelings that come up?

George: You can get kinds of tiredness or you can get feelings of I would say...emotion of joy, happiness, ecstasy or bliss, it's hard to define. I feel, if you feel happiness it can't be a bad thing, in the kriya or at home on me own. I read something and it ...In solar plexus I get extreme fear or happiness, like in solar plexus, it's not like anything, not even with a woman. See it says to fall in love or to love, emotion is the same in every person. Fall in love with someone else the other person may have sparked it off, may think he or she is the reason I fall in love, but it isn't. It's you, the energy the same in you, so if you do it and...it's his teaching, it's happened spontaneous on its own, ...it's sparked off and I'm reading something or hearing something, it happened on its own.

Finally one informant likened an experience that arose during practices to an orgasm:

Mary:...I'd been having a very thoughtful programme and my mind had been scampering

here and I'd bring it back ...to focus on our attention, but toward the end the best I can describe is almost, a bit embarrassing, it was like a spiritual orgasm almost,

Susan: I've had that

Mary: That was the first time it ever happened to me. It brings tears to my eyes even to think about it now and I only can use the word orgasm because it's the only experience I've got in daily life that is that absorbed and that clean, there is nothing else there but that feeling, but it was completely in my head and my chest. It was just phenomenal. I was trying to explain it to my husband and I was a bit embarrassed. I haven't really explained it fully to him.

Susan: I understand

Mary: I don't want to minimise it, I don't want to put it on such a crude physical level, because it wasn't that way, but it's the only other experience that I've had that is a little bit similar. It was completely non-physical. It was amazing, just amazing, to have an experience like that.

For two informants the experience of recalling and retelling the emotional content of meditative practises was sufficiently intense to cause weeping during the conversations. The

following is an example of one such conversation:

Susan: Could you tell me about the emotional quality of the experiences?

Mary: Incredible joy, incredible joy. Whenever I'm telling you about the recognition of what's inside is outside I could not control my laughter and at the same time crying. Not crying out of sadness, but crying out of recognition, about how beautiful it is. (cries) After thirty seven years or whatever I am to have recognised that and its really so simple. It was just amazing and now the emotions are joy and lightness.

The experience of making one's informants cry during conversations was a difficult one. I was close to tears also. This experience gave me some indication of how important these experiences are for the individual and how strong the drive to attain such states may be.

The question about the emotional content of experiences during meditative practises was one of the hardest questions for informants, but the results are worthwhile. Individuals were open about their emotional reality.

To ask individuals to recount experiences that were profoundly moving and private for them was often embarrassing for me and at times painful for them. The asking of such questions resulted in conversations that caused individuals to relive difficult experiences. It was difficult to assess the ethics of the situation wherein I doubted my right to ask such

intensely personal questions. My mode of dealing with this doubt was to share in their emotion and thus respect their experience.

THEME 4: THE INTELLECTUALISING OF EXPERIENCES

When asked about discussing experiences, only three out of eleven informants found it helpful to intellectualise about their experiences. The remaining eight informants found they preferred not to discuss or intellectualise about their experiences. They preferred not to use concepts in order to convert direct meditative experience into a format for intellectual discussion. For example:

Clancy: I prefer not to talk about experiences, but it's alright here because I know it's for a purpose but in terms of, I find that it's kind of disgusting, people that think that ..because I don't think that any one is better than anyone else because everybody had their own experience and experience is not it. Experience is still part of the dream and so I don't feel that too much acknowledgment of experience should be there.

For this informant talking about experiences placed too much emphasis on the experience itself, which was not the goal of the practise she felt. Some informants did not wish to talk to others about their experiences because they felt that the only individuals who would understand were those who had had similar experiences. Informants felt that individuals with similar experiences were able to understand meditator phenomenology through their own experience rather than through intellect. For example:

Susan: When it comes to your experiences do you mind talking about them intellectually or do you prefer not to talk about them?

Agnes: To somebody who's interested. I talk to my friends because they know that I can't put this into words. It's more a feeling...they know what I'm trying to say, but not others outside of this, and it's a shame, it's there for everybody.

During fieldwork I found a reluctance on the part of individuals who were practising meditative techniques to discuss their experiential reality of meditation in an intellectual vein. For most this was not their preferred mode of dealing with the experience. If they had to talk at all they preferred to talk to those who had had similar experiences to themselves. There was a preference for discussing their experiences only with those who practised techniques such as their own. Many were reluctant to convert the raw material of their direct experience of meditation into concepts in order for intellectual discussion to take place. As a fieldworker who had had experience with meditative techniques I was able to converse with individuals who would otherwise not have been willing to discuss their meditative realities.

