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**Ritual and the Symbolic Function:
A Biogenetic Structural Comparison of Techniques Used in
Tibetan Buddhism and the Sun Dance Religion**

by

Tannie Liu

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 Religion

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario,
May 8, 1995.

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RITUAL AND THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION: A BIOGENETIC STRUCTURAL
COMPARISON OF TECHNIQUES USED IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM AND THE SUN
DANCE RELIGION

submitted by Tannie Liu, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Brian Given, Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Religion

Carleton University

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Abstract

A biogenetic structural explanation is offered for the cross-cultural use of ritual to obtain mystical experience, intuitive knowledge and power. The ritual techniques of both Tibetan Buddhism and Sun Dance religion are explored. The various detailed techniques and prescribed rituals in both traditions employing symbols and other motor and sensory "drivers" cause radical re-entrainments of the neurobiological systems mediating experience in the brain. The effect of ritual is to bring about a prescribed set of religious experiences verifying the cosmology of the culture.

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Introduction

My present research is focused on the relationship between ritual and experience. This is a problem that needs elucidation because much human religious experience is associated with ritual. It is my opinion that any religious tradition is incomplete without incorporating the domain of experience. This thesis will examine the nature of ritual and experience and will present a theory that explains that relationship. It will offer evidence of that relationship in two different cultural systems, using a methodology common to anthropology called the "method of controlled comparison" (Eggan 1956). This method allows me to compare the similarities and differences while "avoiding too great a degree of abstraction". Moreover, in a field like religious experience, where controlled experiment is almost impossible to carry out, the comparative method will at least provide some kind of control. It also provides me with a tool to find the similarities and common denominators behind the apparent variety of religious experiences somehow causally related to cultural conditioning. I will conclude by examining the universal structures of this relationship using biogenetic structural theory.

In Chapter I, the nature of ritual is examined in a general way. Various definitions are evaluated relative to the question of ritual and religious experience. For the sake of the present analysis, I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach that uses the resources provided by specialists from a variety of approaches. In addition to proposing an ethological viewpoint, I will be examining the theories and ideas of psychologists such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and William James; historians of religion such as Mircea Eliade; and anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner and Charles Laughlin.

The universal use of ritual would seem to indicate that the incorporation of the body is essential to religious practice everywhere.

Moreover, it is clear to me that in the course of ritual activity symbols become the focus of attention; this internal preoccupation with symbols eventually displaces ordinary consciousness and reveals a world of transcendental reality. Religious knowledge is somehow ritually embodied in all these systems, and it seems probable that the embodiment of this knowledge is causally related to the production of religious experience.

In Chapter II, ritual, symbols and experience are examined using biogenetic structural theory. Biogenetic structural theory is a corpus of work that integrates the physiology of the human body with religious experience. The approach specifically isolates the causal mechanisms ("drivers") that produce various types of religious experience. The theory also examines the neurophysiology of symbolism and how, through the medium of penetration, symbols mediate both meaning and experience.

In the present analysis, two case studies of religious ritual and experience are offered in order to compare systems in a controlled way. Chapter III will provide a case study of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. Tibetan Tantric Buddhism is a religious tradition that relies heavily on the use of ritual to produce both insight and religious experience. Tibetan Buddhist tradition utilizes a rich body of symbolism, as well as many ritual drivers to evoke experiences that lead to spiritual growth. The Tibetan "mystery play", a form of sacred dance in Tibet, is also evaluated relative to the production of mystical insight within the tradition.

Dance is a world-wide religious phenomenon. In Chapter IV I will present the second case study of the Sun Dance religion, a religious system practised by at least thirty tribal groups living on the North American plains and prairie. The Sun Dance tradition is one which incorporates a wealth of ritual and symbolism, and which relies heavily upon many ritual drivers (i.e. fasting, purification, sweat lodge, sleep deprivation, dancing, rhythm and painful ordeal) to produce significant

religious experiences and access to transpersonal power. A general description of the characteristics of the Sun Dance common among the many tribes is provided together with a focus on the beliefs, practices and experiences of the Wind River Shoshoni, one of the most influential tribes within the tradition.

In Chapter V, the universal elements of religious ritual are isolated using the two case studies described above. Biogenetic structural theory will be applied in order to account for the efficacy of ritual in the production of religious experience. More specifically, the concept of "the cycle of meaning" will be used in order to show how religious knowledge and belief are integrated with human experience through the medium of ritual practice.

Chapter I: The Role of Ritual in Religious Experience

Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz, both symbolic anthropologists known for their interest in the meaning of ritual symbolism within cultures, point to the fact that ritual does convey a culture's cosmology with powerful emotion, and in so doing, consolidates members of a community. Thus, according to them, ritual serves an important social function.

For the purpose of this thesis, ritual is explored in its neurophysiological, cognitive and psychological perspectives. Ritual is defined as those intentional, conscious and voluntary, repetitive, stylistic, symbolic body actions that focus on cosmic structures, divine beings or power. Examples of such behaviours include all kinds of chanting, meditation, prayer, dancing and body postures.

I wish to rule out from the start the view of ritual as neurotic behaviour. Although Freud's critique of ritual as collective neurotic behaviour is shared by some anthropologists, psychologists and religious specialists, it is far more important to understand that ritual occupies an important place among many mystical groups such as the Hindu Tantrists, the Tibetan Buddhists, the Taoists, the Shamanic tradition and Jewish and Catholic sects all over the world.

Types of Rituals

According to Evan Zuesse (1987), religious rituals in general can be divided broadly into two groups: confirmatory and transformatory. The goal of confirmatory ritual is to maintain the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The goal of the transformatory group is to bridge the boundaries between the sacred and the profane and cause transformations in consciousness. These two characteristic types of ritual exist in all religious ritual in one form or another; sometimes both are present.

Confirmatory rituals include all kinds of taboos, religious blessings, prayers and meditations that emphasize the perception of transcendental reality amidst ordinary day-to-day existence. Some examples of this ritual framing of consciousness include the Jewish perception of all life as an opportunity to dwell in Yahweh's presence; Sufis walking in the path of God in their everyday life; and Buddhist monks' analysis of all life experience and perception in terms of śūnyatā, the empty nature of all existence. Such rituals that shape consciousness and frame religious experience produce the special kind of consciousness and worldview aimed at by a particular religion.

Transformatory rituals serve to bridge the various boundaries between the sacred and the profane, thus re-establishing the cosmic order. These rituals also arise in response to troubling situations in life in order to reestablish order. Essentially, what these rites do is to disconnect the troubled factor from its environment and bring it in direct contact with the divine, so that the reformed factor can be relocated in divine order. This group includes all kinds of transitional rites such as birth, initiation and marriage. It also encompasses various kinds of conversionary rites that induce trances, visions or ecstasies and which result in radical personal transformation. Restorative rituals such as purification, healing, divination, and sacrifices are also within this category (Zuesse 1987:414-7).

According to Arnold van Gennep in his classic, The Rites of Passage (1965), the crucial phase of the ritual is the liminal or middle phase, in which the individual is taken outside of society and brought into more immediate contact with the divine. The transformative power of the liminal phase is obvious in its ritual symbolism. Usually there is a reversal of activity: for example, people assuming bizarre costumes or engaging in odd behaviour. Turner explains that it is through this liminal phase that the community is consolidated into a group outside

the ordinary social structures. This is because the liminal expresses the prior formlessness or primordial existence out of which society grows into structure. This identification with the primordial usually takes the form of masked dances, painful ordeals, and rituals that invoke divine beings or forces to enter the sacred area. In rituals such as these, individuals are forced to give up the idea of self-sufficiency and acknowledge the essential and defining force of transcendental reality (Turner 1969:94-130).

If such religious rituals (both confirmatory ritual which focuses on the shaping of consciousness and transformatory ritual which focuses on the transforming power of the liminal) are analyzed using the biogenetic structural theory (as will be discussed) it becomes apparent that in the course of ritual, the symbols become the focus of attention. This preoccupation with symbols will eventually displace ordinary consciousness and reveal a world of transcendental reality. This, in turn, confirms a set of religious beliefs as propagated by a particular religious tradition, and also causes a transformation of consciousness.

Ritual - A Multidisciplinary Approach

There are many theories that provide explanations for rituals, symbols and mystical religious experiences. For the sake of the present analysis, I will use an interdisciplinary approach that uses the resources provided by a variety of approaches in order to understand the interrelationships between ritual, symbols and religious experience. Theories and ideas of psychologists, religious specialists, ethologists and anthropologists will be examined.

Sigmund Freud

Freud's major contribution to the understanding of religion lies in his argument that myths are to be understood in the same light as dreams. Both myths and dreams are imaginations which make use of symbols, both reflect unconscious process, and are formulated along the same lines. Whereas dreams express individual desires and fantasies,

myths express collective desires and fantasies.

He argues that behind the great differences in cultures there are fundamental and universal situations in the human condition which are stressful in their natures. Examples of these are the Oedipus complex, sibling rivalry, sexuality, love and hate, death, and confrontation with nature. These powerful, shared psychological stresses constitute a threat to both individuals and societies. They are more or less suppressed in individuals, but reappear in group fantasies in the form of myths (Homans:1987:436-7).

According to Freud, there are certain parallels between neurotic ceremonies and religious rites. They are both scrupulous in detail, are performed in isolation from ordinary activities, and their neglect is followed by guilt and anxiety. Religious ritual differs from neurotic rites in that it is performed together with others within a society, and is socially meaningful in nature. Religious ritual is consistent with consensus reality and is not seen by the people themselves as neurotic. Neurotic rites, on the other hand, seem meaningless, although they do take on special significance within a psychoanalytic context (Freud 1968:119).

Religion, according to Freud, seems to be based on the suppression, and renunciation, of certain natural impulses. Although these impulses are not exclusively sexual, they are selfish and harmful impulses, and very often include a sexual component. Moreover, just like neurotic ceremonies, the process of suppression in sacred rituals is only temporary, and has to be repeated from time to time with repentance and redemption in order to alleviate unconscious feelings of guilt. The focus on minute details during the rituals serves to displace these unconscious guilty feelings (Freud 1968:125).

Freud gives the example of the Eucharist to illustrate his point; according to him, it is another form of the totem meal which he finds in traditional religions throughout the world. Freud, in agreement with

Robertson Smith (1889) and his theory of totemism, suggests that totemism is the beginning of religion. The theory of totemism, however, was a matter of controversy even in Freud's day. Freud speculates that the origins of totemism are something like the following: at one time there was a group of brothers in a primitive society who were jealous of their possessive father, who had hoarded all the females to himself. The brothers gathered together, killed and devoured the father, ending the patriarchal horde (Freud 1964:141-2).

The totem as it is often identified in traditional society, as the primal father or the ancestor of the clan, is a replacement of the murdered father. The communal sacrificing and sharing of the meal serves to recall the original crime, and distribute the guilty feeling among the group. In turn, the Christian consumption of the body of Christ, allows the group to identify with him and his role in disposing of the father (Freud 1964:141-155).

Freud concludes that religion is a fulfilment of a profound unconscious desire for being special, which he termed "narcissism". Religion indulged this narcissism by providing the people with the illusion that they are special, because of their relationship with a deity (Homans 1987:437). In the light of Freud's understanding of myths, his comparison of religion with compulsive neurotics, and his hostility towards religion, he could only conclude that religion, together with its rituals, is a universal obsessional behaviour.

Carl Jung

Another psychologist of importance is Carl Jung. Although a contemporary of Freud's, Jung holds a very different view of symbols, rituals and religion. However, he agrees with Freud that people produce symbols spontaneously in the form of dreams, where they appear as symbolic images rather than as rational thought. Jung disagrees with Freud concerning the nature of religion as largely suppressed sexual and aggressive impulses. Jung postulates a deeper layer of unconscious

content over Freud's concept of the subconscious. It is termed the collective unconscious, which is universal and inborn, and within this layer he located all the archetypes, which are instinctual modes of cognition which can only be perceived through dreams, images and visions. It is this layer that constantly generates all the dreams and images (Jung 1990:3-41).

Jung argues that as there are infinite things beyond the comprehension of humans, we constantly use symbolic terms to convey concepts and ideas which we are unable to define. That is why religions frequently employ symbolic languages. And a word or an image is symbolic when it suggests something beyond its immediate and obvious meaning. As the mind meditates on the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the realm of normal states of consciousness (Jung 1964a:20-3).

After life-long research on the process of individuation Jung emphasises that the process of individuation or wholeness comprises a two-fold process. It first includes the spontaneous arising of a symbol from the unconscious which Jung designates as the unifying symbol. Then follows an understanding and assimilation of its value into consciousness, making an adjustment in the personality to cause the birth of a new attitude, a freedom of expression which in turn brings about wholeness and individuation (de Laszlo 1958:xxvii).

Jung postulates that living symbols appear cross-culturally. According to Jung, the effective living symbol must incorporate all the primitive instincts, emotional and otherwise, which are shared by many people. Only when the symbol embodies all these and represents them in a forceful manner, can it evoke a universal response (Jung 1964b:605). Examples of living symbols include the Heavenly Child, Christ as the symbol of the Self, the Taoist Eight Trigrams, and the Buddhist Wheel of Life.

In contrast to Freud, Jung argues that in the ritual process, man is actually at the disposal of an autonomous "self", outside of his normal state of consciousness. Jung uses the metaphor of a hammer to represent the individual during ritual: the hammer does not know by itself the power that moves it. Moreover, he compares the role of the ritual participant to that of a good actor; he does not merely enact the drama, but allows himself to be moved by the genius of the playwright (Jung 1963a:249-250).

Jung also gives the example of the Christian Mass to explain his theory. According to him, the mass is in every sense symbolic. Moreover, it has a universal appeal because similar rites are to be found among traditional religions all over the world.

Interpreted from a psychological viewpoint, Christ as a symbol of the original man represents the Self, a source of psychic energy that mediates between the ego and the unconscious and urges the ego towards wholeness or individuation. For Jung, the Self is both the initiator and the resulting product of the individuation process. Through the process of the Mass, consciousness is being transformed into that of the totality of the being which is the Self/Christ. Symbolically, therefore, the Mass is a rite of transformation (Jung 1970a:23-35, Jung 1970b:36-71, Jung 1963a:273).

The numinous or mystical experience in the course of the individuation process used to be, according to Jung, the special right of the shamans and healers in archaic culture. It came to be viewed as exclusively the property of prophets, priests and physicians in a later stage and finally, of philosophy and religion in the modern world (Jung 1963a:294).

William James

Another psychologist of relevance to my argument is William James and his research on mysticism and other states of consciousness. According to James (1986), our normal consciousness or rational thought

is but one type of consciousness. Beneath the threshold of our normal waking state lie many other states of consciousness. We normally would not suspect their existence, but under the right conditions, they fully manifest themselves.

According to James's research, various traditions such as the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian all have special techniques to cultivate altered states of consciousness. In India, training in mystical insight from antiquity has been called yoga. Yoga consists of a group of exercises such as diet, breathing, posture and meditation, together with moral disciplines. The goal of yoga is to attain a spiritual union with the Godhead, or attain altered states of consciousness (ASC).

Through yoga, a practitioner learns:

That the mind itself has a higher state of existence beyond reason, a superconscious state, and that when the mind gets to that higher state, then this knowledge beyond reasoning comes (Vivekananda in James 1986:401).

There have been many mystics within the Christian church. Although many of them have been looked upon with suspicion, some have gained acceptance. Their experiences have been treated as precedents for spiritual practice and a body of mystical theology has been developed based upon them. The basis of the Christian system of contemplation is "orison", a series of practices that lead the soul into union with the Godhead (James 1986:406).

Teresa of Avila, the great Christian mystic, is recorded to have written:

God establishes himself in the interior of this soul in such a way, that when she returns to herself, it is wholly impossible for her to doubt that she has been in God, and God in her. This truth remains so strongly impressed on her that, even though many years should pass without the condition returning, she can neither forget the favor she received, nor doubt of its validity. (James 1986:409).

James remarks that the mystic is "invulnerable" to any kind of ridicule, critique or even punishment, and must be left to the uninterrupted pleasure of his/her beliefs, as "faith state and mystic

state are practically convertible terms." (James 1986:424). Additionally, if a positive intellectual content is ever connected with a faith state, then the mystic becomes fiercely dogmatic. That is why religious people all over the world have been known to be passionately loyal to their differing faiths, even in their concern for minute details (James 1986:506).

Mircea Eliade

According to Mircea Eliade, a historian of religion, symbols reveal certain aspects of reality - the deepest structures of being which transcend any other means of knowledge or rational thought. Images, symbols and myths are not random inventions of the psyche: they satisfy the function of bringing these deepest structures to light (Eliade 1961:12).

