

TRANSFORMING SELVES AND SOCIETY:
WOMEN, SPIRITUAL HEALTH AND PLURALISM
IN POST-SOVIET MOSCOW

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy, The City University
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Transforming Selves and Society: Women, Spiritual Health and Pluralism in

Post-Soviet Moscow

by Larisa Honey

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Research into the lives of New Age women in contemporary Moscow offers a view of the social practices of the post-Soviet world that contradicts western preconceptions of Russia as ever leaning toward authoritarianism and offers a look at a movement working towards pluralism and tolerance that blends liberal individualist notions of freedom with collectivist ideals of social responsibility and justice. Following women on their individual paths to self-discovery, transformation and empowerment, we discover that their journeys are marked by active attempts to improve lives – their own, their families', and the broader world around them. In these attempts we see a unification of the values of individual freedom and social responsibility - civil and social rights. The New Age community in Moscow expresses a human rights agenda, opening up the possibility of uniting multiple spheres and revealing the common ground shared by a plurality of voices at the local and global levels.

Blending traditions of Russian mysticism, Soviet social values and pragmatic attitudes, New Age women have developed a unique strain of individualism tempered by a concern for collective well-being. Their lives counter prevailing stereotypes and serve as a case study in the distorting influences of hegemonic discourses that pit East against West and intensify

polarizations and extremist positions in both Russia and the West. Neither a westernizing threat to the cultural and demographic state of the Russian nation nor passive receptors of tradition, Russian New Age women turn to multiple sources of support as they actively work to transform their lives and the world about them.

Acknowledgments

Placed prominently in the front, this final piece of the dissertation writing process is perhaps the most difficult part. How far back in time do I reach? In what order? To avoid a hierarchy of thanks, I've decided to take a chronological approach, acknowledging those who have helped me along in this long dissertation process in the order of their acquaintance within this process. And so, first and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for their continuous support and encouragement in all of my varied studies and adventures. From a very young age they instilled in me a curiosity about the world and a desire to learn through experience and living rather than simply through books or media. From a very young age they also provided me with unique opportunities to explore this curiosity and learn about the world first hand. Later as I entered college and beyond they continued to support my interests, and as graduate school continued on its protracted course, as tends to be the case in such fields as anthropology, they never ceased to provide the support and understanding that perhaps only those closely involved with the world of academia can provide. Their support and love and frequent reminders that I am always welcome back into their home (an offer that I took up upon returning from the field and which greatly aided in the writing of this dissertation) has been the anchor that has allowed me to take the necessary risks to complete this long journey through the dissertation process. And while I greatly appreciate their continued offers of living space for transforming the dissertation into a book, I hope the knowledge of such a support system itself will be enough to help me confidently write the book

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atmosphere that I have come to appreciate and love about the anthropology department here. On that note, I would like to also heartily thank my cohort – particularly Friederike Fleischer, Pellegrino Luciano, Cameron McNeil, Lilly Outs, and Sara Shaoul - for providing a much needed support system – especially in those early years when we really didn't know what we had gotten ourselves into.

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XOXO!

Table of Contents

Copyright Page.....	ii
Approval Page.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
List of Illustrations.....	xiii
Note on Names.....	xiv
Chapter One – Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two – Ideological Campaigns.....	49
Chapter Three – Introduction to New Age in Moscow.....	119
Chapter Four – The Cultivated Individual.....	180
Chapter Five – Spiritual Health Journeys Begin: The Late Soviet Period.....	247
Chapter Six – Transformation and Empowerment.....	320
Chapter Seven – Alternative Spirituality and Christianity.....	393
Chapter Eight – Conclusion.....	444
Bibliography.....	455