It has been argued that science does not attend sufficiently to transpersonal experiences in disciplines that study psychology and culture. Only a few ethnographers have availed

themselves of the opportunity to experience transpersonal states (Laughlin,1988:32). To do so however allows for a qualitative shift in the type of anthropology that may result from fieldwork. It represents a methodological enhancement that facilitates a more accurate representation of the informants' worldview. Participation in altered states of consciousness allows the ethnographer to ask an appropriate set of questions. It also facilitates the study of not just appearance and structure of ritual, but phenomenology too (Given,1992:23).

THEME 5:THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

The second series of interviews were follow-up conversations that discussed in depth the individual's thoughts, feelings and understandings about their experiences with meditative practises. Most of the individuals who participated in the second series had been interviewed in the first series of interviews. It is these conversations that form the core of this ethnographic work. The conversations took place with individuals who were experienced meditators. They had been involved in their practises for many years and thus could draw on lengthy experience with meditation. For myself, at the time of the conversations I had been involved in a variety of practises for a period of twenty two years. It is this lengthy period of practises that served as a context in which these conversations could occur.

During this second series the individual was asked to comment on the nature of spiritual experience. Of five conversations about this topic, three individuals felt that spiritual

experience was what they were ordinarily experiencing. One could postulate that this is in fact the experience of the "third Kensho", wherein the meditative state is no longer a transient experience but has become a stable state. With long term meditators it is possible that meditative states become a part of their lived experience and this may be the experience that informants describe. One informant outlines this as follows:

Susan: What do you now understand the nature of spiritual experience to be? By that I mean what's your conceptual framework of what a spiritual experience is?

Shirley: Oh God that's a biggie, a real biggie

Susan: What do you understand it to be?

Shirley: You see I understand spiritual experiences to be just getting up in the morning and breathing. Everything, everything. Perhaps in the church I always thought of spiritual experience as so holy and angelic, sort of pious and now it's not. It's everything, you now. That bird sitting there is a spiritual experience. This is refreshing for me, this type of spiritual experience and relating to that.

The nature of spiritual experience was thus reported to be the day to day experience of life for most informants.

THEME 6: THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GURU

Of ten individuals discussing their relationship with the teacher, or guru, nine individuals

felt that they had experienced a personal relationship with the teacher. The relationship was conceived of differently by individuals. For some it was conceived of as a personal relationship and for others as a relationship with someone who was wise and had passed through experiences that the individual had not. For the majority of individuals the relationship was an extremely important one. One informant stated that he had always wanted such a personal relationship with a teacher. He describes this as follows:

Susan: As far the relationship between guru-and disciple for you how deep does that go?

John: All my life I always wanted a personal master, ever since I was seven or eight. I'd heard about that possibility...

I wanted it all my life and here it is and I'm just realising how much... and I can fight it ...Just today we were talking about dropping everything and just being with him and then realising that that's really what I want to do. What I wanted to do all my life.

This quote illustrates the depth of feeling that was often expressed by informants about the guru-disciple relationship. The drive for such a relationship is very strong for some individuals. However the majority of informants did not express the need for the relationship as intensely as the quote above. Rather the relationship was one they valued highly. One individual likened his relationship with the guru to that of a son with his father:

Susan: As far as the guru-disciple relationship goes how deep do you feel that is for you?

Tom: I haven't read a lot about it and I don't know many people who do that but just from my own feelings on it, Punditji represents the ideal father. He answers any question I have and it always...if he thinks it's important, points me in the right direction and it's a relationship that brings me a lot of security. So ...if that's the disciple guru relationship...

The relationship of guru with follower is open to being experienced in many ways. Of the conversations that were recorded in the field the emphasis seemed to be mainly on a personal relationship with deep feelings associated with it.

In researching the guru-disciple relationship I was not provided with a great deal of information. On the whole, informants did not engage this topic and thus themes did not emerge, other than the examples provided above. Thus although this is a difficult area for some individuals in the West and needs research in order to clarify this relationship, this is the totality of the information that I was able to collect.

THEME 7: EXPERIENCE REMEMBERED AND RECOUNTED

The distinction between experience during meditative practises, the remembrance of such experiences and the recounting of them, was discussed during the second round of interviews. This distinction between experience, remembrance of experience and recounting thereof is a central concern for anthropologists. Clifford Geertz states,

"A clear distinction between religion experienced and religion remembered is thus an important analytical tool for understanding some otherwise difficult to understand phenomena. And not least of these is the problem of the relation between belief and action"(Geertz, 1968:110).

To make this distinction allows for understanding of some of the phenomena surrounding religious experience and it's effect in daily life. One individual spoke clearly about the distinction between the meditative experience, experience remembered, and experience recounted.

Susan: And last question, can you make the distinction between the experience itself, the experience remembered and the experience recounted?

John: That's funny, you're having the experience, if you go to think about it, that's remembered so that's ..anytime I look back on any experiences, what I could say is when I go through an experience it's very fresh and new and when I remember it I just taste it. Or it's under a veil and I put my finger against the veil and feel the warmth of the experience but I can't quite touch the experience....