When historically-conditioned beings such as modern-day people allow themselves to be invaded by the atemporal selves within themselves, it is not necessarily a regression into primordial state of animal consciousness. Often, by means of images and symbols, they are re-entering a paradise of primordial existence. In escaping from their temporal selves, people do not forsake their status of being human or surrender themselves to their "animal instincts"; they actually recover the language, even the experience of a "lost paradise". Dreams, waking dreams, the images of their longings of a blissful existence are the forces that propel the temporal self into a spiritual world that is infinitely richer than the closed world of their temporal selves (Eliade 1961:13).

According to Eliade, all the important and indefinable parts of a human being manifest in symbolism are still very much alive in ancient myths and theologies. Having "imagination" is enjoying the richness of an inner life with its uninterrupted flow of symbols and images. Moreover, the imagination permits us to see the totality of the world, since the role of symbols is to show the hidden structures of being

beyond our immediate understanding. Hence, persons "without imagination", are cut off from the deepest structures of being and their souls (Eliade 1961:19-20).

Symbols have multiple meanings in nature. Because reality manifests itself in paradoxical and contradictory ways, the mind makes use of symbols to grasp ultimate reality. Limiting a symbol to a set of concrete ideas or frame of reference is to reduce its basic cognitive function. Symbols and myths, therefore, are the very foundation of the religious and spiritual life. They often survive in disguise, perhaps reduced, but never entirely absent. (Eliade 1961:11-15).

Ritual, in turn, is shaped by archetypes, and must be re-enacted by the participants in order to be effective. By and large, ritual represents the longing of the self to be in contact with the ultimate source reality. By repeating the primordial acts of the gods, human beings transform themselves into gods and re-establish divine order. Through the body, they enter the eternal self and transform into the transcendent other. Ritual ecstasy reaches its extreme form in mystical union or spirit possession, when the sense of the self is completely lost (Zuesse 1987:410).

Claude Levi-Strauss

Of great importance in the hermeneutics of symbolism and ritual is the work of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who is generally considered to be the founder of structural anthropology. According to Lévi-Strauss, rituals, myths and other aspects of cultural phenomena are structured cognitively by processes similar to binary computer operations such as hot/cold, day/night, man/woman, nature/culture. Basic to his theory is that at some fundamental level human beings are dualistic in nature.

Lévi-Strauss argues that myths, rituals and other cultural constructs are mental operations which represent the unconscious drive to establish order. He proposes that each culture has worked out a

tightly knit and completely consistent logic in its own rituals and myths.

In general, a Lévi-Straussian myth is always concerned with impossible or untrue stories, such as those of animals that behave like humans, or of humans transformed into animals. Such transformations are metaphoric, and are actually used to describe human conditions. For according to Lévi-Strauss, to live comfortably in society, every individual must have knowledge of a cosmology in order to make sense of immediate experience. A cosmology, which consists of a set of physical and metaphysical ideas, is not known naturally but is given to us by the collective wisdom of a culture. In learning what the cosmos is like, we also learn a set of behaviours in order to adapt.

The entire body of verifying stories that justifies the cosmology and the rules of behaviour makes up the myth of a particular society. Myth and ritual are mutual transformations and each validates the other (Leach 1987:56-64).

Victor Turner

Other anthropologists like Victor Turner and Charles Laughlin criticize Lévi-Strauss's structuralism as overly simplistic. Turner proposes a three-fold hermeneutic approach based on exegetical, operational and positional aspects of symbolic meaning (Ray 1987:95). According to Turner, symbols are powerful, not only in spoken or written languages, but also in metaphors and "wise sayings". Each individual and each culture uses entire sensory modes to communicate. On an individual level, communication might use hand gestures, breathing rhythm, or facial expression. On a cultural level, communication could take the form of dance movements, rituals and ceremonies, etc. (Turner 1982:9).

According to Turner, each symbol expresses many themes, and many symbols may express one theme. A ritual symbol can represent a great range of phenomena and ideas, including often paradoxical or

contradictory themes. This gain in economy is offset by a loss in precision. A simple vehicle such as a particular tree can represent a great range of phenomena, whereas a complex symbol is often limited at the level of sensory perception to a narrow and specific message. This is probably why the great religious symbols, such as the cross, the lotus, or the crescent moon are always very simple, although they are often able to represent whole theological systems and to influence deeply entire cultures (Turner 1989:59).

In addition, in the course of intense ritual experience, the ideological and the sensory meanings of symbols come together and produce powerful emotions that cause personal and social change (Ray: 1987:95).

In agreement with Julius Pokorny, Turner argues that semantically, the word "experience" can be traced back to the Indo-European root *per-, meaning "to attempt, venture, risk". The word "empirical", however, is derived from the Greek word peira, "experience". More recently and directly, the word "experience" is derived from the Latin experientia, meaning "trial, proof, experiment" (Turner 1982:17).

By putting the concept of the word "experience" together in all its semantic meanings, it can be construed as a pilgrimage, a journey, a path which is exposed to danger and risk. By means of experience, one ventures forth fearfully, taking risks and experimental steps (Turner 1982:17-8).

Turner advocates that cultural performances such as rituals, theatre and drama, play an important part in experience. It is through performances such as these that the direct meaning of the experience is squeezed out in the course of the act. "Performance" is a word derived from an old French root parfournir, meaning "to carry out thoroughly, to complete". Turner remarks that, whereas ideas can be transmitted fairly accurately, they tell us nothing about the particular person's mind-state or how he comes to have it. Performance, on the other hand, not

only expresses a purpose, but also fulfils it. Ritual acts express and fulfil purposes and goals not only on a conscious level, but on an unconscious level as well (Turner 1982:13-15).

Other anthropologists base their understanding of ritual on a study of human brain structure together with a study of ethological ritual, Charles Laughlin and his associates propose a particular human need called the "cognitive imperative", a need not only to explain, but also to perform experience in the form of rituals. According to them: "human beings have no choice but to construct myths to explain their world". The mythic material may appear socially or it may appear in individual dreams and fantasies (d'Aquili & Laughlin 1979:171).

The entire body of this group's work is generally known as the biogenetic structural theory. One of the important propositions of their theory is that the powerful states of consciousness which may occur in the course of intense ritual performance and which religious persons throughout the world variously call trance, ecstasies, samādhi¹, satori (a Japanese word meaning "awakening"), or mystical visions are the products of brain transformations. That is, in the course of intense stimulation through the use of ritual "drivers" such as dancing, singing, self-mortification or sleep deprivation, the ergotropic (energy expending) system in the body is actively stimulated to the point that there is a spill-over effect to the trophotropic (energy conserving) system in the body. This results in intense stimulation of both systems, perhaps leading to the experience of ecstasy and the sense of ineffability that is so common to mystical experiences (d'Aquili & Laughlin 1979:176).

From an evolutionary viewpoint, ritual acts have their origin in the displays and formalized interactions of animals. Such communicative

¹Samādhi, a sanskrit word meaning "establish, make firm". In Buddhism, it means a state of non-dual consciousness, where the experiencing subject becomes one with the experienced object (Kohn 1991:182).

behaviours are the products of biological evolution. As Richard Schechner writes:

To ethologists a ritual is a behaviour sequence genetically transformed over the course of aeons. Behaviour is rearranged, condensed, sped up or slowed down; functions change so that, for example, threat behaviour becomes part of a "mating dance". Movements are exaggerated or simplified, becoming rhythmical and repetitive, often freezing into postures. (Schechner 1987:441)

Rituals in the animal kingdom, moreover, do not occur arbitrarily. They occur in conjunction with the encounter of stressful situations such as mating, defining territory, obtaining access to food. Human rituals are also concerned with stressful situations such as confronting the mystery of human existence, birth, death, sickness, disease, hunting, etc. The difference between human and animal rituals is that human rituals are strongly influenced by both individuals and society, and are ideological in nature, whereas animal rituals are non-ideological in nature. From an ethological viewpoint, humans use sacrifice and ceremonies to express the plea for a successful existence and to relieve anxiety. Using ritual elements such as masks, costumes, food sharing and various musical instruments, humans may return to a primordial state of animal consciousness (Schechner 1987:441).

In conclusion, although there are many approaches and theories available, there is no single theory which provides us with a complete picture, so that a combination of all the theories together with their strengths and weaknesses is necessary in order to arrive at a better understanding of ritual and religious experience. For example, Freud's restriction of symbolism to the level of primitive impulse, particularly sexual impulse, is open to debate. As Eliade has pointed out in agreement with Jung, the unconscious is not inhabited with monsters only; gods, goddesses, heroes and all kinds of fairies dwell there too. Moreover, the sexual act all over the world is never purely organic, but is universally associated with hierophany. Restricting a symbol, for example that of the Great Mother, to this or that mother and attributing

it to the Oedipus complex is open to dispute, as the Mother can also mean a desire to return to the primordial form of blissful existence. And to restrict a symbol to any one of its meanings is to reduce it in its cognitive function (Eliade 1961:14).

Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory, however, seems to be too simplistic. In the first place, his theory that human beings have a tendency at some fundamental level to construct reality in a dualistic manner is contrary to the experience of many mystics all over the world. Many testify to the fact that at the height of their experiences, the idea of the self and any dualistic mode of thinking disappear. Moreover, reality alone is not made up of a network of discontinuous mental constructs organized into binary opposites. It is, in fact, continuous in nature. For example, there is no discontinuity in the changeover from day to night; the appearance of discontinuity is a perception of our senses, and is related particularly to how we describe it.

In fact, the world of external experience is continuous rather than discontinuous. Gennep (1965) illustrates this with the example of a widow. If a woman's husband dies, there is no discontinuity between her status as wife and her status as widow. Rather, there is a transitional period where she is in mourning and is removed from ordinary social contact and is subject to a number of taboos before her new identity as a widow is established (Gennep 1965:156).

The ethological theory that human ritual is not a new class of communicative behaviour is illuminating. But it does not provide us with an explanation of the correlation between ritual and mystical experience as claimed by the mystics throughout the world. I think that it would be misleading to conclude that human rituals are nothing more than a refined form of non-human rituals.

Although Carl Jung, William James, and Victor Turner are all enlightening in their discussions of symbols, rituals and religious experience, they nonetheless provide us with little information as to

why particular religions have particular religious experiences. The Tibetan Buddhists, for example, have experiences about their deities, while various native Indians, such as those practising the Sun Dance religion, have visions of the buffalo in the course of their rituals. I feel that a combination of various theories, together with biogenetic structural theory is helpful in understanding the question of how a particular set of religious experiences arise within a particular religious tradition. For, in the course of my research using a biogenetic structuralist model, it became clear to me that in the enactment of ritual, the symbols become the focus of attention, and that this internal preoccupation with symbols eventually displaces ordinary consciousness and reveals a world of transcendental reality. It also becomes apparent to me that religious knowledge is somehow ritually embodied in the particular symbols each religious tradition chooses to maintain, and that this embodiment of knowledge is somehow causally related to the production of religious experience.

Chapter II: A Biogenetic Structural Explanation

Biogenetic structural theory is a corpus of work that integrates modern information about the physiology of the human body with religious experience. This approach specifically isolates the causal mechanisms ("drivers") that produce various types of religious experience. The theory also incorporates the neurophysiology of symbolism and the way in which, through ritual penetration, symbols mediate both meaning and experience.

Biogenetic structuralism is a complex theory that combines elements of the neurosciences, cognitive sciences, transpersonalism and anthropology to integrate different approaches to human nature. From this perspective, ritual behaviour is viewed as the result of the process by which the human brain constructs a world of experience and communicates it in symbolic gestures. Both experience and knowledge are products of cell organization within the nervous system (Laughlin et al. 1986:108). Fundamental to this perspective is the idea that reality is a construct of the nervous system, conceptualized into a distinctive world of separate entities within the field of sensory awareness. This implies that the everyday world is culturally conditioned.

As the Encyclopedia of Neuroscience says:

Although the brain is, in fact, a sodium-potassium-chloride engine, this particular chemistry is theoretically not essential to mind: All mental processes could in principle be carried out equally well by other technologies. What is now becoming clear is that chemistry and physics are not the base sciences of the psychobiology of mind; they are but the sciences of technology by means of which housekeeping and metabolic activities are implemented in organic entities. To the contrary, the key word linking brain and mind is organization (or in a loose sense, information) and the key level of analysis is that of the interaction of the network of individual neurons. In other words, mind, despite its apparently molar and continuous nature is a process that is embodied within the interaction of the extremely complex, yet fundamentally discrete neuronal network. It is the ebb and flow of signals among the vast number of neurons in the brain that is most likely to emerge as the actual psychoneural equivalent of mind (From Castillo 1995:25-26).

If the mind (and by extension the "self") is a process organized by the neural networks established and reinforced by repeated usage, this would imply that the everyday world of experience is determined not only by genetic heritage, but also by culture. As Aoki and Siekevitz have pointed out:

The genetic program played out during gestation provides a newborn with intact sensory organs and a well-formed brain, whose 100 billion neurons, or nerve cells, are already linked in pathways that are specialized to perform specific functions. But before the developing brain can attain the full power to process and analyze sensory experience, experience itself must place its own imprint on the finer structure of the brain.

Even though the basic organization of the brain does not change after birth, details of its structure and function remain plastic for some time, particularly in the cerebral cortex, the tissue that forms the brain's convoluted surface. Experience -sights, smells, tastes, sounds, touch and posture - activates and, with time, reinforces specific neural pathways while others fall into disuse (Aoki and Siekevitz 1988:56).

For example, if one wants to speak Chinese, one must have the neural networks for speaking Chinese structured in the brain. The presence of Chinese neural networks is obviously acquired through enculturation. A genetic Chinese born to non-Chinese speaking parents in Canada will not have the requisite enculturation to speak Chinese; rather, they will have the enculturation to speak English (Castillo 1995:23).

The operational environment (Eo) is a term that applies to reality apart from our experience. The cognized environment (Ec) is a term that applies to our everyday world of experience. The cognized environment is a developmental process which matures in the course of life by means of the growth of networks of cells channelled in a certain way. The primary function of the cognized environment is to adapt to its operational environment. Fundamental to this assumption is that the operational environment is transcendental in nature and beyond the capacity of any individual or group to comprehend it, and that there are zones of uncertainty beyond human understanding. Further to this perspective, the cognized environment is never more than a model, a

point of view about the operational environment (Laughlin 1990:16-17).

The nervous system constructs and mediates experience in a moment-by-moment activity. The system scans the Eo for interesting objects; the cognitive function of the brain gives rise to experience which is an awareness of the self and the everyday world (Laughlin et al. 1986:118).

Phases and warps

Phases are cognized episodes of experience, and warps are points of experiential and neural transformation between the phases. There are a great variety of phase attributes; for example, bodily sensations (I am itchy), feelings (I feel hurt), and sensory clues (I am listening to some music). In any given society, only limited sets of possible phases of consciousness are recognized. Members of that society are then conditioned to recognize the appropriate attributes of these phases (Laughlin et al. 1986:109). For western culture in general, until recently, the only phase of consciousness recognized as important has been the normal waking consciousness. Any other states are negatively labelled as, for example, "on a trip", "just a dream", "madness" and "hallucination." This recognition sets boundaries on phases of consciousness typically experienced within a culture.

Ritual manipulation of phase attributes, especially by means of symbols, may be used to transform neural networks mediating phases of consciousness. Such manipulation of ritual technology may "open up" the senses to some formerly unknown aspects of the operational environment making new experience possible (Laughlin et al. 1986:110).

A phase is a distinct strip of unfolding experience dominating the sensorium at any given time; a warp has a direct influence on the organization of the following phase. A warp may be compared to a liminal event (Turner 1969) that mediates two distinct phases of experience. For example, if one is "angry" at one moment and "happy" the next moment, then between these two phases of consciousness there is

a warp which ends the "angry" phase and leads to the "happy" phase. The liminal effect of the warp can be compared to a symbolic doorway or gate by passing through which transformation of consciousness is made possible. It can be metaphorically described as "leaving" one phase and "entering" another (Laughlin et al. 1986:110).

Four characteristics of a warp need to be clarified in order to pave the way for an understanding of how ritual may influence experience. First, warps are often momentary; they often pass so quickly that it is very difficult to perceive them. For example, one moment you may be awake and the next moment asleep. Second, warps are at the intersection of two distinct phases of consciousness. The warp too, has its neural structures and functions similar to phases, but the functional aspect of a warp is often hardly perceptible. Third, warps also have the characteristic of embedding. For example, one may be "happy" and then "sad" all within being "awake". Fourth, the formation of the neural structures organizing a warp may be stimulated by outside factors (Laughlin et al. 1986:111). An example is that of a person who experiences an allergic reaction some time after breathing cat hair, but who may not be aware of just what agent in the environment he/she is sensitive to. In general, the more immediate the trigger, the more likely that this causal relationship will be recognized.

In order for individuals or groups to influence phases of consciousness effectively, the influence has to be directed over the factor inducing warps. In other words, control must be directed over the least aware aspect of unfolding experience. The simplest way is to shift and increase attention on the warp preceding a phase of consciousness. Focusing attention on the warp results in the warp "opening up" to consciousness. The warp then becomes a phase, and this results in greater control over the process of consciousness (Laughlin et al. 1986:111).