List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Spiritual Group on the Arbat.....	56
Figure 2. Flyer of Maria Davi Khristos.....	58
Figure 3. Metro Station in Chertanova.....	127
Figure 4. My Aura.....	137
Figure 5. Temple of Peace Emblem.....	141
Figure 6. Sveta and David’s living room.....	152
Figure 7. Sidewalk to trolley.....	175
Figure 8. Running to Trolley.....	176
Figure 9. Chakra Chart of Humanity.....	238
Figure 10. Cathedral of Christ the Savior.....	248
Figure 11. Retreat Grounds.....	328
Figure 12. Preparing for the Birth Canal.....	333
Figure 13. Waiting for the Birth Canal.....	335
Figure 14. A Woman Being Reborn.....	336
Figure 15. Me after Birth Canal.....	337
Figure 16. Taana with Cosmogram.....	418
Figure 17. Sai Baba Pocket Calendar.....	434

Note on Names

I have changed the names of my primary informants except for Sveta and David, as they are published authors and public figures.

Chapter One

Introduction

This dissertation is a multilevel examination of the lives of women in contemporary Moscow who have chosen paths of positive self-transformation through participation in alternative spiritual health practices. Focusing on one main organization, whose members serve as both entrée and guides to this community, this study follows women on their journeys through the alternative spiritual health sphere as they share their individual paths to self-discovery, transformation and empowerment. These journeys are marked by active attempts to improve lives – their own, their immediate families’, as well as the broader world around them. In these attempts we can see a unification of the values of individual freedom and social responsibility - civil and social rights. Freedom of conscience and self-expression is joined to a platform of social justice that sees education, health care and adequate housing¹ as basic fundamental needs. In this sense the alternative spiritual health community of today could be understood as expressing a human rights agenda, one which opens up the possibility of uniting multiple spheres and revealing the common ground shared by a heterogeneous plurality of voices at both the local and global levels. In order to recognize this possibility, however, we must first transcend the ideological barriers that solidified during the Cold War and continue today within the hegemonic western discourse.

¹ Rights promoted by socialist countries in the International Covenant in Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Situated within Post-Soviet Russia the women of the alternative spiritual health movement find themselves at the center of an ideological struggle to embody and shape the spirit of the new Russian nation. This internal struggle is informed by a global discourse that falsely opposes East against West, communism against capitalism, individualism against collectivism, creating artificial dichotomies that in turn have worked to intensify polarizations within Russia. This discourse has fostered extremist positions in Russia and the West that obscure the expressions of pluralism within Russia and has served to cloak and conceal the moments of commonality that could further efforts to promote human rights within Russia and around the globe.

Women and spirituality have become benchmarks of the new spirit of Russia, their lives and forms taken as a litmus test for the direction of the nation, posited by extremist advocates as a choice between a traditional Orthodox Christian autocracy or a secular democratic state. The experiences of women involved with alternative spirituality reveal the flawed assumptions underlying these oppositions and show instead how intertwined they are. In their lives we see the intersection of East and West, individual and collective responsibility, modern woman and traditional mother and learn how contextual the meanings attributed to such ideal forms can be. In other words, while not oppositions, we learn that the configurations and understandings of such notions are also not universal and homogenous but rather are constituted by their cultural and social contexts. But more importantly, these women remind us of the active creativity involved in this formation and understanding of cultural forms and meanings.

They are not simply living out legacies of the Soviet period or blindly looking to the West. The anthropological perspective highlights the agency of Russian spiritual health practitioners as individuals who, while situated within ever changing social contexts, also actively choose the values, practices and agendas that suit them best (Lamphere 1997). Viewed in this way, we can see how practitioners produce unique understandings of the individual and collective, understandings which join social justice and civil liberties as one. As such, they remind us once again of the value of the age old anthropological admonition against ethnocentrism, pointing out that it should just as vigilantly be applied to such seemingly universal concepts as these.

In the rest of dissertation I use the term New Age synonymously with alternative spiritual health. I acknowledge that New Age is a problematic term, one that perhaps ironically in this case imposes a western framework onto the Russian context. I came upon this decision begrudgingly, as I explain in more detail in Chapter Three. But by situating Russia within the New Age, we can see Russia as an integral part of a global movement and come to understand just how pivotal a role Russians have had within this movement. This context helps reveal how blurred the boundaries between Russia and the West can be.