The individual's use of the analogy of the veil for the experience remembered or recounted as opposed to directly experienced illustrates how clearly he is able to make the distinction between the experience itself and its remembrance.

Of five conversations on this topic all five individuals clearly emphasized the distinction between the experience itself and the remembrance and recounting. Possibly as a result of meditative practises they were accustomed to being aware of their own mental functioning. They also felt it was an important distinction to make so that the phenomenology of experience was not confused with the description of the experience. One informant spoke of this as follows:

Susan: Do you think it's an important distinction to make?

Mary: An important one? I think it has to be made because I don't think we should pretend that our memory of something and our explanation of that thing is anywhere near the thing. I mean it's like a painting of nature ..it's not the same. It's got it's own beauty, the poetry that we talked about it can have it's own beauty to be able to convey for someone, to be able to say, oh yes I've been there, I've seen that but it's not the experience. I guess I'm a little bit pessimistic about being able to convey things, to convey spirituality.

There is awareness here of the fact that the experience itself is in no way the same as the description of the experience. In fact as the informant points out the description is merely a "nice painting" that maybe is not really like the experience at all. However the informant

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admits there may be a value in having a "painting" for others who have not had any such experience.

Individuals were able to articulate the difference between experience itself, experience remembered and experience recounted and were able to use concrete analogies to point to the difference between these three phenomena.

THEME 8: A LANGUAGE TO DESCRIBE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

An important issue in this research is the language to talk about meditative experiences. An individual may or may not feel the need of a language with which to describe and discuss the experiences that arise during meditative states. Some individuals like to discuss their experiences and some do not. A language for the discussion of meditative experiences is not always readily available to the individual. However the majority of societies exhibit forms of institutionalised dissociation (Bourguignon, 1973:11). The lack of ability to discuss dissociative experiences in the West may be due to the limiting nature of the structure and associative function of language in the West. Certain experiences may become inaccessible due to the lack of language about them.

"...an accepted pattern of using words is often prior to certain lines of thinking and forms of behaviour..." (Spier, 1941:75)

Meditative experiences are readily disattended in the Western world. Once such types of experiences begin to occur the individual may feel the need to seek out a hermeneutic with which to integrate the experiences into his personal reality. Such experiences may be

difficult to discuss and there will be a shortfall between experience and that which is communicated no matter which symbolic system is chosen (Laughlin, 1988:42).

There is a necessity for anthropologists who are open to transpersonal experience during fieldwork. They will be able to do adequate research on such states through the experience thereof. They will access the language and symbols used locally to describe such states in the ritual sphere. It should be noted that the difficulties encountered dealing with the transpersonal within same culture context will be as novel compared to the difficulties encountered by the transpersonal anthropologist in a cross cultural setting. In such a milieu there is not the commonality of language usage and culture that occurred during this particular case study where researcher and informant are same culture members. Without cultural similarities, the common reference points possible between language, symbol and experience in the ritual domain will become fewer and more tenuous. Without access to the same fund of cultural metaphor, simile and analogy constant lack of match between experience and reference point may well result. That two individuals conversing cross culturally within the transpersonal domain are ever talking of the same phenomena may be brought into doubt.

Twelve informants discussed the issues of a language for the meditative experience. They also discussed searching for a language to speak of their experiences to themselves and others. In these conversations it emerged that when an individual did seek such a language, the terms and expressions were found from courses with teachers of meditative techniques,

from gurus, from poetry, from sanskrit and from books. Of ten individuals who were asked where they found the terms that they used for discussing the meditative experience, five individuals found the terms directly from the words of gurus. Specifically these gurus were Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Sai Baba and Pundit Ravi Shankar. Four informants found terminology in books in general. As for the way in which meditators decided exactly what the gurus meant with regard to experiences, Wallace's example of a formal structure wherein empty schemata are provided for experience (Wallace, 1970:80) may suggest that the gurus provide a schemata into which individuals may slot their experience.

The following is an example of a conversation with an informant about the nature of the experiences during practises. This conversation illustrates how gradually experience may be represented in conversation, a little at a time. It also illustrates some of the difficulties for both fieldworker and informant in using language to describe inner experiences. The fact that both fieldworker and informant have been exposed to similar processes facilitates the understanding between the two parties.

Susan: Yep! The nature of the experience itself, the basis, could you tell me something about the feelings, sensations associated with..

John: The actual kriya?

Susan: The spiritual experience.

John: Like usual, or just..during or after it or during the day?

Susan: It could be during the day but stuff that you feel is associated with that.

John: I think a greater sensitivity to what's going on.

Susan: This is during?

John: No just in general, like this may sound sort of strange, I can feel the vibes much more easily. I sort of, whereas before nothing, and now I sort of notice this is some negativity going on, more on the feeling level.

Susan: This is since you started doing kriya?

John: Mhmm. and it's more of, I find emotions flow more, both positive and negative ones.