One obvious example of this mechanism is in dream control. The hypnagogic is the warp between the waking and the dream phase, while the hypnopompic is the warp between the dream phase and the waking phase. These warps are so brief that few people in the western world are aware of them. In fact, few people in the west can recall their dreams in any great detail. By contrast, dream incubation and recollection are commonly practised in cultures that recognize the message from the unconscious, or dream self, to be important. These cultures often use dream control in ritually transforming the hypnagogic and hypnopompic warps so that they no longer remain barriers to recalling dreams (Laughlin et al. 1986:112). Warp control is also found in modern cognitive therapy. Research on clients by David Burns (1985) has confirmed that between a perceived stimulus in the environment and the resulting mood there is a warp called an automatic thought. For example, a girl who is very low in self-esteem and self-confidence calls up her boyfriend and finds out that he is not there. The girl immediately has the automatic thought which says: "He is avoiding me." This triggers her feeling of being depressed and anxious afterwards. Therefore, by learning to cognize the warp, the individual learns to better control her mind state.

Many anthropologists have noted the importance of ritual in bringing about social and psychological change. Eliade (1964) has noted the usage of ritual in restructuring the experiences of the future shaman. By learning ritual control of the warp between the normal phase and the "transindividual" phase, the future shaman can gradually integrate alternate phases into a single personality (Laughlin et al. 1986:112-3). Likewise, by practising various rituals, Tibetan Buddhists are able to transform their ego-centred consciousness into phases of consciousness symbolized by various deities.

The Symbolic Function of the Cognized Environment

The cognized environment is an autonomous, self regulating system. One function is to adapt to the ever-unfolding operational environment; another function is to maintain the equilibrium of the organism.

The continuous moment-by-moment activity of our consciousness or cognized environment is "intentional" in nature. That is to say that the cognition of a phenomenal object is the result of the organization of neural networks. A phenomenal object is cognized, produced by a neural network that is, for the time period, the focus of cognitive, affective, metabolic and behavioral operations for an organism. The development of intentionality is a characteristic dialogue between the prefrontal cortex and the sensory cortex of the human brain. Subsidiary structures that are involved in this dialogue may expand over an extensive area of cortical, subcortical, endocrinal and immunological structures (Laughlin 1990:18).

Experience is a function of this intentional dialogue and basically involves the construction of a phenomenal world within the sensorium. Both the sensory and the cognitive intentional aspects are changing by the moment, subject to neurological organization and functioning. A conscious network in any given moment never includes all the available networks, and there are vast fields of neural networks subconsciously active simultaneously (Laughlin 1990:18-19).

The development of the cognized environment is symbolic in nature. The symbolic function accounts for the relationship between a sensory object and the neurocognitive, neuroendocrinal, neuroimmunological, or other bodily processes that become cognitively associated with the object. The object, whether imagined or actual, is produced by a network of cells that provides a partial meaning, such as the outline of an object or its components. An object in this sense is generally known as a symbol (Laughlin 1990:19-20).

During cognitive development, the intentionality or meaning of a sensory object is structured among the complex interconnected neural networks. The sensory object, in turn, acts as its evocator, its fulfilment and its expression. An object is first sensed as evocation; it then activates the sensory system, which becomes connected with other multiple associations so that the symbol or sensory object is actually recognized and made meaningful (Laughlin 1990:21).

In the fulfilling aspect the process is reversed and the multiple network of neural structures "anticipates" the desired outcome in the operational environment for its fulfilment. For example, an arrow is used to bring down a bird, or a crystal is used as a meditative device.

Expression is a special case of the fulfilling process: the intentional network chooses an object that manifests its meaning in order to communicate in the operational environment or between individuals (Laughlin 1990:21).

Material like tools, instruments, icons, regalia, masks, etc. are the material fulfilment and expression of the cognized environment of collective individuals within a particular society. The technological interaction between the cognized and operational environment is normally referred to as technology.

The symbolic function operates during every moment of consciousness, but most humans are largely unaware of it except for the most contemplative of individuals. Humans do come to recognize some symbols as particularly powerful in their evocative, fulfilling and expressive modes. And people within a particular culture have a conditioned response to culturally dominant symbols through cognitive development. Thus, the Taoist yin-yang symbol may come to represent the male and female principles, the light and the dark, the natural balancing of opposite force, and so on, all important to the philosophy of the Chinese mind. Or a cross may evoke a particularly powerful emotive effect upon Christians. Further, according to Jung, some

symbols are representative of unconscious archetypes such as the divine child, the Buddhist wheel, and the Taoist Eight Trigrams. Such symbols incorporate those impulses and emotions common to most people and convey them in a forceful manner; that is why they have a powerful penetrating effect, for they reach the deepest part of the psyche.

Symbolic objects in the operational environment evoke structural associations and responses that have been enculturated along with those objects. Initial or partial information in the form of symbols can quickly penetrate to the greater neurocognitive field, evoking total meaning stored in the cognized environment. The recognized attributes of any symbol or stimulus are always less than the totality of attributes possible due to the zone of uncertainty. Therefore, the meaning evoked by a symbol is always involved in a process of refinement as it gradually becomes more accurate, more complete or seen from a more mature perspective relative to the transcendental nature of the stimulus. This would hold true whether the stimulus originates from within the unconscious or from the external world (Laughlin 1990:23).

Symbols and Spiritual Awakening

A Neurocognitive Model

In a neurocognitive model, a symbol by definition is any stimulus in the operational environment (Eo) which represents more about reality to us than we experience. A symbol evokes more information in the cognized environment than the stimulus itself provides. The primary function of a ritual symbol is to prepare the Ec of the practitioner to experience the greater symbolic field (Webber & Laughlin 1979:4). For example, the meditation on Dorje Sempa in the Tibetan tradition may evoke many experiences. Yet symbolically, the figure represents the experience of Nirvāṇa, the greater symbolic field (details to be discussed in Chapter III).

Certain symbols are well known and evidenced by generations of practitioners to be capable of bringing the practitioner to a deeper

understanding of an experiential level already pre-coded within deep structural models. The logical conclusion of this view is that there will be a cross-cultural universality to symbolic formation and processing, as we are all of the same genetic heritage and with the same nervous system (Webber & Laughlin 1979:6).

One function of the nervous system is to act as a buffer zone that channels information under appropriate conditions from the Eo to the Ec. Symbolic penetration using cognitive and perceptual input acts as a driving mechanism which activates structural models, perhaps causing a warp and a new phase of consciousness (Webber & Laughlin 1979:12). One such repetitive input in the Tibetan tradition is the construction of the image of Dorje Sempa in one's visual field, the recitation of the Hundred Syllable Mantra, etc. The repetitive input in the Sun Dance religion is incessant dancing with the eyes focused on the center pole, the buffalo, the repetitive drum beat, etc (see below).

The concept of neurognosis (Laughlin & d' Aquili 1974) implies that the nervous system is, in part, a genetically coded system of models, many of these models being outside the boundaries of normal consciousness. Many genetically coded universal models are inhibited by developmental and enculturative pressures. For example, for a male child in western society, models associated with female characteristics are inhibited: thus, the neurognostic models expressing the feminine side (Jung's "anima") are repressed (Webber & Laughlin 1979:14).

To activate these latent models one must exclude and inhibit habitual activity of models and redirect the mental activities into new process areas. The power of penetration symbols such as Dorje Sempa and the buffalo lies in their efficacy to by-pass cultural and personal conditioning heretofore inhibiting these latent models. This redirection may involve the retuning of the autonomic nervous system

(ANS)¹, lowering active inhibition by habitual models of the universal models within the Ec. The symbol acting as an image of the inner genetic models must be keyed in to activate these latent models (Webber & Laughlin 1979:14). In other words, objects of meditation are keyed to very particular universal models, and thus produce predictable experiences.

Intense intentional focus of higher cortical faculties upon a symbol eventually may produce a re-organization of neurocognitive structures. New entrainments are formed and developed, and these structural and surface transformations will generate warps and altered phases of consciousness. In other words, the previously inhibitory networks of the latent models are kept from activating while the latent or universal model will become self-activating, or "come alive" spontaneously (Webber & Laughlin 1979:14). This is exemplified when a Tibetan deity talks to the adept and grants forgiveness, or when the buffalo challenges a dancer to accept its power. Biogenetic structuralism uses the word homeomorphogenic² to label and describe this chain of connections between conscious and unconscious models.

In short, symbolic penetration loosens the habitually re-inforced boundaries between phases of consciousness. Penetration may thus facilitate the following: 1) The imaginative association of disparate and contradictory material in the psyche, and 2) the spontaneous arising of formerly inhibited structural networks (Laughlin et al. 1986:124).

In conclusion, various meditation systems have evolved and been

¹ The autonomic nervous system is divided into two complementary systems, the excitation (ergotrophic) and relaxation (trophotropic) subsystems. This particular balance between these two systems can be activated. This activation using either external or internal stimuli for example, meditation, is called tuning (Lex 1979:131-136). Further discussion of the two systems and how they cause ASCs will be covered later.

² A compound derived from the word "homeo", meaning "similar form or structure", and "morphogenesis" meaning "biological formulation". It is used to denote causally linked transformations between various parts and level of the body (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:350-351)

treasured within a culture because they prove to be capable of accelerating the unfolding of religiously important experience. Although all humans have the potential to unfold these experiences, they are often limited because of deep conditioning and canalization of neural networks. Thus, deep activation of neural models and resultant transcendental experiences are stunted. Symbolic penetration techniques, ranging from focusing attention on one's breath, a bowl of water, an image of a deity or an animal are practices that utilize symbolic penetration to "open up" the senses to some formerly unknown aspect of the operational environment and to activate states of consciousness associated with that aspect. And it is through ritual techniques that symbols mediate both meaning and experience.

Other elements of ritual in trance induction and their effect on the neurophysiological system

Many anthropologists have noted the importance of ritual to the process of significant individual and social change. Ritual focuses the attention of actors on symbols and events which are culturally meaningful. Ritual actors commonly see aspects of their society, cosmology, environment and even themselves in a new light through ritual techniques. Many of the common elements such as chanting, dancing, psychotropic drugs, fasting, sleep deprivation and forms of self-mortification may be understood as driving mechanisms for retuning the autonomic nervous system, the system that directs energy to the sensorium causing altered states of consciousness (Laughlin et al. 1986:113-6).

Neuroscientific research has shown that a variety of altered states of consciousness share common psychological and physiological features. These features include alternations in thinking, changes in the perception of time and body image, loss of self control, feelings of ineffability, change of emotions, hypersusceptibility, distortion in perceiving reality, etc. (Winkelman 1992:93).

Barbara Lex (1979) has suggested that ritual-induced altered states of consciousness have several prominent physiological features in common, including right hemispheric dominance, cortical synchronization in both hemispheres and a predominant parasympathetic (trophotropic) state.

According to research reported by Barbara Lex, the left cerebral hemisphere functions in the production of the speech process, linear analytical thought, and assessment of time duration. The right hemisphere functions in spatial and tonal perception, recognition of patterns - including internal emotional states- holistic, synthetic thought and limited linguistic ability and zero temporal capacity (Lex 1979:125).

It appears that many ritual practices evoke the right hemisphere, while simultaneously holding constant the left hemisphere. Certain meditative techniques produce this effect. For example, the recitation of a mantra, a rhythmic utterance, has the effect of engaging the speech processing left hemisphere while leaving the right hemisphere to function freely. On the other hand, drumming, chanting, singing, and use of other percussion instruments engages right hemisphere capabilities, evoking a "timeless" quality in the awareness of the participant. The ineffable and mystical states, and the predominance of imagery points to a dominance of right hemisphere function. Therefore, driving behaviours during rituals, with their manifold excitation of numerous cortical and subcortical structures, do evoke the right hemisphere and its function (Lex 1979:127-130).

Barbara Lex's research also reveals that the autonomic nervous system is not completely "automatic"; it can be excited through voluntary efforts. The ANS rapidly responds to internal and external stimuli by retuning the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and parasympathetic nervous systems (PNS). In general, cold and fear excite the SNS, which results in a heightened state of awareness. On the other

hand, sweat lodge and other purgative exercises excite the PNS, which generally results in pleasurable states such as sleep and relaxation (Lex 1979:131-132).

Whereas meditative alertness is mediated by SNS, fear and anger activate a greater sympathetic discharge generally known as the fight or flight response. Research also shows that continuous stimulation of the SNS is dysfunctional and is usually followed by PNS rebound. Intense stimulation of the PNS, however, will lead to fainting and other visceral disorders and a shift of the ANS to sympathetic discharge. Therefore, a balance between the SNS and PNS is always present among healthy individuals (Lex 1979:132).

Stimulation of any part of the nervous system may evoke a response in the total system, which is integrated and interconnected. The autonomic-somatic integration between the ergotropic and trophotropic systems reflect the oscillating needs of an organism shifting from ergotropic (energy-expending) and trophotropic (energy-conserving) behaviour.

Ergotropic response consists of increased sympathetic discharges, increased skeletal muscle tone and excitation in the cerebral cortex resulting in desynchronized cortical rhythms; the trophotropic response includes heightened parasympathetic discharges, relaxed skeletal muscle tone and synchronized cortical rhythms. In general, the ergotropic response is activated when a person is confronted with novel stimuli and heightened awareness is activated in order to filter out the information. When the stimuli cease to be novel, then trophotropic response takes over (Lex 1979:135)

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Table 1. Some Effects of Stimulation of the Ergotropic and Trophotropic Systems.

Stimulation of the Ergotropic System	Stimulation of the Trophotropic System
Autonomic Effects	
Augmented Sympathetic Discharges	Augmented Parasympathetic Discharges

Increased heart rate,
blood pressure, sweat
secretion; pupillary dilation;
inhibition of G.I. motor and
secretory function

Reduction in heart rate,
blood pressure, sweat secretion;
increased G.I.
motor and secretory functions

Somatic Effects

Desynchrony of EEG, increased
skeletal muscle tone, increased
secretion of catabolic hormones:
epinephrine, norepinephrine,
cortisol, thyroxine, growth
hormone, ADH, aldosterone

Synchrony of EEG, loss of
skeletal muscle tone, blocking
of shivering response,
increased secretion of
insulin, estrogens, androgens

Behavioral Effects

Arousal, heightened activity,
and emotional responsiveness

Inactivity, drowsiness, and
sleep

(Lex 1979:136)

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According to Lex, techniques that induce ASC generally increase trophotropic response, either through direct stimulation or through indirect stimulation of the ergotropic system, resulting in the trophotropic rebound. An example of this is meditation, such as Zen and yogic practice, which involves relaxed muscle tone and a state of cortical alertness. It activates a state of trophotropic dominance while maintaining some degree of ergotropic excitation. Other ritual techniques such as prostrations and dancing, etc. which involve increased skeletal muscle tone and activate the ergotropic system will, if intensified, lead to a trophotropic rebound. Trophotropic response also increase sensitivity to hyperventilation and activities such as singing and whistle blowing. Trophotropic response also decreases sensitivity to pain; this would partly explain why some ritual participants are able to withstand extreme ordeals in the course of the ritual (Lex 1979:138-9).

d' Aquili and Laughlin (1979) postulate that during certain meditative states logical paradoxes appearing in myths disappear. This intense experience is coupled with an "oceanic" feeling and the perception of the union of opposites, such as the total union of the self and the other in certain yogic trances, or the union of self with

God in the Christian tradition. This intense experience seems to be due to the unusual physiological circumstance of a simultaneously strong discharge of both the ergotropic and the trophotropic systems. During meditation, one may begin by intensely stimulating the trophotropic system. This is coupled with a marked decrease of sensory input, clearing the mind of all disturbing thoughts, and an attempt to maintain a minimal activation of the ergotropic system to prevent sleep. This may result in the paradoxical condition of both systems "turning on".

The spillover in the case of meditation is from the trophotropic to the ergotropic resulting in strong discharges from both systems (d'Aquili & Laughlin 1979:176).

Winkelman (1992) has done a comprehensive survey of various types of behaviour observed by anthropologists to be employed in trance induction. For the purpose of the present analysis I will review some of the techniques which are commonly used in religious rituals, excluding the use of psychotropic drugs and hallucinogens.

Auditory Driving

The use of rhythmic auditory stimulation such as hand clapping and drumming or the sounds of other musical instruments form an important part in mystical tradition. Neher's reviews of research in 1961 and 1962, show that these percussive instruments impose a synchronous brain wave pattern which is distinguishable from ordinary desynchronous waking consciousness. Neher's research also shows that the percussive instruments may create visual sensations of colour, sound and movement, organized hallucinations and other emotional responses. These percussive techniques are collectively termed auditory "drivers", since the brain wave patterns they impose on the listeners can be measured with an electroencephalogram (EEG) (Neher in Winkelman 1992:95). In the course of my research I have come to agree with Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili (1992) that drivers serve an important function as an attention focusing technique that limits the stimulus from the operational

environment and aids in inducing a trance.

Fasting and Nutritional Deficiency

Leukel's research in 1972 shows that complete fasting and reduction of food consumption resulting in food and water deficiency leaves the body in a hypoglycemic state which can cause seizures. Strauss et al. research in 1952 point out that fasting also increases susceptibility to percussive drivers as measured by EEG (Leukel & Strauss et al. in Winkelman 1992:95). It appears that fasting and nutritional deficiencies can contribute to a change in the central nervous system which may be conducive to trance induction.

Solitude and Sensory Deprivation

Winkelman's review also shows that lack of sensory stimulation will produce hallucination. Moreover, a reduction of sensory stimuli leads to a parasympathetic dominant state with an increase in cortical synchronization (Winkelman 1992:95). It seems evident that sensory deprivation is a technique that serves to eliminate stimuli from the environment and thus aids in focusing attention during meditation.

Sexual Restrictions

Explicit sexual restrictions or long periods of isolation are methods commonly used among yogis and mystics and may indicate there is a direct connection between sexual abstinence and mystical experience. Davidson's research in 1980 shows that sexual activity with resulting orgasm and ejaculation cause a collapse of the skeletal musculature culminating in extreme parasympathetic dominance. Sexual restrictions may be used to prevent such a collapse before the culminative ritual practice (Davidson in Winkelman 1992:96).

Extensive Motor Activity

Prince's research in 1968 shows that extensive motor behavior such as dancing and prostrations may lead to fatigue, exhaustion or collapse/unconsciousness. Some of these driving behaviours may result in hyperventilation and oxygen depletion. This, coupled with

hypoglycemia, causes slow brain wave pattern and hallucinations (Prince in Winkelman 1992:95).

Meditation

There is a vast literature available on the topic of the psychophysiology of meditation. Castillo (1995) has done a recent review on the topic. According to Castillo's review meditation produces an overall decrease in brain wave pattern from the beta to the alpha and theta ranges, and an increase in alpha and theta amplitude in the frontal and temporal regions, showing an increase in synchronized cortical rhythms. Meditation also produces a synchronous, slow brain wave pattern in the subjects in contrast to the desynchronous, high frequency brain wave pattern of the normal waking state. Significant changes of the type noted above have been reported by subjects even after discontinuing meditational practice (Castillo 1995:29).

In addition to the change in brain wave pattern, other physiological changes include:

...heart rate, the redistribution of blood flow, lowering of blood pressure, and changes in blood chemistry, including changes in levels of adrenal hormones, amino acids and phenylalanine, plasma prolactin and growth hormone, lactate, serotonin, white blood cells, red blood cell metabolism and cholesterol (Castillo 1995:29).

It is obvious that different meditational disciplines produce somewhat different psychophysiological responses. But research does indicate that there are fundamental similarities in the production of a synchronous slow brain wave pattern in the meditative subjects. Another important finding of these researches is that meditation or the focusing of attention on a symbolic object can have dramatic effects on both the physiology and the subjective experience of the practitioner. Moreover, judging by the reports of long-term change in the form of brain wave patterns among meditational subjects, it does confirm that retuning of the brain and in turn, the mind is possible through a repetitive behaviour such as meditation.

Chapter III: Tibetan Tantric Buddhist Techniques

Two case studies of religious ritual and experience are being offered for comparison. The first case study is that of Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, a religious tradition that relies on the use of ritual to produce both insight and religious experience. The Tibetan Buddhist tradition relies very heavily on a rich body of symbolism as well as many ritual drivers to evoke experiences that lead to spiritual growth. Symbolic Penetration and Ritual Transformation of Consciousness - Tibetan Arising Yoga

India has developed, refined and practised exercises under the name of yoga that lead to a definitive change in phenomenology for over 3,000 years. It is also safe to say that the diversity of techniques reached a pinnacle in Tibetan Buddhism (Webber 1980:55).

In Tibetan Buddhism, practitioners combined the Mahāyāna Buddhist (Mādhyamikas school) emptiness theories and yogic meditative techniques (including Tantric practice) with many cosmological ideas, images and magical rites of Hinduism before it was transported into Tibet around the eighth century A.D. (Conze 1975:184). As one scholar comments:

It is interesting to observe that however great may be the divergence between the Buddhism of the early schools and the stage we have now reached [meaning Tibetan Buddhism], nothing new has been adopted without first ensuring that it should accord with the doctrinal position. The doctrine still remained consciously Buddhist and what is more remarkable, still continued to do so, even when feminine partners were introduced into the system (D. Snellgrove in Blofeld 1987:116).

There are a wide variety of Tantric symbols, from the more concrete material fulfilment such as the vajra (adamantine sceptre) to the chörten (a stūpa like tower). Other symbols include the mandalas (diagrams showing deities in their cosmic connections) and the vidams, (male or female symbolic deities for meditational practices). Yidam is a Tibetan word meaning in-dwelling deity, derived from the Sanskrit word Istadeva. The Buddhist meaning, however, differs from that of the

Hindus. For the Hindus, it is an actual deity who has been invited to dwell in the heart of the adept. For the Buddhist it is an emanation of his own mind, that all encompassing force that leads the adept to negate his own ego and attain enlightenment (Blofeld 1987:176).

The Tantrists agreed with the metaphysical assumption of the Mādhyamikas that only emptiness is real, whereas any kind of manifestation or form is ultimately unreal and the illusive product of our minds. One logical conclusion of this assumption is that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are really nothing but a figment of our imagination (Conze 1975:184). On the surface, however, this explanation would suggest that long ago some lamas had deliberately devised divine beings for people to meditate upon.

But according to the Buddhists, Samsāra (Six Realms of Transmigration)¹ which has form, and Nirvāṇa which is formless, are two aspects of the same reality, namely the transcendental void. The void is far from being formless and empty, and combines the attributes of formlessness and the potential to produce myriad forms (Blofeld 1987:229).

Although these gods and goddesses are ultimately unreal compared with one vast transcendental void or emptiness, at times they do seem to take on a life of their own, as when they were known to appear before the dying. This fact would seem to negate the idea that they are arbitrary teaching devices created by the lamas. This is because the mind is not subject to space limitations. Such limitations appear to be so only to our ordinary consciousness due to karmic hindrance, and the illusion that we have a separate independent identity. Actually, the

¹ According to Buddhist cosmology (especially Mahāyāna) sentient beings are ranked in ten realms of existence. Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas (solidarity buddhas, interested only in their own salvation), Śrāvakas (hearers, Hīnayāna adherents), beings in heaven (gods and goddesses), humans, demons, animals, hungry spirits and beings in hell. The Six Realms of Transmigration refer to the lower six realms with the heavenly realm still within this Six Realms of Transmigration. This is because the gods and goddesses still have obscurations and pride and are subject to the cycle of rebirth.

mind within each individual is identical to the universal mind, the container of the universe.

Evidence from two sources in recent times give at least partial support for these ideas. One is Jung's idea of the archetypes which reside in the collective unconscious (for more details please see Jung 1990:3-41, Dourley 1984:37-51). And Jung states that many of his patients spontaneously drew diagrams similar to the mandalas without prior knowledge of the Buddhist faith. The other source is the literature on the use of LSD, mescaline and other psychotropic drugs. Many people have reported having encountered in the depths of their consciousness symbols resembling mandalas and deities described by Tantric texts (Blofeld 1987:99).

The Tibetan Arising Yoqa and the Buddhist Cosmology

The intent of Tibetan Buddhism, or Vajrayāna² is basically the same as Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is to cause a cessation (Skt. nirodha) to the suffering (Skt. duḥkha) of life which keeps sentient beings forever recycling in the Six Realms of Transmigration. For Buddhists, death is not the cessation of existence and suffering. Rather, it is the cessation of one form of existence and the beginning of another form of existence. Salvation is obtained when one is released from this infinite round of rebirths. It has to be won by attaining state of consciousness that is totally detached from any desire which leads to rebirth. Moreover, suffering results from the desire for phenomena, and thus the cessation of suffering requires the full realization of the emptiness nature of all phenomena (Skt. śūnyatā). Full realization of emptiness cannot be obtained by mere intellectual assent to its truth, but only after the contemplative has

² Tibetan Buddhism is a type of Vajrayana, a category that also includes such sects as Japanese Shingon.

attained a mature state of mind called mahāmudrā³.

Realization of this mahāmudrā mindstate is attained when the psychosexual energies (Skt. vīrya) of the adept have become reorganized in such a way that they are unblocked and free flowing through all the channels (Skt. nādis) lying along the central energy centers of the body (Skt. chakras). Constant meditation upon the essential inherent empty nature of existence and all phenomena together with the mahāmudrā mindstate will then bring about the realization of emptiness. The variety of arising yogas (Skt. sādhana) available in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are all directed at reorganizing the psychosexual energies so that the practitioner can experience the full meaning of a deity as a symbol, and thereby attain the mahāmudrā mindstate. All such practices employ visual imagination in order to reach this goal (Conze 1975:197-199, Kohn 1991:133).

The practitioner has first to choose a teacher; the choice of a lama (monk) as a guru (teacher) is of utmost importance in Tibetan Buddhism. For, according to the Tibetan Buddhists, if the goal is merely to learn some meditation, the choice of a guru is of no importance. But the Tantric practice is to attempt a short path, or a complete transformation of the mind of the practitioner, and at times requires some dangerous exploration of the practitioner's consciousness. Then the choice of the lama becomes very important. To qualify as a guru, a person sometimes has to spend many years in a monastic university, or to have worked diligently to acquire the knowledge and experience he/she has. Or, he/she must have suffered enough trials during his/her personal quest. There are various myths that circulate in Tibet about the hardship of finding a good guru, for example, the story of Milarepa. So the guru's knowledge is greatly valued, and complete obedience and service to the guru is very important. The most

³ "Mahāmudrā" is a term used particularly by the Karma Kargyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

important feature of a guru, however, is someone who has been "there" before, or has direct experience and can work as a guide to explain the inner meaning of some of the texts.

A practitioner is first initiated into the practice of a sādhana - that is, the arising of one form of deity or another. Initiation involves the lama performing a ceremony (Tib. wang kur) to empower the initiate. The initiate is also instructed to memorize a series of related practices and symbols and some traditional texts.

There are hundreds and thousands of tantras (texts) in Tibet. The Tantrists follow the Mahāyānist's footsteps in believing that if the Buddha is alive all the time in some transcendental realm, he can always find a vehicle for his teachings (Beyer 1972:12, Williams 1989:29). Moreover, new tantras are constantly discovered by visionaries in some sacred places. These texts normally convey the cosmology and various meditative practices, aimed at providing guidance for eventual mystical experiences. The text being chosen by a lama normally will be in accordance with both tradition and the temperament of the practitioner.

Tibetan Tantrists also incorporate dance in their repertoire of rituals. There are large public religious dances, and private dances practised by individuals. These dances are most commonly called the Lama Dances by the public, or gar cham by novice monks. In Tibetan, gar usually means dance of a peaceful nature that mostly involves stylized body movements and hand gestures (mudrās). The aim is similar to the practice of the sādhana, that is to identify the consciousness of an practitioner with a certain deity. Cham is a forceful, wrathful kind of dance that involves vigorous dance steps. The dance movements are believed to be sacred, highly restrictive and access to the teachings are directly transmitted between teachers and students in an oral tradition. Most cham yigs (dance texts) only give brief descriptions concerning the outline of the dance for memory. These sacred dances are believed to have existed in pre-Buddhist Tibet within the indigenous Bon

tradition, and have been refined by Padmasambhava⁴ when he entered Tibet. The fifth Dalai Lama in the 17th century, generally known for his profound visionary experiences, had personally codified many dances including the Vajrasattva (Tib. Dorje Sempa) and the Heruka dances in his sacred dance texts (Hoetzlein 1991:315). There are, however, many other sacred dance texts as derived from and preserved in other monasteries. The public religious dances mostly last for one or two days and are performed at the end of the year, on Padmasambhava's birthday or in early summer in Ladak (Wentz 1958:291). The dancers are usually accompanied by a group of musicians including a chant master, drummers, horn blowers, trumpet blowers and cymbal players. All dancers, however, have to wear appropriate masks and richly adorned costumes.

Usually there are many short dances in this one or two day ceremony, together with a longer mystery play. The story of the mystery play is a re-enactment of the coming of Padmasambhava and the subjugation of demonic forces in Tibet which are then driven into an effigy and offered to the Great Protective Goddess (Wentz 1958:290).

Another part of this main sacred dance which is sometimes played in conjunction with the first part, sometimes separately, is about the subjugation of evil beings (also represented by a human effigy) by Lord Yama (Lord of the Death). Lord Yama is a wrathful deity⁵, portrayed as a bull-headed buffalo with flame emanating from the horns. Lord Yama is usually followed by a group of yak- or stag-headed messengers (Nebesky-wojkowitz 1976:77).

⁴ Padmasambhava - The Buddhist saint who introduced Buddhism into Tibet around the 8th century.

⁵ According to the Tibetans, the wrathful appearance of a deity symbolizes the mind selflessly motivated by enlightenment, while the outer expression is fierce in order to control negative emotions.

The dance is usually led by the lamas with laymen playing some minor parts; nuns and laywomen are excluded from the dance. Before the dance begins, the lamas usually have to spend many days meditating and acquiring the state of consciousness as represented by those deities they are going to personify. The aim of both the lamas and lay practitioners in performing the dance is to convey spiritual teachings to the public. The dance is also viewed as a ritual to expel the demonic forces of the past year and to welcome the New Year. Moreover, participation in the dance is believed to increase one's store of good merit. The attainment of the proper mind state should occur before the dance, mostly as a result of private practices in the various sādhanas (Hoelzlein 1991:320). The dance, acting as a form of "active sādhana", is a formal re-enactment of those mind-states previously acquired. The performance resembles the empowerment of the practitioner; the guru has to assume the particular mind-state of a certain deity in order to "give permission" for a practitioner to practice. Due to the present political situation in Tibet, these dances are performed very rarely, and some monasteries are unable to continue this activity.

Preliminary Preparation and Progress of a Sādhana

Meditation is usually carried out in a meditation cell or the shrine room of a private house. It is usually decorated with thangkas (a scrolled silk painting), mandalas and various symbolic objects such as stūpas. However, some practitioners, especially those of the Kargyupa sect, prefer to meditate in solitude, walled up in a meditation cell or confined to a cave for a certain time, sometimes as much as three to seven years. Food is passed through an opening, while they spend their days practising a particular sādhana (Blofeld 1987:84). They are considered mature contemplates when they can construct complex mental images at ease, and through their direct experiences know by heart, without resorting to any secondary sources, that this world is nothing more than a manifestation of the mind.

The progress is usually tested by a guru, they believe that practitioners can never falsify their experiences before a real guru, who would normally, upon asking a few questions based on his/her own direct experience, judge the attainments of the practitioner.

Outline of a Tibetan visualization technique

The Tibetan Buddhist techniques of symbolic penetration generally involve the following steps:

1. Purification.

The practitioners start by quieting their minds of discursive thoughts and perceive their bodies as hollow and their sensorium as empty.

2. Constructing the Image.

The practitioners begin by mentally constructing an image of a deity step by step within their empty sensorium. Symbols are imagined such as texts, vajras, bells, skulls, knots, hand gestures, body postures, and the environment of the deity, together with geographical and architectural surroundings.

3. Stabilizing the Image.

The practitioners meditate in their minds' eyes the whole or parts of the image. They eventually learn to produce a stable image at will.

4. Identification with the Image.

Initially, the deity is imagined as outside the practitioners' body. Once the form is stabilized, however, the practitioners imagine the deity entering their bodies, usually through the tops of their heads, and becoming one with them. The process here is from visualizing the deity as someone "out there," perhaps dwelling in a certain heaven, to a stage in which the deity becomes one with the initiates.

5. Inner meditation.

At a more advanced stage, the initiates imagine the internal energy flow within the body of the deity, which is also flowing inside themselves.

6. Mantra recitation.

The initiates repeat a mantra (sacred litany) specific to the deity.

7. Dissolving the Image.

The initiates dissolve the image until all that is left is a tiny spot of light.

8. Arising of the Image.

The initiates meditate upon the emptiness into which the image of the deity has dissolved for as long as they can hold it, or until the image of the deity spontaneously reappears.

9. Final dissolution of the Image.

The image is finally dissolved back into the essential emptiness of the sensorium (Laughlin 1992:199-200).

The intention of this practice is to evoke experiences, internal transformations of consciousness symbolized by the deity; for example, the experience of compassion through the meditation of the Bodhisattva Chenrezi. It is also an exploration of the depth psychology of the being which brings about intuitive insight into the nature of consciousness. To this end, as with most other forms of insight meditation, rational discursive thought is eliminated, for the initiate comes to understand that rational discursive thought can be a serious hindrance to the maturation of wisdom.