Susan: When you say flow...?

John: I experience them more. Like they're stronger in my awareness, like there's my anger, there's my love, whereas before it was kind of flat, good and bad, positive and negative, but it just kind of was, not sort of a rollercoaster, more evenness, now it's not so flat any more, sort of more ups and downs. Instead of like this, like this (Gestures with hand up and down).

Susan: Could you say something about the content of the experience. What this experience is about?

John: Meaning what it means for me or...?

Susan: Actually I was just getting to that as well, how you interpret the experience.

John: So the content, you mean the hard core facts of it?

Susan: Yeah, content is the hard core facts and interpretation is ..

you see how I'm picking away at it?

John: It's just I can't, it's like anything I say would be interpretation.

Susan: Okay then give me your interpretation.

John: What I see it as, is something that's more like I'm getting more freed up as far as emotion goes. Meaning emotions float more and more ups and downs

Susan: So are you from that interpreting how do you see it as before and after effect.

John: There were a lot of clogs

Susan: Were they not coming out is that what you mean?

John: I just didn't experience them because you can say repressed or whatever. There was such a filter on emotion that they just never come up and what the kriya seemed to have done is, what Guruji seems to be doing is like tearing that. It's kind of like milk has a skin on it, pulling that skin off so it bubbles over..and yeah making the energy flow better and that's not so bad and that's what I think is happening. My experience of it, I just have more extremes as far as emotions go but my detachment from it is getting more. It's like I'm having more stronger emotions going through. It kind of goes along with the first part I said about my self image and all that. It's not like it's changing it's just being thrown out. Like I'm being identified with that. It's kind of like all my emotions I see this personality and it's becoming colourful

Susan: Your personality?

John: Yeah and It's like I'm realising I'm not it. The two at the same time.

This conversation illustrates how a conversation gradually develops to arrive at an intersubjective articulation of experience, wherein some meaning common to both parties is experienced. The process however is gradual and at all times approximate.

In the first round of interviews individuals discussed their need for a language to talk about their experiences and the various locations where they found such a language. Of four informants, two denied the importance of language for discussion of meditative experiences and stressed instead the importance of a common experience in order to have discussions. An example follows:

Susan: Yeah. I'm saying if somebody like Punditji doesn't give you those words, if somebody doesn't give you those words, how can you say I had this experience if you didn't have access to words like that?

Mary: But you see the only people I talk to about these kinds of experiences are people that I know who have done it as well. I personally don't talk to people who are non-meditators about this sort of stuff.

Susan: So you would just have the experience and not sort of need any language for it, you're saying?

Mary: Yeah, well I'm not out to convert anybody to this. I don't proselytise at all and I'm not very good at public speaking so it wouldn't be much of a benefit to anybody for me to go out and try to convey these ideas. So I guess I'm very selfish about it and keep it in myself.

However though two individuals denied the importance of a language with which to

discuss experiences, the remaining two individuals felt the need of a language given to them by the guru. This position is expressed here:

Susan: So you feel you need the words?

Tom: Yeah or we would never have understood without the words. There could be another set of words that work, but for me those are the words the Master used and then I read about it and so those are the ones that I assigned to those experiences and to try to describe my experiences. So in that sense yes words were very important for me to integrate the experiences in my life.

Thus the importance of a language to express the meditative experience is an individual need. I would point out that the two individuals who felt the need of a language were male and the two who felt that common experience was paramount over the need for language were female. With so small a sample it is impossible to make any inferences from this observation. It would be an interesting issue to pursue elsewhere.

One individual was able to address the problem of having a common language to discuss spirituality. He described the difficulty that can be encountered without a common experience at the basis of the language. The Sapir\Whorf thesis states that due to the nature of associations made within a language, certain experiences may be excluded.

"Language is heuristic, not merely in the simple sense...but in the much more far-reaching sense that its forms predetermine for us certain modes of observation and

interpretation"(Sapir,1964:7)

As language becomes transparent to the user it is able to limit the states it is possible for the individual to experience. The informant describes his difficulty discussing spirituality as follows:

John:.....and how is it recounted?

Susan: When you have to tell anyone?

John: I think I'm making sense because when I use language I use words that are extremely charged with meaning for me and I speak them from the feeling level but the other person hearing them just doesn't ..not a lot of times, they do. I know the vocational language and I feel it's very inadequate. One experience I had I was telling this person this experience I had ..it was in the Franciscans, we prayed a lot, really devout. We were talking about that silence and that presence and I thought I was using language that would give that taste of experience. When I talk about it it brings back a taste and I thought he was sharing that taste with me and at the end of the hour he said "John I have no idea what you are talking about. I've never had any experience like that", and it just crushed me! Well first of all someone in the religious life and so devout had never had that experience. It scared me. Yuck!