Tibetan Arising Yoga - Yoga of Dorje Sempa

Dorje is a Tibetan word meaning adamantine (Skt. vajra), sempa, is a Tibetan word meaning being (Skt. sattva). The two words are translation into Tibetan from the Sanskrit compound word Vajrasattva, meaning a diamond-like being. When depicted in a Buddhist mandala, Vajrasattva, who is a Buddha, is usually located in the centre of the mandala, or east of centre (Blofeld 1987:118).

The word vajra (dorje) also refers to a sceptre-like object some two or three inches long, made of some precious or semi precious metals.

Originally, the vajra was a symbol of the Hindu god Indra and represented the thunderbolt. But Buddhists no longer adopt this meaning (Blofeld 1987:118).

The notion of adamantine usually stands for a substance so hard that nothing in the universe can cut or dent it. Unconquerable, irresistible, shining and clear, the adamantine symbolizes the non-substance of the void. And when a practitioner is nearing liberation, the person is described as attaining a vajra body or as having realized the essence of Vajrasattva. Henceforth, his/her mind is mature enough that she/he can withstand any psychic force or any physical ordeal easily. This is the essence of the vajra principle. The Buddha principle in its purest form of Dharmakaya⁶ is also known as Vajrasattva.

Philosophically, vajra means a diamond-like wisdom that is hard and sharp, a mind state which cuts through misconceptions and delusions, and leads to enlightenment.

By vajra is meant emptiness;
Sattva means pure cognition.
The identity of these two is known
As the essence of Vajrasattva
(Advayavajra Samgraha in Gomez 1987:376)

Hence, in Tibet, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are generally known as Wielders of the Vajra. It is not surprising that a lot of Tibetans use the word Dorje as their name. Traditionally, the vajra is used in conjunction with the vajra bell, and together they symbolize skill-in-means and transcendental wisdom which, when combined, produce enlightenment (Blofeld 1987:118).

The Dorje Sempa practice in Tibet is one of the preliminary practices and a foundation to which one returns to from time to time. So Dorje Sempa represents both the beginning and the culmination of practice.

⁶The body of the Buddha, which is at one with the uncreated void.

After receiving empowerment from a guru, a novice is generally instructed to do a set of exercises which are four or five in number, called the preliminaries. They are required to repeat them one hundred thousand times, as follows:

1. The Refuges:

The novice is generally required to recite a sanskrit formula: "Namo Guru-be", namo Buddhāya, namo Dharmaya, namo Saṅghaya", which means:

I go for refuge to the Guru (One who has attained enlightenment).

I go for refuge to the Buddhas (Those who have attained enlightenment).

I go for refuge to the Dharma (Sacred Law, or Universal Law).

I go for refuge to the Saṅgha (Sacred community, those who actually seek enlightenment).

2. The Bodhisattva Vow

He/she strives to attain enlightenment, but vows to delay entering Nirvāṇa due to boundless compassion for the suffering sentient beings.

During this time the novice has to visualize a host of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, vidams⁷, dākinīs⁸ and gurus of his lineage to whom he prostrates one hundred thousand times.

3. Dorje Sempa visualization and purification

Then he/she visualizes Dorje Sempa above his/her head and recites the Dorje Sempa mantra one hundred thousand times in order to cleanse away obscurations caused by past karmic deeds and to prevent negative karmic retribution. He/she then visualizes Dorje Sempa entering into her/him and becoming one with her/him, and they are both absorbed into the void.

4. Offering of the Mandala

The mandala here is the mandala of the universe conceived of as a

⁷ Strictly speaking, the vidam is not a class of its own, but any Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, wrathful and peaceful deities can be adopted as vidam (Blofeld 1987:113).

⁸ The inspiring power of consciousness towards enlightenment, usually portrayed in a female wrathful form.

net of precious stones similar to the Hindu concept of Indra's net. The practitioner has to offer the mandala to the assembly of deities and lamas to whom he/she has previously paid homage (Blofeld 1987:163).

In the eyes of a non-practitioner, not only may the ritual appear tedious, meaningless and perhaps alien, but also mechanical. But to a Tantric practitioner, this is not the case. The practices cannot be done mechanically, for that would be the same as not practising at all. The practices cannot be tedious for soon the activity will lead to mystical experiences which become a great joy. They cannot be meaningless for every gesture, symbol, or mantra becomes profoundly meaningful to the dedicated practitioner. For example, the efficacy of the mantra lies in its function as a kind of performative action, which is equivalent to translating human intention into action. This principle runs parallel to the Catholic idea that: "In the beginning there was the word, and the word was made flesh" as appears in The Gospel of John (Blofeld 1987:88). With the aid of the mantra, some adepts can dissolve themselves into the void and conjure up the particular force they wish to utilize.

Another example would be the mandala offering, which to a non-practitioner might look ludicrous from a rational point of view, since the universe does not belong to the practitioner, so how can he/she offer it? He/she is, in fact, conjuring up a cheap substitute and offering it to the deities. But according to the Tibetan Buddhist, since the mind is identical to the universal mind, there is nothing that is not the practitioner's own. The mandala offering is, in fact, a symbolic renunciation of the practitioner's ordinary phenomenal world before he/she proceeds to construct the extraordinary world of the deity and undergoes a transformation of the mind (Given 1993:99). Also, on a lower level of understanding, it would reinforce the Bodhisattva vow to make use of whatever comes into the practitioner's possession for the benefit of sentient beings (Blofeld 1987:166-167).

Dorje Sempa Yoga as Symbolic Penetration

The text⁹ recommends that the meditation on Dorje Sempa be practised before sleeping, but one can also do it during the day for as much time as possible. It is generally recommended to recite the Hundred Syllable Mantra 108 times, but if it is impossible to do so, at least twenty-one times should be attempted.

The practitioners first have to generate the feeling of great remorse for all their sins and failings either in this or in past lifetimes. They have to pray passionately in their hearts that they detest any kind of bad karma, and determine not to do them again. The practitioners then fervently wish and sincerely believe that the yoga will cleanse away their sins.

The Outer Symbol

The practitioners start by visualizing Dorje Sempa as an outer symbol. Step by step, a complex visual image of Dorje Sempa is constructed in the sensorium. The instructions are quite complex. The practitioners visualize Dorje Sempa on a moon disk atop a lotus sitting on top of their heads. His body is coloured white, and every part of his body is clear and transparent. He has one head and two hands. He is holding a vajra in his right hand over his heart and a bell in his left hand extended at his side. He is adorned with all kinds of beautiful ornament. On the crown are five jewels symbolizing his attainment of the five kinds of wisdom. Actually, all the jewels symbolize the attainment of the Buddha's mind. It should be mentioned that some Tibetan deities like the very popular Chenrezi (Skt Avalokiteśvara) can have as many as eleven heads and a thousand arms, which is the main focus of some sādhanas. The hands usually are grasping certain symbolic objects such as knives, bows and arrows,

⁹ In the outline of this sādhana on Dorje Sempa, I am more or less following "The Yoga Method of Dorje Sempa" provided by Willis 1972, P.83-86. Some quotations as they appear in the sādhana are not direct quotations; the changes however, are for clarity.

books, flowers, etc., that give clues to the attributes of the state of consciousness represented by the deity. The practitioners have to visualize, too, that in Dorje Sempa's heart is the syllable "HŪṂ", in the middle of a moon; around the circumference is the Hundred Syllable Mantra.

Then the practitioners are to offer a prayer to Dorje Sempa in the following manner: "I confess all the degenerations of my vows, all the sins, obscurations, diseases of myself and all sentient beings; I pray thee, please cleanse me." The prayer has to be sincerely offered. They then visualize sending much light and divine nectar to all sentient beings.

After the prayer, the practitioners visualize images in the following sequence:

1. Much light emanates from the "HŪṂ" in Dorje Sempa's heart centre and radiates from his body, stirring the minds of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in all the universes.
2. Then, all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas return their blessings to Dorje Sempa in the form of much light and divine nectar.
3. Abundant light rays and divine nectar flows into the "HŪṂ" in Dorje Sempa's heart.

From Dorje Sempa's heart, the light and divine nectar enters through the top of the practitioners' bodies and through the cranial orifice middle vein (Tib. rTsa-dbv-ma) just like a waterfall, and fills the practitioners' hearts and insides of their bodies. And all their sins, diseases, and obscurations come out from the pores of their skin like husks washed away with water. They then visualize that their bodies are free from obscurations and all negatives and their minds become clear and powerful.

Then, the practitioners visualize their four energy centers (psychic centers in the head, throat, heart and belly) being filled with shining white divine nectar, their bodies are filled with inexhaustible

joy, and they become Dorje Sempa.

They then recite a mantra:

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYAM ANUPĀLAYA VAJRASATTVA TVENŌPATIṢṬHA
 DR̥DHO ME BHAVA SUTOṢYO ME BHAVA ANURAKTO ME BHAVA SUPOṢYO
 ME BHAVA SARVA-SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA SARVA-KARMA-SŪCA ME
 CITTAM ŚREYAḤ KURU HŪM! HA HA HA HA HOḤ! BHAGAVĀN SARVA-
 TATHĀGATA-VAJRA MĀ ME MUṆCA VAJRĪ-BHAVA MAHĀSAMAYASATTVA ĀḤ!
 (Beyer 1988:144)¹⁰

Although most practitioners recite the mantra without knowing the English meaning, translated into English the mantra would mean something like the following:

Ah Vajrasattva, guard my vows. Vajrasattva, let them be firm! Be steadfast for me, be satisfied, be favourable, be nourished for me! Grant me all the magical attainments! Indicator of all karma: make glorious my mind HŪM! Ha Ha Ha Hoḥ! Blessed One, diamond of all the Tathāgatas [supreme enlightened ones]: do not forsake me, make me diamond! Great being of the vow ĀḤ! (Beyer 1988:144).

Then the practitioners offer thanks to Dorje Sempa in meditation:

"By my ignorance, I often transgress my vow. Protector, lord, and vajra-bearer be my refuge. Embodiment of great compassion, lord of every sentient being, I go to thee for refugee."

Now the practitioners visualize Dorje Sempa with a smiling countenance, bestowing forgiveness and saying: "My son, Dorje disciple, and the son of my lineage, all your delusions and veils and degenerated vows are all cleansed."

As white light, Dorje Sempa dissolves into the practitioners through the cranial orifice, into their hearts, and into the "HŪM" there. The practitioners become Dorje Sempa, and become like a reflection in a mirror simultaneously apparent and empty of inherent existence. And the bodies, speech and minds of the practitioners become, in essence, Dorje Sempa (Willis 1972:83-86) (For more details of the visualization practice see also Beyer 1972, Blofeld 1987).

The Inner Symbol

The practitioners try to stabilize within their sensorium all the

¹⁰ There are a number of variations of this mantra depending on the level of initiation and on the lineage.

visual image which they have constructed. The completion of the inner symbol may take some time, depending on the mental flexibility of the practitioners. Traditionally, after the inner symbol is stabilized and the practitioners can call forth the image at will. They also have to meditate during the day that "all beings are to be seen as Dorje Sempa", "all sounds are to be heard as the Hundred Syllable Mantra" and "all the surroundings as Nirvāṇa" (Blofeld 1987:174-6).

What is important about this is that the Tibetan Buddhist meditative system utilizes repetitive ritual behaviour and the image of the Dorje Sempa to act as "keys" to start neural model transformations. The outer symbol is being continuously "fitted" like a key into the universal model.

Other ritual elements such as the meditation on the syllable "HŪṂ" and the Hundred Syllable Mantra also serve to stabilize the image and quickly evoke the universal model (Govinda 1991:208, Webber 1980:59-61).

Transformation of the inner symbol may be experienced through any one of the senses and may or may not be specific to meditation on Dorje Sempa. For example, the experience of light bulbs, milk bottles, glass water jugs and similar objects has been reported by non-Tibetan practitioners when working on Dorje Sempa (Webber 1980:60). This type of transformation is a clear example of how quickly an altered state of consciousness which is uncommon to everyday experience is transformed into a form conditioned by the culture of the practitioner. These symbols are the forerunners of the eventual Dorje Sempa experience.

The Universal Symbol

Further meditation on the inner symbol will lead to the spontaneous arising of the universal model. One may experience Dorje Sempa "coming alive" in the sensorium, either during a meditative vision, or during a subsequent dream. It can be inferred in the text by the speech of Dorje Sempa: "My son, Dorje disciple, all your delusions and veils and degenerated vows are all purified." It must also be noted

that the universal symbol sometimes does arise without the transformation of the inner symbol. In other words, penetration may be directly from the outer symbol to its universal (or archetypal) significance. The essential quality of this experience for Dorje Sempa is a purified consciousness, as the mind is experienced as "clear and powerful".

Absorption into the Universal Symbol

Intense concentration on the universal symbol may lead to an absorption state. Absorption occurs when the mind develops a very fine balance between deep calm and awareness. With absorption, there is no longer a distinction between subject and object. The practitioners experience themselves as Dorje Sempa; they become "at one" with the deity. Such an experience may involve all the sensory modes such as visual, olfactory, kinaesthetic, or auditory modes of consciousness and is an experience remarkable for its intensity. Absorption is often associated with ecstatic bliss and profound tranquillity (Laughlin 1979:11).

Void Consciousness

Contemplative maturity and further absorption into the universal symbol may lead under the right conditions to the experience of Nirvāṇa (pure consciousness), also known as consciousness without an object, or the experience of śūnyatā (voidness). This final transformation is the experience of the "greater symbolic field" of the deity, the essence of Dorje Sempa. It is characterized by a consciousness that has a complete loss of ego centredness, and the loss of the view of the world as a distinct reality, or the phenomenal world as anything like solid or fixed. śūnyatā is characterized by an awareness beyond transient phenomena, beyond feeling and concept (Laughlin 1989:128). In turn as D.T. Suzuki puts it, Nirvāṇa is not:

annihilation of consciousness nor a temporal or permanent suppression of mentation, as imagined by some; but it is the annihilation of the notion of ego-substance and of all the desires that arise from this erroneous conception (Suzuki in

Spiro 1982:57).

This is the phase of mature contemplation in which the full intended significance of the outer symbol is comprehended. Because the phenomenology of the individual is in synchronization with the network of models that produces the greater symbolic field, it becomes evident that the experience of śūnyatā is radically different from the starting image of Dorje Sempa; and herein lies the problem of using rational analysis to reconstruct the meaning of the outer symbol in the Tibetan system. The initial visualization has seemingly no logical connection with the ultimate experience. In the Tibetan Buddhist mediation tradition, the initial symbol of Dorje Sempa is considered to be an "outer symbol" and the realization of oneself as Dorje Sempa and the transcendental void is termed the "most secret offering."

In conclusion, the basis of attaining an ASC is the use of various sādhanas in Tibetan Buddhism. Dorje Sempa practice symbolizes the highest ideal, the attainment of Nirvāṇa and a mind state free of attachment due to intuitive understanding of the true nature of existence, a mind state that cuts through misconception and leads to spiritually important intuition and experiences and ultimately to liberation.

There are various sacred dances in Tibet, but the dance is a re-enactment of those mind states already acquired prior to the performance through the practice of the various sādhanas. The use of various deities, for example, Dorje Sempa as symbols during meditation act as symbolic penetration to by-pass personal and cultural conditioning and evoke those phases of consciousness symbolized by the deity or the symbolic field with which the deity is associated.

Chapter IV: Dance and Religious Ritual

Dance is part of many religious systems throughout the world. There are many reasons for dancing: people dance to honour and worship, to enact and reinforce social roles, to express religious faith, to plead for supernatural blessings, to cause social change, to embody the divine through personal transformations, and to reveal divinity through symbolic body actions.

Dance is defined as an intentional, purposeful, rhythmical, and cultural sequence of body movements. Dance differs from ordinary motor activity in that it has inherent values that are viewed as relevant from the dancer's viewpoint (Hanna 1987:203).

The power of a ritual dance lies in its multisensory, emotional and symbolic capacity to penetrate to deep significance and experience. The efficacy of the Sun Dance, as in most rituals, depends upon the beliefs of the participants, particularly their faith in their ability to affect social and personal change.

Dance may derive meaning from its sensory and perceptual qualities, such as feeling empathy with other dancers, or the belief in the presence of supernatural beings. Meaning can also be conveyed through metaphor, imitation of divine icons, hand gestures and body postures, and reenactment of certain states of consciousness of a particular deity. Meaning can further be elaborated through a non-dance activity, such as the narration of a sacred story accompanying the dance. A popular psychological and theological belief is that dance has evolved as an instrument to cope with distressing human situations (Hanna 1987:204). This view holds that spontaneous movement serves as an outlet for emotions in the struggle of everyday existence or confrontation with the mystery of life. Over time, dance developed as a sequence of patterned, symbolic movements. When a desired outcome (for example, rain after a rain dance) has, in fact, occurred, the dance

itself may be attributed with having a causative effect on the outcome (Hanna 1987:204). Dance may change over time, or a new interpretation or an altogether new dance may be developed due to perceived divine revelation by visionaries, contact with other groups, or through individual or group initiative.

The exact origin of dance in religion cannot be traced. Rock carvings at various sites all over the world testify to its antiquity. Various myths all over the world contain stories about the origin of dance. A remarkable example is the myth of the Hindu God Śiva¹, who is believed to have danced the world into being; he also destroys and regenerates the world through his dance. He is believed to have later taught the art of dancing to humans. The Nāṭya Śāstra, the classical Indian treatise on dance, describes the functions of dance as to offer worship and to pray, to purify oneself, to lead to salvation, to participate in the cosmic play, and to reveal divinity within oneself (Hanna 1987:205).

The Sun Dance Religion

The Sun Dance religion is a religious system practised by at least thirty tribal groups dwelling on the North American plains and prairies. This is a traditional religious system rich in ritual and symbolism, and one which relies heavily upon many ritual drivers (e.g. fasting, purification, sweat lodge, sleep deprivation, dancing, rhythm and painful ordeal) to produce significant religious experience and access to transpersonal power.

Each tribe provides the Sun Dance with its own specific terminology which reflects its particular cultural emphasis. The Shoshoni/Crow, for example, called it the Thirst Lodge to reflect their particular ritual emphasis. The precise origin of the Sun Dance cannot

¹ The Supreme Being is manifested in a trinity: Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva.

be determined but it is well over a century old. In 1881, the United States government passed laws to prohibit the Sun Dances, believing that they were barbaric and demoralizing. In 1904, the laws were actively enforced by the then Commissioner of Indian Affairs. However, since these rituals were essential to the natives' spiritual needs, they were secretly continued by almost all the tribes on the plains except the Crow, who abandoned it in 1875. The most distinguished modified dance is that practised by the Wind River Shoshoni, whose version was adopted by the Northern Ute, Fort Hall Shoshoni, Bannock and the Nevada Shoshoni. With the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, open practice of the dance was again permitted, but it survived in a modified form which gives greater emphasis to spiritual needs, rather than severe personal ordeal and the militant nature of the earlier Indians. Several features of the ceremony, such as the official killing of a tree or the singing of a war song have been replaced by more spiritual ideals. However, the hanging of the buffalo skull, even in today's ceremony, still reflects the warlike nature of a hunting society. In 1941, John Trehero the charismatic Shoshoni Sun Dance leader, brought the dance back to the Crow. The Sun Dance has since then become for the Crow, as well as for many other tribes, the esteemed heritage of the Indians and a viable channel for spiritual advancement. Many of the modern Sun Dance leaders, however, are young men and women who have become disillusioned over western acculturation and have sought to reestablish their identity through participating or sponsoring the dance (Brown 1987:145-147).

It is a misfortune that early anthropological accounts of Native American religions usually ignore or pay very little attention to the spiritual significance of their ritual and religious practices. For example, Robert Lowie, an anthropologist very familiar with the history of the Crow Sun Dance, wrote in 1915, that the Dance served largely as an "aesthetic pleasure and entertainment" for the onlookers (Brown 1987:143).

One Swedish scholar, Åke Hultkrantz, commenced a study of North American Indians in 1947. He sought particularly to challenge this prevailing reductionist perspective on native religion. Throughout his career, he sought to elevate the research on Native American religions to a scientific level comparable to the study of the other world-established traditions. He was convinced that North American religions provide a treasure trove of data on traditional religion and should be intensively studied using a phenomenological perspective (Hultkrantz 1981:xvi). It is precisely this perspective that is being emphasized in the following analysis.

General Characteristics of the Sun Dance

There are a great variety of traits specific to the Sun Dance tradition among the approximately thirty distinctive tribes on the North American plains and prairies. Each group institutionalized the dance in its own way, reflecting its own specific views and values. A brief description will be offered of the essential features across a fair sampling of tribal groups. I will focus on the Wind River Shoshoni who are, at present, one of the most influential practitioners of the Sun Dance tradition.

The major Sun Dance celebrations take place for all tribes in late June or early July, during a time when, as the Indians put it, "the sage is long" and "the chokecherries are ripe" (Brown 1987:144).

Usually, the chiefs receive dream instruction during the spring, and announce their intention to assemble a dance. Chiefs usually follow the tradition in which the dance is carried out with some variation due to dream instruction.

Among all the tribes, periodic singer meetings are held throughout the year so as to instruct new singers in the powerful songs used in the dance. Usually a sponsor coordinates activities, supplies the construction material to build the sacred lodge where the dance is held and provides a feast afterwards as a personal sacrifice. The "medicine

person" or the shaman is the most important spiritual leader during these ceremonies. The medicine person, who acts as a keeper of the sacred lore, usually has received his power through a vision or has received authority from a retiring chief. These medicine persons are esteemed sages within the tribe, for they have lived and experienced the tradition and are in possession of healing powers.

The participants or the dancers are often individuals who were previously in extreme danger or sickness and who vowed that if only they could overcome adversity, they would participate in the earliest dance possible. Within the Sun Dance lodge there are "sacred police" who oversee that proper respect of the spiritual matter is being observed (Brown 1987:144).

The Construction of the Sacred Lodge

The first task is to find an appropriate place that has sufficient water and pasture land. The first ritual involves the choice and ceremonial chopping down of a cottonwood tree that has branches forking at the top. A young woman is chosen to give the first chop, on the grounds of her purity and virtue. The tree symbolizes the axis at the center of the world. It links heaven and earth, thus giving the people access to spiritual realities which lie beyond everyday existence (Brown 1987:145).

The tree is believed to be a form of living entity which provides its power to the tribe in the form of a sacrifice. Notably, it transmits to the participants its cooling powers through sacrificing its existence. Thus, the sacrificial tree sums up the major themes of the Sun Dance, such as the synthesis of opposites (wet/dry, life/death), and personal sacrifice for the collective good of all. Once the tree has been erected at the center of the lodge, offerings are placed at its base or at its fork. Colourful ribbons, signifying heaven and earth are usually tied on the branches as well. Each tribal group, however, has its own specific symbolic variations in dressing the tree (Brown

1987:145). Among the Shoshoni/Crow/Ute, for example, the head of a buffalo is placed on the tree, and in the branches there is an eagle. There are also twelve side poles and side rafters (Jorgensen 1982:180).

One common characteristic of the lodge is that the entry always faces east, the direction of the rising sun, and bushes are placed outside the lodge for privacy of the participants. The tribes believe the sacred lodge not only represents the world, but also the universe and the uncreated cosmos. Since the construction of the lodge is a re-enactment of the creation of the world, all acts therefore are sacred and are accompanied by prayers and powerful songs that relate the myths of origin and creation. Sweat lodges are also set up near the encampment for the purification of the participants (Brown 1987:145).

Typical Sun Dance Performance

Every morning just before sunrise, all the dancers face the direction of the sun and move slowly to the beat of the drum and blow their eagle bone whistles, as a commencement of the ceremony.

For the next three or four days' duration of the dance, as practised by the Shoshoni/Crow tradition, the dancers are dancing incessantly towards the tree while observing a complete fast. They also blow on eagle bone whistles and imagine themselves to be eagles. In the course of the ritual, many participants have visions, or they have significant dreams during the night (Brown 1987:146).

On the second or third day of the dance, people who are afflicted with various illnesses come for healing. The spiritual leader often prays over them and draws out the illness with an eagle-wing fan. There are numerous accounts by people of miraculous cures. At the closing of the dance, blessed sacred water is passed around among the dancers who have had no food or water since they entered the lodge. The dancers usually complete the ritual with a purifying sweat bath (Brown 1987:140).

In the Siouan form as described by the Lakota shaman, Black Elk in

the Sacred Pipe, the dancers, who have to observe a total fast, move periodically around the inner circle of the lodge in sunwise manner, so they are always gazing at the sun - no doubt a painful ordeal.

A second Siouan emphasis is the piercing of the muscles of certain dancers in fulfilment of earlier vows. The spiritual leaders pierce the muscle of the dancers by inserting wooden skewers which are tied with rawhide thongs to the central tree. These people then dance to some "power songs", pulling back on the thongs until the flesh and muscle are loose. The ideology of this activity, according to the natives, is that in addition to personal sacrifice, they are also identifying with the sacrificial tree. There are some variations of this ordeal among a number of Siouan tribes (Brown 1970:86-97, Brown 1987:145).

Other tribes such as the Arapaho, the Cheyenne and the Blackfoot Confederation lay emphasis on world and life renewal and healing (Brown 1987:145).

Wind River Shoshoni - Their Beliefs and Ritual Practice

The Plains or Wind River Shoshoni is a North American Indian tribe that lives on a reservation in Western Wyoming. Like most American native Indians the Plains Shoshoni believe in numerous nature spirits and a Supreme Being (Tam Apō). The spirits, however, are mostly disguised as animals, reflecting a heritage that has a long history in a hunting culture. In general, the Wind River Shoshoni believe in six categories of spirits and divinities.

1. Tam Apō (Our Father), a Supreme Being, who is the sustainer of the universe and the ultimate source of all things. He is represented by the sun and sometimes the moon as well.
2. Thunder, lightning, rain and wind spirits; these are all very powerful spirits. These spirits have some kind of autonomy in their sphere of action, but their function can sometimes be supplanted by Tam Apō.
3. Nature spirits, mostly in disguise as animals, which give puha

(supernatural power) to individual medicine men or vision seekers. Their power is mostly sought in sacred sites where there are rock drawings.

4. Tam mbia (Mother Earth), who nurtures humans with plants and water supply.
5. Diverse demonic spirits, usually in the form of man-eating ogres, disease-giving dwarfs, wandering ghosts. These have a negative influence on human affairs and should be avoided as much as possible.
6. The spirits of the departed who live in the land of the dead. They can be contacted by powerful shamans. Severely ill people or people who are in a coma sometimes visit this realm as well (Hultkrantz 1981:21-22).

All the spirits and divinities have their separate functions. Thus, the power is acquired when a person is sick, or wanting to improve the situation in her/his life, or seeking to obtain power to heal others. The Supreme Being is prayed to collectively in the Sun Dance, or in dire emergency. Prayer is offered to Mother Earth sometimes in the Sun Dance and on other occasions. Nature spirits such as wind, rain, and thunder all have a prominent role in their respective areas, and are included in this power complex.

Theoretically, the Supreme Being and the spirits co-exist but in practice, they sometimes substitute for one another. Thunder, lightning and wind spirits may seem to function independently, but the Supreme Being can sometimes assume their specific function and substitute for them (Hultkrantz 1981:22-23).

In short, power as conceived by these people is a diffuse, impersonal, supernatural force that exists everywhere, and every living being needs some in order to live. During a Sun Dance, power in inordinate amounts is invoked into the sacred lodge by the dancers and non-dancers. Often, when the natives talk about power, they are referring to a major supply of power rather than power in general. The

term "power" is sometimes used interchangeably with the Supreme Being, and each of these spirits and divinities have major supply of power (Jorgensen 1972:206-7).

The Sun Dance is believed to be an invocation of the Supreme Being, although spirits of the eagle and buffalo and Mother Earth do play a part. Other spirits are reported to have appeared now and then. The presence of these spirits in the Sun Dance corresponds with the belief that concrete modes of spirit power are transferred by such spirits to individuals, particularly to medicine men, as well as the more abstract power of the Supreme Being (Hultkrantz 1990:103).

Cultural Symbolism of the Sun Dance

1. The Lodge.

The Sun Dance lodge is sometimes called taguwunexa (thirst-standing-lodge) or taguwunōgani (thirst-standing-house), reflecting the essential feature of the ritual among the Wind River Shoshoni. Beginning four nights prior to the ceremony, the "medicine man" or shaman leads a group of singers to sing sacred songs each night in order to bless the ground (Hultkrantz 1981:242). In principle, after this ritual blessing, the ground is considered sacred, and only dancers are allowed in the lodge. Not even medicine men who are non-dancers are allowed in the lodge. Onlookers coming in to receive blessings have to observe special taboos such as taking off their moccasins and hats. Menstruating women and drunkards are prohibited from entrance (Hultkrantz 1981:249-250).

2. The Center Pole.

The center pole or wurušagar (forked pole) is the most sacred part of the lodge. As noted earlier, it is ideally a cottonwood tree which is green and juicy. But in some areas where a cotton-wood tree cannot be found, a pine has been substituted in recent times. Many participants have related the experience that the center tree appears to open in the course of the dance, and water is seen to flow out from it

(Hultkrantz 1981:251). It is this spiritual water that can be seen and drunk by some of the visionaries.

The center pole is a vehicle for prayer. It is believed to be inspired by the Supreme Being and must be left to decay naturally and must not be destroyed, for the prayers and the sickness are attached to the pole. The pole also serves as a communication channel between humans and the Supreme Being. It is also believed to be an image of the Supreme Being or as the Milky Way. Sun Dance participants are instructed to pray before the post and sacred power is believed to emanate from it (Hultkrantz 1981:252).

3. The Buffalo Head.

A Kwic (a buffalo head) is attached to the center pole just above or below the forked branches. It faces west and is a focus of attention during the dance. Sweetsage is stuffed in its nostrils to symbolize its spirit. The buffalo is believed to be the first messenger. There is a myth that circulates among the Shoshoni and the Ute about the origin of the Sun Dance. Long ago, a buffalo spirit appeared before a warrior. The buffalo spirit instructed the warrior to set up and perform the dance. This, according to the natives, is the origin of the dance. In the older version of the dance, a central feature was prayer for military success. This partly explains the vision of the buffalo before a warrior (Hultkrantz 1981:254). The buffalo too symbolizes food and nourishment and mastery over game in a hunting society. All these reflect an earlier hunting and warring culture of the Indians. In recent times, the dance is more for good health and the vision quest, reflecting a change of lifestyle to that of a reservation life. The buffalo head, too, is being replaced by a stuffed buffalo.

4. The Willows.

A bunch of willows is attached to the fork of the center pole. The willows symbolize nourishment, plants that have been provided by Mother Earth (Hultkrantz 1981:254).

5. The Eagle.

One of the rafters that serve as the roof of the lodge carries on top of it eagle feathers or a stuffed eagle. The eagle represents the second messenger. Myth has it that many years after the introduction of the Sun Dance, a young Shoshoni had a vision one night. It featured an eagle flying from the west towards the east. The spirit instructed the young man to revitalize the dance. The eagle ordered some changes to be made to the ritual. It gave instructions that an eagle should be attached to the backbone of the sacred lodge². The eagle further gave instructions to put up twelve roof poles and to make whistles from the bones of the eagle. According to the Shoshoni, the eagle was chosen as a second messenger because he is a superior bird which can soar very high, and which symbolizes purity and peace among the Indians (Hultkrantz 1981:255). There are also numerous reports of spiritual visions of the eagle during the dance (Hultkrantz 1990:106).

6. The Flags.

Two flags are attached to the center pole, usually one white and one blue, symbolizing the polarities within the universe, such as man/woman, wet/dry, day/night, life/death (Hultkrantz 1981:256).

7. The Puēlk (The Sun Dance Doll).

This is a replica of an Indian made of wood, which has a face painted with lightning symbols and feathers sticking out from the back. It represents the great shaman that gives power during the dance (Hultkrantz 1981:257).

Reinterpretation of the Cultural Symbols

According to the research of some anthropologists, notably Hultkrantz, Christian reinterpretation of the Sun Dance symbols started around 1890 and has been carried on incessantly by missionaries. However, Christianized interpretations have lost some of their influence

² The rafters that run east-west from their anchorage to the center pole are normally referred to as the backbone of the sacred lodge (Hultkrantz 1981:254).

in recent times, especially after the proclamation of the freedom of American Indian Religion rights in 1978 (Hultkrantz 1981:261). Some of the Sun Dance symbols that have been reinterpreted over the years include: the Sun Dance Lodge as Jesus' grave; the Center Pole as Jesus; the twelve side poles as the twelve apostles; the buffalo as the Old Testament; and the eagle as the New Testament (Hultkrantz 1981:259). In general, according to the opinion of most shamans, nobody really knows the exact meaning of the dance, for new dance steps and new interpretations are constantly added to the dance through visions and dream instructions.

The Sun Dance Ritual

The dancers

Prospective dancers start preparing themselves in the winter and spring. Their preparations are usually based on their dream instructions and interpretations by medicine men, or through the encouragement of friends and relatives. Some dancers are instructed by their dreams to follow the path to acquire power to become shamans in order to heal others, lest they become sick or, in some cases, die. The calling is usually not for the narrow end of acquiring power for themselves, or to heal themselves of some sickness, but for the collective good of all.

Some dancers also dance particularly for a specific vow, or for some close friends or family members, or to comfort the dead or those who are in mourning.