This conversation illustrates the dilemma experienced when language is inadequate to describe experience. In this example there was a lack of parameters to deal with the nature of the individual's experience. Without common parameters the possibility of achieving

communication is lessened. Individuals need to know that the experience to which their language points is in fact the same reference point as the other's experience. In this case the reference point was definitely not the same and led to a complete lack of understanding.

The same individual discussed not only the need for a hermeneutic when involved in meditative practises but discussed the transition from one hermeneutic system to another as follows:

John:...so when I met Punditji in that first talk he just blew me away. I was experiencing a lot of things he was talking about, in a Christian context, with Christian symbols but a very positive Christian, rejecting most of the negative symbols for example the crucifix,...Like why focus on the negative, so when I met Punditji here was somebody who put it into words in a completely different way, in a much more personal, less theological... That's what I don't like about theology ...pie in the sky...the new kind of psycho-spirituality was moving in that direction but Punditji was already there. I suppose that's what language does.

Possibly an example of the type of "words" that John refers to here are the teacher's use of analogies and stories to describe mediative states.

It became apparent through conversations that informants found a symbolic system to represent their experiences. Some developed their own system from a variety of sources.

The match between experience and symbol was accepted as imperfect. During interviews there was the constant problem of the inadequacy of language to talk about meditative experience, no matter which symbolic system was used. The whole project was an exercise in awareness of the lack of match between experience and symbol. The issue is even more more complex for the ethnographer who studies the transpersonal cross culturally. Without a symbolic base common to ethnographer and informant the match between experience and symbol is likely to be hazardous at best.

THEME 9: CHANGES IN WORLD VIEW SUBSEQUENT TO MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES

A main issue of this fieldwork was "Is there a change in the view of the self and the world subsequent to experiences with meditative practises?" Engaging in discussions about how the view of the world had changed subsequent to meditative experiences was an attempt to address how meaning was sought from experiences of altered states and then expressed in relation to the world.

The Baruss and Moore (1992) scale for measurement of beliefs about consciousness and reality is useful in assessing individuals' beliefs about self and the world. The scale ranges from "physicalism" to "transcendentalism", including "religiosity", "meaning", "extraordinary experiences", "extraordinary beliefs", and "inner growth" in between. I will attempt to apply this scale to experience and view of the world within the parameters of this

project. Most of the following texts belong in the category of extraordinary experiences (Baruss and Moore, 1992:62)

Of five conversations with individuals where the issue of the change in world view was discussed all five had definitely noticed a change in world view subsequent to the meditative experiences. A taxonomy derived from meditator's reports of their experiences for changes in lived reality due to meditative experiences ranges from, "seeing the world as wonderful" to "a greater appreciation of the environment". The experience of "seeing the world as wonderful" is recounted below:

Agnes: Everything seems wonderful. The world's a beautiful place and people are beautiful, this I try to see in people that I don't really admire all that much. I see them doing bad things and I try to see the goodness in them, but I'm sure it's a better atmosphere with my husband and with me children and I think they ought to be included in this but ...

The change in world view also included a greater appreciation of the environment, as one individual put it, "I have a lot more respect for everything in my environment, everything, even rocks." Another individual felt she was more compassionate and less judgmental.

Other changes were of a subtler order altogether, with individuals feeling that occurrences were not so important. For example in this quote, "I don't see what's happening

around me to be so vitally, so horri'ly important that it's worth a fight every day..."

Another individual was able to take what happened to him in the world more "lightly" and was less intimidated by others. The following statement illustrates how individuals' attitudes to the world seemed to be more accepting of the world as it is. For example:

Teresa: Before I was really very upset about the world situation and politically, all the wars going on and the refugees, all that stuff. I was really involved and being an activist and making..., having refugees in my apartment, things like that, just because I felt so really strongly and I still do, but I feel like it's always gonna be there and I understand a little bit better now why. Why it is there's always going to be that suffering in the world, good in the world and they're complementary and all that. So I feel that I can accept it more. Not that I like it or won't do anything about it. But it doesn't get, it doesn't twist my heart and I don't get as angry at the whole thing. I can understand and accept it more and act on it after that.

This statement indicates a shift in world view subsequent to meditative experiences. The individual is stating that her world view is charged with less negative emotion than previously. This conversation is representative of the changes in world view experienced by informants.

THEME 10: CHANGE IN SELF IMAGE SUBSEQUENT TO MEDITATIVE EXPERIENCES

Questions were asked of all thirteen informants about changes in view of the self subsequent to meditative experiences. These changes in the view of the self are central to the research project.

Of thirteen conversations about changes in the view of the self, nine of the conversations occurred in the first round of initial conversations and four of the conversations were in the second round of in depth discussions. Initial indications are that the view of the self became more positive in general and more negative views of the self were dropped. This tends to fit the Baruss Moore scale in the area of "extraordinary experiences". Baruss and Moore operationalise this category as "I have had an experience which could best be described as transcendent or mystical experience" (Baruss and Moore, 1992:62).