The good health sought by many dancers is often linked to some moral obligation and repentance over past misdeeds such as alcoholism, incest, extra-marital sex etc. The dancers are generally exhorted by the shamans to be good at heart, to be aware of their commitment to their fellow kinsman and to maintain the integrity of Indian values after the acquisition of power. The initiate has to learn a set of twelve dances (Jorgensen 1972:178-179).

The Sun Dance Ritual

On the evening after the lodge has been built, the medicine man prays to Tam apō to bless the dancers and the ritual dance begins. A group of singers sits around a big drum, together with a choir of women. The participants start dancing with the traditional small steps between their booth and the center pole, fixing their eyes on the center pole, the buffalo, or the wooden doll. Dancing with bare feet over a sandy surface, they wear downy feathers and blow rhythmically on the eagle bone whistle. The dancing has begun. According to the Indians, in order to gain the sympathy of the spirits they have to "suffer" by abstaining from food and drink for the three or four days' duration of the dance. For the next three days, the dancing continues incessantly, halting only for short periods of sleep and rest (Hultkrantz 1990:103).

The dance³ starts on the night when the center pole is erected and lasts for the next three days, depending on the weather and dream instructions from the medicine men. Generally the dancers are up half an hour before sunrise for the sunrise ceremony, rest a little, and begin the dance around 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. every day. Stopping only for short intervals about one to two hours a day for rest, most dance into the morning and retire around 1:00 to 3:00 a.m.; some dance throughout the entire night.

The dance is in a set of four songs with a rest song lasting about thirty seconds to one minute in between. On the second or third day of the dance usually there are no rest songs. The dancers also move to a quicker and quicker drum beat, from 180 beats per minute on the first day to 220 beats per minute on the last day. Usually on the third day of the dance, the more experienced dancers will dance more energetically

³ The following account is based on observation of rituals and beliefs among five Ute and Shoshoni reservations in 1966. According to this research, the five rituals showed marked similarities with some variations due to particular chiefs, the reservation and individual dancers. But nevertheless, the ideology and the ritual practices are very close, with the similarities being even more pronounced during the ceremony than in the pre-dance activity (Jorgensen 1972:178,185).

and non-stop in search of a vision (Jorgensen 1972:189-216).

The Puha

The puha is not considered to be there at the beginning. It has to gather gradually in momentum as time goes on, particularly with the appearance of power spirits during trance states. It is confirmed by the fact there is no "display of power", i.e. healing, being done before the second day. The second day is also the day when individual dancers start to report receiving visions or power. Also by the second day, the ground is considered so sacred that people who come in for healing have to observe special taboos, such as taking their hats off (Hultkrantz 1990:103).

The third of the four days of the dance is usually the day when there is considerable shamanizing done by the spiritual leader. The spiritual leader usually performs family blessing and the healing of the onlookers. Dancers, too, perform shamanizing on themselves and among the other dancers. There are many reports of such healing. There are also many reports of transference of powers between individuals or even stealing of power (Jorgensen 1972:189-192).

The Vision Quest

The natives believe that in the course of the ritual the buffalo "snorts fire out of his nostrils", "his eyes roll", and he becomes like an infuriated bull in a bull ring, challenging whoever will accept his power. Some dancers have had visions that they are knocked down by the buffalo. It is believed that if they fall unconscious for a short while and do not immediately dance again, it is a sign of cowardice, and that he or she has rejected the power of the buffalo. During these critical times, the shaman usually interrupts to encourage the new dancer by shouting something like the following:

You can get what you're looking for. You've got to get it.
If you want to be a good doctor [shaman] you've got to work
for it. You've got to take it away from that buffalo. He
wants to give it to you, but it isn't going to be easy
(Jorgensen 1972:214).

As might be expected at this critical juncture, the new dancers usually jump up and resume dancing.

Reports of visions or ASC during the Sun Dance are common. Some dancers have experienced how the "buffalo head seems to move", "sweat comes out from the nose", "the eyes seem to roll", or the "sweetsage looked like icicles." Such signs predict the forthcoming of a vision, perhaps of the buffalo spirit (Hultkrantz 1981:253).

Others have visions of the spiritual eagle during the dance. One informant relates that

Many have visions as they fall down in the sun. While dancing, they see something flying back and forth - an eagle spirit. Several times I have seen the dancers catch it, as it were, with their arms. They fall backwards or sideways, but never forward, and always without hurting themselves (Hultkrantz 1990:106).

If dancers have "visions" they are believed to be knocked out by a "blow" of power which lifts their feet off the ground before they could even feel it. Normally, they are shamanized by the spiritual leader, and fellow dancers move them back to their stalls and cover them with sheets while their souls are believed to be off somewhere being counselled. When dancers get up (usually after an hour or so), they are believed to be completely energized by the experiences and dance effortlessly afterwards (Jorgensen 1972:192).

Sometimes dancers are so strongly affected that they can lie unconscious for hours. During these lengthy visions, the dancers may learn a new song, new dance steps, new curing techniques, or even new interpretations of the dance. They also chat with the spirits, eat, and very often have visions about drinking water (Jorgensen 1972:214-5). The recipients often relate their experiences or memories of them to fellow dancers and to the shaman for interpretation.

Below is one account related by a shaman:

When he fainted, he was carried to his booth. He thought he woke up on a ridge somewhere and found that the buffalo at the center pole was circling around him. The buffalo turned into a man - a common transformation theme in visions - and urged him to drink from a running stream. He did so, and he

drank and drank. Finally he awoke and found himself lying in the sun dance lodge. A couple of years later the same spirit told him how to cure people (Hultkrantz 1990:107).

Another shaman went directly from being a sick person to being a medicine man. He related that as a young man he was always sick. He joined the Sun Dance, danced and then fainted. Some dancers carried him back to his booth unconscious. He lay there for a couple of hours and had a vision of an Indian who bestowed healing power on him. He treated many sick people afterwards (Hultkrantz 1990:108).

Visions of spirits also occur in dreams during the night. There are numerous reports by dancers who received power visions in nocturnal dreams immediately after the dance or who fainted on their way back to their tent and received such visions. A dance that ends in a vision is ideal, but it is believed that both dancers and non-dancers earn some power whether a vision has occurred or not.

In conclusion, the Sun Dance religion uses a lot of ritual "drivers", notably incessant dancing for three or four days and sometimes throughout the night, to induce trance. It also incorporates other ritual drivers such as sweat lodge, drumming, singing, whistle blowing, and food and water deprivation to retune the autonomic nervous system "driving" experience. These ritual drivers are combined with symbolic penetration using powerful, culturally salient symbols like the center pole, the buffalo, the eagle and the Indian medicine man, to attain a more or less specified altered state of consciousness. As a source of vision and power, the Sun Dance occupies an important position in modern Shoshoni as well as many other Indians' religious lives. Some researchers have believed it to be a replacement for the traditional Our Father Dance (Hultkrantz 1981:240). It has also increasingly replaced the traditional vision quest in which solitary young men went to seek guardian spirits. According to some medicine men, the traditional vision quest is unsafe, as the questers can come into contact with evil spirits. "Unsought" visions during the Sun Dance are seen by these

medicine men as a safer way to seek spiritual power (Hultkrantz 1990:110).

Usually through a dance, especially for those who have a vision, the dancer undergoes a transformation of personality. They are more affirmed in the Indian way of life, empathize more with other Indians, discover a sense of belief in their own power, and enjoy better self-esteem derived from faith and pride in their own heritage, together with the confirmation of their vision and power by the community. Stories about the skills, power and the good of the sun dancers keep circulating among the community as a model for future dancers. The persistence of the Sun Dance over the years has proved that it has served an important need in the religious and spiritual life of some North American Indians.

Chapter V: Ritual Experience and the Verification of Mythic Knowledge

So far I have presented a comparison between two different traditions of esoteric religious experience. I have been specifically interested in tracing the relationship between ritual practice and experiences in the Tibetan and native Sun Dance traditions. In my research I have found it necessary to apply a particular theoretical and methodical perspective, specifically the anthropological perspective called biogenetic structuralism. This perspective has allowed me to isolate and identify the operative drivers in ritual that lead to specific experiences. It has also allowed me to understand the relationship between the specific experiences as well as the overall worldview of the two cultures. I have presented a description of both of these cultures with respect to their ritual practices and mystical experiences. I now wish to conclude my thesis by analyzing the common features of ritual and experience in both these traditions.

On reviewing the material on the Tibetan practitioners and the dancers in the Sun Dance religion it becomes apparent that they both rely heavily on ritual to produce both insight and religious experience. Both traditions rely very heavily on a rich body of symbolism as well as many ritual drivers to evoke experiences that lead to spiritual growth. Ritual operates as a technique leading to liminal states in which the participant is separated from the external world and is phenomenologically empowered to enter an internal spiritual space. Symbols act as portals through which the adept enters his/her inner world, and they give form and expression to the experience within.

The Effects of Drivers in Tibetan and Sun Dance Ritual

A notable feature of the rituals employed by these two traditions is that they incorporate elements that act as "drivers" to retune the autonomic nervous system of participants. This retuning is experienced as a profound transformation of energy in the body. They further use

techniques of intentional, patterned, repetitive and structured behavior to change the state of consciousness. The Tibetan tradition incorporates four or five preliminary activities such as the prostrations, the repetitive recitation of the One Hundred Syllable Mantra, the Bodhisattva vow, and the mandala offering to prepare the consciousness of adepts for more advanced realization. Altogether, these techniques combine to re-organize both the energies and the cognitions that inform the consciousness of practitioners.

In the Sun Dance tradition, it is the dancing, drumming, whistle blowing, and the power songs that retune the autonomic nervous system and help facilitate a condition conducive to trance induction. They also help in developing the mental flexibility of the practitioner for later symbolic penetration. During these periods of repetitive input from multiple modalities, sensory input from the outside world is focused and reduced to a single wavefront, thus effectively reducing stimuli from the operational environment (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:276).

This wavefront may act to entrain a specific field of neural networks and further penetrate into internal systems which give rise to mystical experiences. One major effect of ritual and its use of repetitive sensory input is to block the activity of the dominant left cerebral hemisphere and to reduce the normal resistance of the ego to non-linear thought processes. It appears that during ritual there is a shift towards the non-dominant right hemisphere which is characterized by atemporal, image-rich functioning (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:277).

In essence, there is a shift from the normal analytical, conceptual mode of the left hemisphere to a mode that is more participatory, with emotion-ridden images rather than logical thinking predominating. Ritual behaviour retunes the autonomic nervous system, the system that directs energy to the sensorium, causing altered states

of consciousness. Activities such as mantra chanting, incessant dancing, drumming, etc., either directly activates the trophotropic system or activates the ergotropic system causing a trophotropic rebound. The result is the emergence of image-rich, atemporal experiences coupled with a structural synchronization of neural networks, and an elimination of internal conflict within the psyche. Such retuning eventually produces a state of consciousness that is characterized by deep relaxation, release of tension, numinosity, and ineffability (d' Aquili & Laughlin 1979:176).

While the repetitive act of ritual serves to quiet down the conceptual mind, symbols activate non-analytical modes of knowing. A central characteristic of all penetration techniques is to expand and modify the neurognostic structures operating in the consciousness of the participant and to increase the range of cognitions available to experience. A powerful penetration symbol such as the Tibetan Dorje Sempa and the Sun Dance buffalo can, depending on the cognitive maturity or flexibility of the individual, evoke inner symbols that, in turn, activate previously latent, genetically coded models. Supported by ritual driving techniques and followed by intense cortical activity organized about a particular symbol, ritual activity may cause structural and surface transformations producing warps and altered phases of consciousness and the arousal of transpersonal experiences. These experiential alterations are due to the alteration of habitual activities of consciousness. The inner phenomenology of adepts, arising as sensory symbolic data, may spontaneously arise from genetically coded but previously latent structures as a consequence of these practices (Webber & Laughlin 1979:5).

This explains how symbols may act as portals or doorways through which consciousness may pass to an alternate state. In turn, symbols may also act as expressions of that symbolic world. Powerful symbols may by-pass cultural and personal conditioning and may activate latent

universal symbols to conscious awareness. Once they have entered the consciousness, the consciousness will translate their meaning to best suit the cultural conditioning of the participant. For example, as I mentioned earlier many non-Tibetan participants report having visual imagery of light bulbs, milk bottles, glass water jugs and drinking glasses while visualizing Dorje Sempa (Webber 1980:60). In turn the Sun dancers may see the center pole opening, and water flowing out of it. Such experiences run very similar to Jung's idea of archetypal imagery and the communication of those archetypes with the consciousness.

Since this archetype is numinous, i.e. possesses a specific energy, it will attract to itself the contents of unconsciousness - conscious ideas that render it perceptible and hence capable of conscious realization (Jung 1956:294).

During the absorption level, with the arising of the universal model as object, many neurobiological sub-systems become activated. One sub-system that is activated is the neuroendocrine system; activation of the neuroendocrine system will retune many physiological systems associated with the object of consciousness (Webber & Laughlin 1979:16). From the text of Dorje Sempa it can be inferred that the radical transformation of consciousness begins with light and divine nectar descending from the top of one's head. The practitioner experiences his or her body as clear and powerful. With similar effect Sun Dance dancers incorporate the essence of buffalo into themselves by "eating and drinking" with the buffalo spirit, and feel energized afterwards.

During absorption, there is a unity of consciousness - only the states of consciousness connected with the universal model being activated are experienced. Everyday, normal, habitual patterns of experience drop away. For the Tibetans, the result of meditation on Dorje Sempa is a purified state of consciousness, one free from obscurations of the dualistic mode of perception that form and emptiness are two distinct and separate realities. For the Sun Dance participant it is a feeling of empowerment (accepting the power of the buffalo), and a feeling of peacefulness and freedom (soaring like an eagle).

Absorption may only last for a short time in a beginner, where the practitioner will identify himself as Dorje Sempa, or feel powerful upon encountering the buffalo; but however short, the experience is numinous due to its visual, olfactory, kinesthetic, auditory and affective intensity. The logical implication of all this is that the model responsible for the absorption sets off neurosecretory mechanisms and physiological systems that are interpreted as the universal model. Thus, the resulting phenomenological and behavioral patterns are specific to the universal model in question (Webber & Laughlin 1979:16).

Dance and Religious Traditions

During my research it became apparent to me that, although both traditions have employed sacred dance in their ritual, there are some fundamental differences in their beliefs and their objectives in participating in the dance which result in a difference in religious experience. For example, one of the main characters of the Tibetan mystery play is Lord Yama, a bull-headed deity with a group of stag- or yak-headed followers. It clearly echoes the buffalo of the Sun Dance. Some anthropologists even conclude that Lord Yama is the remnant of the pre-Buddhist Bon tradition, as the yak or stag is their most important sacrificial animal. The Tibetan Buddhists are, in any case, known to have adopted many pre-Buddhists local indigenous deities into their pantheon (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1976:79).

Aside from the fact that the bull or buffalo is a universal symbol of power that it is found in many world religious systems, for the Tibetan Buddhists to participate in the dance is to personify the state of consciousness as expressed by Lord Yama, a mind-state that is filled with selfless motivation of enlightenment, where the outer expression is ferocious in order to suppress negative mind-states. For the Sun Dance religion, participation in the dance is to accept the challenge of the buffalo and be empowered by it. Although some have experienced the buffalo spirit as a man, there is no report of any practitioners

experiencing themselves as the buffalo during the course of the dance. They do not seem to be encouraged to identify with the buffalo in the way the Tibetan practitioners are encouraged to identify with the deities. It is apparent to me that, although the symbols might look somewhat the same, owing to cultural conditioning the ultimate religious experience is different. For it is apparent that, from the Tibetan Buddhists' perspective, the deity is believed to be an emanation of their own minds; whereas the Sun Dancers experienced the buffalo as a separate independent spirit. And in the course of ritual techniques, symbols influence both meaning and the ultimate religious experience.

Moreover, it is clear that the Tibetans use the dance as a form of active sādhana, or a re-enactment of the mind-state already acquired before the dance, while the Sun Dance religion uses the dance lodge as a direct vehicle to attain ASCs. This is reflected in the fact that the Sun Dance is of longer duration, with more direct ritual drivers such as sweat lodge, food and water deprivation, and faster and faster drum beat to facilitate the trance. Moreover, more experienced dancers will dance vigorously in the final day in search of a vision.

Nevertheless, dance is a rich complex that involves many elements that help facilitate the attainment of ASCs, such as the wealth of symbolism incorporated in the ritual, the masks, the ritual garb, the dance movement, and other sensory and motor drivers such as dancing, drumming, and percussive instruments. Moreover, dancing in general leads to a feeling of empathy with fellow dancers (in Victor Turner's term, "communitas"). Meaning can also be conveyed and enhanced through non-dance activity such as the power songs and the narration of a sacred story. Small wonder throughout world esoteric traditions, sacred dance occupy an important place.

Some Implication From The Present Study.

It is obvious that different symbols evoke different religious experiences; moreover, the difference in experience is causally related

to the beliefs and ideology within a society. For the Tibetan Buddhist, the objective is to realize Nirvāṇa, a state of consciousness that realizes the emptiness of all phenomena. Many practitioners have realized this state of void experience from the meditation on Dorje Sempa. For the Sun Dance, although a certain state of absorption can be inferred from the experience of the dancers, their chief objective in participating in the dance is to encounter and accept the challenge of the buffalo and feel empowered by the experience. There appears to be no report of Sun Dance practitioners experiencing themselves to be buffalo or having the void experience typical of the Tibetan Buddhists. From my present research, it is apparent to me that symbols embedded within ritual encode very specific information and therefore, result in predictable religious experience. Moreover, in both cases, faith in the ability of the ritual is the primary factor that results in its efficacy.

Cosmologies and Ritual Experience

I now discuss The Cycle of Meaning just how this faith works tightly within a cycle of enculturation. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) first introduced the term Weltanschauung, meaning one's cosmology or image of the world (Bolle 1987:101). Cosmology refers to the set of consciously held images, doctrines, and empirical views which a particular culture has concerning the universe. In various religious traditions, the body of myths or religious texts is a natural place to look for the cosmology. Cosmologies usually depict the origin of the world, or hidden aspects of the cosmos which are beyond the scope of ordinary experience. The cosmic relations described are considered important to the harmony and well-being of society. For in order to live comfortably within a society, a person must have access to a cosmology which makes sense of immediate experience. In addition to learning what the universe is like, the individual also learns how to live harmoniously within this cosmological framework. Thus, cosmology

operates as a set of ideologies concerning life and the universe. These rules of behaviour are culturally conditioned through a process of socialization.

The important features of a society's cosmology are collectively expressed through a society's "mythopoea", a term that refers to the body of myths, rituals, art, dramas, routine dream interpretations, sacred texts and other symbolic materials expressing a society's understanding of their operational environment (Laughlin 1990:28).

The knowledge and experiences arising as a consequence of participation in a society's mythopoea are often about the "hidden" or "ineffable" aspects of reality (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:213). In the case of esoteric Buddhism, one has the idea that one arrives at an understanding of hidden things; the mystery play and the sādhanas deal with hidden reality and represent the "mysteries" in a perceivable manner. The mystery of participating in a society's mythopoea is accentuated by the mysterious atmosphere, the masks, the costume of the dancers, the mantras, the secretive dance steps, the rich symbolism within the temple, and the ceremonial regalia of the lamas. In the Sun Dance too, the eagle bone whistles, the tree ornaments, the ceremonial garb, the frenzied pace of the dancers, all add to an active sense of mystery. One has a sense of the dramatization of mythical events, a simulation of hidden reality shared by the participants. Upon present analysis, what are "hidden" or "ineffable" are the direct transpersonal experiences shared by the adepts and the gurus/shamans. Strictly speaking, what is hidden is no longer hidden, but has been revealed in direct experience.

A variety of interrelated symbols in the ritual context (e.g., the mandala depicting Dorje Sempa in his cosmic association, the relationship between the center pole, buffalo and eagle) may help to provide landmarks of psychic experience on the inner journey. Repeated experience and symbolic penetration is necessary in order to really know

the experience, the kind of knowledge that is most often attributed to specialists such as the guru or the shaman.

But the experience of the adept in both traditions, as in most other mystical traditions, is rarely left to chance. Experience must be guided, as the Tibetans repeatedly reiterate; such dangerous explorations of the psyche require an experienced guide. The Sun Dance shamans are similarly valued precisely because they "know" and "live" the tradition. Moreover, such experiences are usually incorporated into the cosmologies and expressed in the texts or myths of the tradition. These sacred texts and myths serve to frame the experience of the adept, while the shaman/guru helps to verify and interpret what an adept has experienced. The whole process works as a cycle of meaning.

The Cycle of Meaning

The cosmos is conceived in both the Tibetan tradition and the Sun Dance religion as well demarcated realms populated by celestial bodies, demons, nature spirits such as rain, lightning, and thunder. All of these are interrelated, so that a change in one element affects other elements within the unified whole.

According to biogenetic structuralism, cosmologies in essence are cognized worlds which are informed by the range of human experience. As the Buddha says: "The world is within this fathom-long carcase" (Eliade 1969:179). From the evidence of various mystical experiences and from our present analysis, it seems that we may at least metaphorically understand the rest of the universe by understanding our inner structures. A major significance of transpersonal experiences is the realization that there is more to one's being than the normal waking consciousness, that the universe we conceive of in our normal waking consciousness is but part of a greater whole consisting of multiple realities.

Access to these multiple realms is generally via manipulation of discrete phases of consciousness available mostly to the specialist who

has been trained in the requisite techniques. The drive to experience the inner realms of experience appears to be universal and dates back to antiquity. Eliade's review of the archaeological evidence points to the existence of meditative practice as far back as the European Upper Palaeolithic period 50,000 - 30,000 B.C. (Eliade 1964:503). Throughout the world's traditions, various techniques have been developed to attain ASCs; the most notable, of course, being yoga in India.

Cosmologies are not a set of logical rational propositions about the self and the universe. Rather, cosmologies are part of a dynamic interplay among many variables comprising a cycle of meaning, a set of negative feedback loops that confirm or sanction social knowledge relative to individual experience (Laughlin 1990:27). A common example of an experience which is negatively sanctioned is the experience that many in western society have had after ingestion of psychotropic drugs. Such people are considered to be "on a trip" and their experiences are devalued no matter how numinous they are. Another example is the devaluation of the experience of neurotic patients during therapy. As one modern therapist, using a method called holotropic therapy¹, writes:

Often the final outcome of the session is a deep mystical state that can be of lasting benefit and personal significance for the subject. Ironically, the routine repressive approach of traditional psychiatry to occasional spontaneous episodes of hyperventilation thus interferes with a potentially therapeutic process in some neurotic patients (Grof 1988:163).

The Three Levels of Knowledge

Knowledge may range from superficial acquaintance to deep understanding. This is certainly the case among ritual practitioners as well. The first level of knowledge is belief. Young monks/nuns in the Tibetan tradition are committed to study many years in various monastic settings. In most lineages, a major part of their days consists of

¹ A therapy that combines controlled breathing, music, sound effects, body work and mandala drawing (Grof 1988:161).

reciting and chanting the various tantras (texts). The young of the Sun Dance cultures learn their myths through the repetition of power songs and the stories told by the shamans. This is the first level of the cycle of meaning, where what is known of the cosmos is adopted from secondary sources, not through one's own direct experience.

The second level of knowing is understanding, where after many direct experiences, textual studies or symbolic materials begin to take on special meaning due to one's own direct experience.

The third level of understanding of a cosmology is through full participation in the cosmic drama. The monk/nun or dancer is now a serious contemplator and is having extraordinary experiences that confirm and sometimes elaborate what has been learned, due to the zone of uncertainty (Laughlin, McManus & d'Aquili 1992:228).

The steps that lead to deepening realization are never left to chance by traditional cultures, but are always carefully mapped out in meticulous detail by religious people. As William James once observed:

When however, a positive intellectual content is associated with a faith-state [mystic state], it gets invincibly stamped in upon belief, and this explains the passionate loyalty of religious persons everywhere to the minutest details of their so widely differing creeds (James 1986:506).

The procedure seems to be two sided: on the one hand, to protect the psychic development of the adept during such dangerous procedure; and on the other hand, to protect and perpetuate the tradition. It appears that the mystical experiences incubated in any such rituals or meditative practices are somehow predictable, and the metaphorical interpretations of those experiences are already pre-established in their mythopoea.

Divine Relevation and the Cycle Of Meaning

The cycle of meaning is a very delicate circle, and may be easily disrupted. Rituals like the sacred dance in Tibet and the Sun Dance are vulnerable to disruption or prohibition. Youngsters may come under new influences such as the Sun Dance encounters with Christianity, and this

may attract them away from their own tradition, as evidenced by the reinterpretation of many Sun Dance symbols under the Christian influence. The cycle of meaning is also vulnerable to change. From a certain historical point of view, the mystically inspired "words of the Buddha" in Buddhism, which result in hundreds and thousands of Tibetan tantras, and dance texts depicting meditative practices of various kinds may be an example of such change. Moreover, a new emphasis in mystical practice, or a new interpretation of the cosmos can happen as a result of "divine" revelation, such as the "second messenger" phenomenon in the Sun Dance. The change often comes with a new emphasis being placed within the tradition, for example, the shift from the original military emphasis of a hunting society as symbolized by the buffalo to a more peaceful reservation life as symbolized by the eagle.

The shaman/guru also occupies an important position in the cycle of meaning by controlling the setting of the ritual, the selection of texts or symbolic material to be focused upon, or the interpretation of religious experiences. However, there is always the possibility of the emergence of new symbols and new interpretations due to "divine" revelation, that transform the cosmology and thus result in a revitalization movement. Or the gurus/chamans may propagate a new world-view or a modification of the old world-view as a consequence of their own visionary experience.

Further Considerations Derived From the Present Comparative Analysis of the Tibetan Buddhists and the Sun Dance Religion

Some further important considerations of the meditation practices that we need to address are: (1) The development of cognitive flexibility due to repeated model construction; (2) Long-term influence of transpersonal phenomena; and (3) Is there sufficient evidence to make cross-cultural comparisons between ritual systems of this sort?

1. Developmental Flexibility

One of the essential characteristics of "arising and dissolving

yogas" in the Tibetan system is to strengthen one's ability to build complex model systems and the mental flexibility to move from one mental construct and one state of consciousness to another. The same principle appears to be working in the Sun Dance tradition in that, over a long period of practice, the shaman is said to be able to summon and dispatch spirits at ease. As Åke Hultkrantz has observed:

The trance requires a capacity for habitual ecstasy and frequently makes great demands on the psycho-physical capacities of the medicine man. The result is often catalepsy, convulsions, or violent personality changes, all of which are open to interpretation as possession.

(Hultkrantz 1980:99)

These meditation practices exhibit the essential characteristic of evoking intricate transformations of consciousness and their accompanying psycho-physiological effects. Meditation within these symbol systems works to loosen biological constraints on particular, habitual mental-physical constructs. In the Tibetan tradition, the indwelling deity has been chosen to balance a practitioner's temperament, or to increase a desirable trait or eliminate an undesirable trait. For example, a wrathful deity is usually chosen for a practitioner with a quick temper, one that is easily spurred to anger. The wrathful deity serves as a control or inhibition for such a temperament. For practitioners who would like to enhance their compassion or wisdom, specific Bodhisattvas such as Green or White Tārā, or Mañjuśrī are chosen. These are meditation practices that have been tested throughout the centuries to help practitioners develop more wholesome mental characteristics. In the Sun Dance religion too, many shamans report a change of psycho-physiology; for example, they may experience a shift from feelings of powerlessness, sickness or lack of self-esteem to feelings of mastery, healing empowerment, and high self-esteem as a result of these visionary experiences.

According to Jung, symbolic expression in dreams and visions has an inner purpose. The purpose is essentially the urge from the unconscious to give birth to the inner whole person through symbolic

expressions that are independent of the conscious ego. Paradoxically, the level of attainment nevertheless relies upon the realization and co-operation of the ego. Jung termed this process individuation (de Laszlo 1958:xxviii).

For Jung, in ritual action such as magical rites, invocations, and prayers the process is reversed; the individual's aim is to direct the libido artificially to introvert upon the unconscious and to render to consciousness those archetypal structures necessary for the adjustment of the ego (Jung 1956:294). The ideal human goal for Jung would involve the complete integration of conscious and unconscious material. And salvation involves the process of this integration by which experiences which are normally outside of our normal range become conscious.

Laughlin and his associates postulate that although there is no evidence that Jung practised Tibetan arising yoga, it seems apparent that he was aware of the similarity of his theory and that of the psychology inherent in Tibetan practices. Indeed, Jung wrote introductions to major Tibetan texts like The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Jung 1963b) and The Tibetan Book of The Great Liberation (Jung 1963c).

The arising yogas have been carefully chosen through countless generations to facilitate experiences that side-step the ego, giving transpersonal evidence of experience beyond the boundaries of ego. Taken as a whole, the many different varieties of arising yogas may in fact form a symbolic map of the entire psyche outside of the cognized "I". The consistent practice of arising yoga over many years may result in the most complete individuation process that is realistically possible for human beings (Laughlin, McManus & Webber 1985:91-106). The Sun Dance religion, too, seems actively to incorporate unconscious material into consciousness, as evidenced by the fact that many shamans initially join the Sun Dance owing to a call from the dream-self to participate in order to acquire power. And the intention to acquire power is not to cater to mere personal gratification, but is for the

collective good of all. The shamans are generally esteemed among both the natives and anthropologists as well-adjusted individuals. Moreover, the shamans and the dancers habitually use their dream and visionary instructions to renovate the dance, either suggesting a new song, a new dance step, or a new interpretation of some aspects of the ritual.

But as Webber & Laughlin have pointed out, there is a major difference between becoming merely intellectually aware of a universal (archetypal) model that exists within one's self and full experiencing of that model during absorption. Consider, for example, a practitioner experiencing herself to be Dorje Sempa or a dancer experiencing himself as an eagle. A penetration technique that emphasizes experiences of absorption into a universal model, over and above mere ego-identification, greatly expedites the process of individuation because it unifies the model into the totality of the human organism, and not just into conscious awareness (Webber & Laughlin 1979:16-17). There is a world of difference between a male or female having a dream or vision of an animal or cross-sex archetype such as Tārā or Jesus, and a male or female experiencing total cognitive and behavioral transformation into an animal or an aspect of the cross-sex consciousness.

2. Long Term Influence of Transpersonal Phenomenon

Another important consideration of such meditationa^l practices is the question whether there exist long term effects of transpersonal phenomena upon the psyche. Modern neuroscientific research on long term meditators repeatedly shows that in general, medi^tors exhibit a slower brain wave pattern with synchronous EEG rhythms even after cessation of the practice. Both the Dorje Sempa practice and the Sun Dance stress that in order for them to be effective, experiences derived from the meditation should be extended into normal states of consciousness. In Dorje Sempa meditation, the direct aim is to transfer the "blissful clear and powerful" qualities into normal states of consciousness. In the Sun Dance religion, the feelings of empowerment and peacefulness,

together with empathy for all fellow kinsmen in everyday life seem to predominate in descriptions.

From a Buddhist perspective, the major goal of the meditational practice is to develop compassion. Yet it is through a radical transformation of experience, as in the case of the experience of the transcendental void, that universal compassion is made genuine due to the intuitive realization of the interconnectedness of all phenomena.

As the Diamond Sutra says:

And yet although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana. And why? If in a Bodhisattva the perception of a 'being' should take place, he would not be called an 'enlightened being'.
(Diamond Sutra in Conze 1975:130).

In the Sun Dance too, dancers often feel more empowered and more compassionate after the occurrence of visionary experiences. There are many stories that circulate within the tradition about the good deeds of the dancers after they have acquired the power, and many have actually gone on to become shamans for the benefit of all.

3. Cross-Cultural Comparison

The third consideration is whether there are enough indicators of such types of experience to make cross-cultural comparisons. The conclusion is that many of the experiences described in the Dorje Sempa yoga are common to many Tibetan texts, as well as consistently reported by non-Tibetan practitioners from other cultures. In the Sun Dance tradition too, reports of visionary experiences and healing are plentiful. To quote Eliade in his classic book, Shamanism: "Shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberian and Central Asia." (Eliade 1964:4). He went on to show that: "Lamaist ideology and practice made their way deep into Central and North Asia, contributing toward giving a number of Siberian shamanism their present aspect" (Eliade 1964:441). So it is obvious that between Tibetan Buddhism and Sun Dance religion (a form of North American shamanism) there are a lot of common and comparable aspects.

But many other possible comparisons are beyond the scope of my present study. A controlled study of this kind between two different traditions is apparently rare, for in the course of my research, I found very few. Many of the symbols and meanings of the Sun Dance religion have come to us only recently through the remarkable work of Åke Hultkrantz. I hope that my own work will induce a dialogue and bring about better understanding of North American Native religions as they relate to the more global religions.

In conclusion, as evidenced from the present study, although humans have the capacity to experience a great variety of materials latent from our genetic make up (Jung's collective unconscious), they rarely experience such breadth due to the conditioning of culture. In short, cosmology gives rise to mythopoeic expression. The ritual developed within any culture's mythopoea operates to incubate important experiences. The symbolism within ritual, evokes models mediating phases and warps of consciousness. Profound transformations of consciousness and the arising of genetically coded universal models gives rise to extraordinary experiences which produce an equally profound state of awe, numinosity and ineffability in the ritual participant. It appears to me that meditative experiences are somehow predictable and that their interpretations are already pre-established in a tradition's cosmological understanding and mythopoeic expression, and that through ritual techniques symbols mediate both religious meaning and religious experience.

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