In this project one individual spoke of less depression. Another individual spoke of a change in the view of self from a melancholic individual to a more positive self view. She described the lessening of melancholia as follows: "Mmm. and in fact I carried that despair so much within me that I thought that that was who I was, that was who I thought I was. I was quite proud of being that so it wasn't even something that I wanted to let go of. That's an interesting thing, but it's been gone, for four years."

One positive change in view of the self was with regards finding more "direction" in life as described below:

Tom: I have felt more of a purpose in life having those experiences and it's partly a result of the experiences, partly a result of the knowledge, knowing that those experiences are just putting me in touch with the Divine and that there really is a purpose for my life and it seems to be kind of a mix of the knowledge and the experience.

On the whole the answers to the issue of self image revealed a shift to a more positive view of the self resulting from experiences with meditative practises. A greater noetic component of consciousness was described and the discovery of the innate nature of the individual. This innate nature was described as "innocence and goodness" as follows:

Christine: Well that was one very specific experience during a breathing practise but I think that in time it has permeated into ...so it started with something specific but it has become more.

Susan: As a result of this greater...awareness has that changed your view of yourself and the world?

Christine: I felt that I was coming face to face with my innermost heart, a person that I've always feared. I guess I could characterise it as the child in me and what it did was it

familiarised me with my own innocence and the goodness of my heart and I think that prior to that I doubted it and I didn't really know that it was still there, that level of the personality had been covered over through years of conditioning and responsibility and other ideas of who I was...it seemed to peel back the layers.

This quote is representative of the change in the view of the self of informants. The impact of meditative experiences was transposed into the daily reality and changed how individuals saw themselves. The effect of the experience was not just within the time frame of the experience itself but extended further. This is one reason why synchronic analysis of ritual is insufficient. Practises may have inbuilt time delays in effects and thus diachronic analysis is necessary to reveal the impact of ritual over time. The meaning of an experience, in this example, illuminated some permanent aspect of the self that subsequently is better known to the individual. This greater self knowledge resulted in a more positive view of the self for the individual.

Beyond changes in self view there is the possibility of viewing the self in a radically different way so that the entity is not conceived of as "self" in the traditional understanding of the word. This may fit the Baruss and Moore scale under the category of Inner Growth. This Inner Growth category is defined as "Consciousness is the key to personal growth" (ibid:62) One informant spoke of this type of understanding of himself subsequent to experiences with practises, as follows:

Susan: I'm asking you how do your spiritual experiences, how did your spiritual experiences change your view of yourself. Now I am going to ask questions to attempt to get at that. So we'll talk a little bit about the experiences first. In general how do you think spiritual experiences, from kriya, change how you see yourself.

John: That's a question. I think it's funny, it didn't, how can I put this, it doesn't change so much my view, because like on one side of me I'm still insecure and self-doubting...but what it does is it doesn't make me have a different viewpoint of me it makes me have no viewpoint of me. Like, if it's trying to give me good self-esteem and all that, throws the whole thing out, it doesn't matter, so it's, when I experience, it's let's not take a position. If I take a position about what I think I am now, what the kriya has done, ... instead of taking a healthier or better position, it just kind of throws all that positioning out. You are, you just are. Does it make sense?

This individual is suggesting the possibility of a personal shift away from changes in the view of the self (including a more positive self view) to a possibility of no self view. This is due to the fact that the individual is experiencing a state of consciousness where he feels he just is, without a sense of a better or worse view of the self. As he states it, "You are, you just are."

The Baruss and Moore scale may situate such experience as Inner Growth, as defined as "Consciousness is the key to personal growth". However I feel that the fit between the

experience as defined in conversation above and as defined in a category such as "Inner Growth" will tend to be tenuous. This is an example of the continuing problem of fit between experience and representation.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The study of altered states of consciousness (ASC's) using qualitative research techniques may develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between extraordinary experience and social communication for anthropology. Through such endeavours the discipline will be able to expand the understanding of multiple realities. New forms of knowledge will be obtained through techniques of qualitative research.

The intent of this thesis has been to record the nature of meditators's experiences during practises and the impact of these experiences on the individual's view of herself and her world. The biogenetic structuralist template provided a useful link between personal phenomenology and neuro-anthropology. Attention has been paid to issues of voice, and the theorisation of the phenomenology of the researcher and the informant. Participant observation was necessary in order to do research with meditative experiences and to acquire the meditator's experience-based lexicon. "Thick participation" on the part of the anthropologist as a method facilitated the recording of ASC's in the field. Verbatim material from interviews, such as individual's stories, was organised into a thematic structure to reveal the importance of these experiences in individual's lives.

Questions were put to meditators with respect to their meditation experience. From conversations arising from these questions the themes were collected. These themes were

"initial motivations for practising meditation", "experiences with meditative practises", "emotions experienced during meditative practises", "intellectualising about experiences", "belief about the nature of spiritual experience", "relationship with the guru", "experiences remembered and recounted", "a language to describe spiritual experiences", and "changes in self image and the view of the world subsequent to meditative experiences". The material generated from the interviews was organised by the researcher to fit these themes. Text was selected by the researcher that was representative of the majority of the conversations with meditators on a particular topic.

The major difficulty in the research process was the lack of language with which to discuss the experiences that meditators wished to convey. The initial task of the researcher was to collect and understand meditator's terms for specific experiences. Many of these terms were not part of the usual lexicon of the West and were in fact terms borrowed from other cultures. Despite the common cultural heritage of the researcher and informants, the difficulty of conversing about meditative states had to be overcome. This occurred in the face of a common fund of analogies, metaphors etc. I would suggest that in the light of this fact that cross-cultural research on ASC's will be further hampered by the lack of a common cultural lexical framework to discuss experiences of ASC's. Without such a common framework the fieldworker will need, not only a knowledge of the cultural vocabulary, but also experience with ASC's and access to the specialised cultural language for such states.

The biogenetic structuralist framework was used in this thesis to discuss experiences of a

meditative practise. It provided a framework in which to fit some of the experiences with meditative practises through a model based on neurocognitive structures. For this project it was used to analyze the technique of sudarshan kriya, and related techniques, through which individuals may come to experience realities radically different from those that have been culturally entrained for. By attending to the warp, "the point of experiential and neural transformation between phases (of consciousness)" (Laughlin, 1990:141), by means of sudarshan kriya the changes in consciousness that are available to all humans may come to conscious awareness.

Left hemisphere dominated cultural entrainment may be over ridden to provide experiences of non-discrete realities. Such realities are described by Eastern mystics and individuals as personal experiences. However, they may be theorised as neural re-entrainment resulting in the warp coming to be experienced as a cognised phase, within the perspective of biogenetic structuralism. The experiences described may result in changes of conception of self due to the neural re-entrainment that accompanies the experience. This is borne out by the data from in depth interviews about changes in self and world view subsequent to meditative experiences.

The use of yogic techniques by Westerners opens individuals, culturally trained to experience monophasically, to polyphasic experience. The "warp" state (Laughlin, 1990:140) may come to be experienced increasingly consciously as awareness is brought to bear on areas of experience customarily disattended. With such experience it would be possible for

the warp to become a cognised phase. Realities that may then open for the individual are those of alternate states of consciousness. Such experiences may be characterised by an awareness of "Oneness", and as a result of this state new concepts of self, experience and the world may result. These experiences of "Oneness" are recorded in the data from in depth interviews.

Experiences of alternate states of consciousness such as those described as the Void, or oneness at the basis of life may result in the removal of the conception of self as held in the West.

"Completely gone is any view of the self as a permanent, impermeable, seamless entity (or ego). Gone as well is a cognition grounded in the belief that the phenomenal world is anything like solid and fixed" (Laughlin, 1983:46).

In such types of experience the neural structures of experience are re-organised so that neither subject nor object serve as paradigm, but rather a whole new paradigm is created from the whole, the flow of experience.

The move of neurocognitive patterning of experience is from a partial view of reality to a whole that includes subject, object and the process of interaction between the two so that the whole field is one. Such experiences may be described as "...a grand unification (which) happens in the consciousness. Our perception changes...We merge with what we see and hear." (Shankar,1990:14). The culturally determined "partial view" (Given, 1992:8) may be transformed into an experiential reality of Oneness.

The importance of this qualitative research is in the new information on ASC's it provides and their meaning for individuals. The research is important for the discipline because it is an example of how anthropology may be done in the field using techniques such as "thick participation". It is also important for the discipline of the sociology of religion. ASC's such as those described in interviews herein must be considered when developing theoretical treatments of religion. The distinction needs to be clearly made between belief systems and experience. Direct experience may result from ritual but a culture-specific hermeneutic will tend to shape the understanding of that experience. These are two aspects of religion that need to be subject to different theoretical approaches.

Qualitative research includes both informant and researcher in the account of experience, through the use of dialogical modes. This results in a radically different construction of knowledge, allowing the informant power within the production of knowledge. The recounting of stories is constructed by individuals for themselves.

A reality may be revealed through many windows in any sphere of enquiry. Views from different windows may be beneficial to one another. Good science attempts to vertically integrate experiences, with social structure and other aspects of knowledge, rather than reduce one aspect of knowledge into another. I would suggest that the use of qualitative methods allows the opening of a window on human experience and the study of the transpersonal experience enhances the understanding of what human experience may be. To craft a voice in the dialogical mode may open a window that has not been opened on the

dimension of altered states of consciousness. This window is not the only window through which to view these matters. This attempt to describe a state of consciousness will be incomplete at all times. This is "...a task at which no one ever does more than not utterly fail" (Geertz, 1988:143), and this state of affairs is perhaps more particularly true with the internal experience of meditation than ethnography in general.

Research into mindbody states may lead to the formation of new paradigms. State-specific science will develop along with the interdisciplinary study of states of consciousness. This new paradigm will draw on those individuals from other disciplines who are interested in such experiences and opens the door to cross-cultural dialogue with experts on other culture's epistemologies and pedagogies (Given, 1993:23).

"Roberts (1983) sees a "science of consciousness" composed of people from many different academic disciplines and different universities..." (Roberts, 1989:100).

This research project with meditative experiences will contribute to this interdisciplinary "science of consciousness" and to the development of new paradigms, by providing insight into the experience of transpersonal states from those who experience them.

APPENDIX

SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (SERIES 1)

(The questions were not used verbatim nor necessarily in the following order.)

- 1) What was your religious background as a child and what do you think of those beliefs and practises now?
- 2) What was your initial contact with sudarshan kriya and what was it about that contact that turned you on? Before learning the practise what did you feel it would be?
- 3) How deep is the guru-disciple relationship for you?
- 4) Have you had experiences with sudarshan kriya which were particularly meaningful to you that you could tell me about?
- 5) Are there any emotions associated with the experiences?
- 6) Do you mind intellectualising about your experiences with practises or would you prefer not to?
- 7) Is there a change in the way you see yourself and your world as a result of your experiences with this practise?
- 8) In the West often these experiences are not valued or talked about. Do you think you were looking for a language to talk about these experiences when you learned sudarshan kriya?

SAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (SERIES 2)

(The questions were not used verbatim, nor necessarily in the following order. Some of the questions were not used at all. However the general topics below were usually introduced.)

- 1) Can you talk about how spiritual experience has changed your view of your self?
- 2) Are you able to talk about the emotional content of these experiences, the feelings, the sensations?
- 3) What was the content of the experiences?
- 4) How do you interpret the experiences for yourself?
- 5) Do you have a language to talk about these kinds of experiences? If so do you think the language helps the experiences to come to the waking state and integrate into the personality?
Did the language help to understand the experience?
- 6) What did you learn from the experience?
- 7) Did the experience change your view of the self?
- 8) Did such changes occur gradually or all at once?
- 9) Were there changes in your world view resulting from experiences that influenced how you saw your work, your relationships, or the nature of what you understand the individual to be?
- 10) Did you act differently due to a change in your view of the world?
- 11) Was there a change in your religious beliefs as a result of experiences due to meditative practises?

12) What do you understand the nature of spiritual experience to be?

13) Can you make a distinction between the experience (resulting from your meditative practise), experience remembered, and experience recounted? And do you feel that this is an important distinction to make?

APPENDIX II

KEY TO INFORMANTS

Gender, Age and Nationality

Agnes	female	50	British
Clancy	female	39	American
Tom	male	37	American
John	male	26	American
Kathy	female	50	British
Corey	male	40	American
Teresa	female	34	American
George	male	53	British
Shirley	female	63	Canadian
Christine	female	40	American
Mary	female	38	American
Claire	female	40	Canadian
Leo	male	39	German

APPENDIX III

A MEDITATOR'S LEXICON

(The following are terms used by meditators during interviews)

"Breathing practise" a meditative practise using breath to focus the attention inwards.

"the Divine" term used to designate the force for positivity and godliness in creation

"flow" an experience derived usually from meditative practises where the individual experiences self and other as one, without obstacles to expanded awareness

"guru-disciple relationship" the relationship between the individual meditator and his teacher of meditation, sometimes characterised by devotion but not necessarily so

"guruji" an honorific term to designate the teacher of meditation

"kriya" literally an action, but in this context designates the meditative practise of sudarshan kriya

"the Master" an honorific term for the teacher of meditation. This implies that the status of

the teacher above that of the student is accepted by the student

"meditating" to sit quietly with eyes closed and practise a technique which directs the awareness from outer phenomena towards inner phenomena

"not take a position" meditator jargon for remaining flexible in all situations

"opposite values are complimentary" meditator jargon for expressing the belief that extremes in life are compatible and necessary

"personal Master" a teacher of meditation who has been accepted by the meditator in a personal relationship which is often characterised by devotion but not always so

"my programme" a term to cover a variety of practises done in a specific order each day that complement one another

"punditji, pundit" honorific terms specifying a brahmin with knowledge of the Vedas and their recitation

"Shiva" Hindu deity who personifies the force of destruction in creation

"spiritual community" a group of individuals who practise meditation and live together

"spiritual orgasm" an experience that may occur during meditative practises where energy arises within the body and rushes to the head accompanied by physical sensations of sensual bliss

"Yogic technique" general term to cover all practises within the Hindu tradition that involve the use and redirection of energy throughout the body

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