Polarizing Discourse

In many ways, the very lives of New Age women embody democratic pluralism in action, and for some active searchings for individual fulfillment and responsibility began during Soviet times, in the period leading up to perestroika. This is in direct contradiction to western-centric portrayals of Russia as anti-

modern, held back by “vestiges” or “legacies” of socialism, and lacking the active citizenry necessary for the development of democratic capitalism.² Their lives offer critical lessons about the cultural biases at the core of these portrayals and serve as a case study in the powerful and distorting influences of hegemonic discourses. I emphasize the plurality of discourses here because it is the interaction of western and Russian discourses that is ultimately crucial to the lives of Russian New Age practitioners.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia became in essence a discursive battleground. Both in Russia and the West notions such as “moral vacuum,” “ideological void,” and “chaos” entered the popular lexicon and quickly became the new “givens” of post-Soviet society.³ The meanings and implications of these terms, however, differed greatly in Russia and the West. In Russia they served to legitimate and bolster the concerns of conservative politicians and religious leaders, justifying authoritative measures to quell the perceived national crisis. In the West they became evidence of Russia’s inherent backwardness and

² While Kharkhordin’s (1999) work establishes the Soviet state’s encouragement of practices of individual development and will power, he too focuses on what he views as the conforming, self-sacrificing and duplicitous behaviors that resulted from such practices. As such, he offers a variation on these critiques of Soviet forms and interprets current notions of individualism as lacking western democratic and pluralistic values.

³ See, for example, Connor, W.R. “Filling the Vacuum left by Soviet Ideology” in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2/5/92 Vol 22.; or the quote “The economists see rapid privatization as critical in establishing ownership control over enterprises now operating in a vacuum” in the articles by Sylvia Nasar “Russians Urged to Act Fast” in *New York Times* Jan 6, 1992. By 1995 Philip Taubman of the *New York Times* sees Russia in the midst of anarchy in his article “Anarchy in Russia” (Taubman 1995). And by 1997 the situation has little improved, as we see in the introductory sentence to the *Christian Science Article*, “Medieval City Holds Key to ‘Russian Idea’: As post-communist *Russia* flails its way through a moral and ethical *vacuum* (Ford 1997). The inherent bias against Russia becomes clear in a recent *New York Times* article on a financial scandal at Harvard’s Russian program. Michael Carroll, the editor at Institutional Investor, which published an expose of the scandal, which involved American academics reaping financial gain from Russian development programs, sees their criminal turn as Russian influenced: “Russia was going to go the way of the West, so in come the best and brightest of Harvard, and this story shows how the best and the brightest started to do things the old Russia way” (Ivry 2006).

justified western intervention into Russian affairs. These discourses have worked in tandem to encourage polarizing visions which artificially position East against West, modernity against traditionalism, and democracy against totalitarianism. Dialectically entwined, these discourses quickly escalated, as imagined binary oppositions were distorted into caricatures, which in turn have served to encourage and inflame extremist views.⁴

In the West this discourse is promoted by a large body of academic literature. Long criticized by anthropologists,⁵ this view continues to hold sway in such fields as economics, public health and political science and is widely promoted in the media. In many ways it has become the prevailing western discourse about Russia and informs the debates on post-Soviet society. This literature, however, is driven by ideological assumptions and draws on stereotypes about Russia and the Soviet Union in ways that uncritically elevate the West as the model for democracy and modernization and ignores ethnographic work which has provided a much more nuanced picture of the social processes taking place during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

The post-Soviet period in Russia is commonly referred to in this literature as “the transition,” and a sharp demarcation is generally made between the social world of the Soviet period and Russian society since the fall of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 took most of the world by surprise.

⁴ This is reminiscent of ‘family values’ discourse in the United States, which is not entirely coincidental or surprising, as certain extremist activists in Russia have borrowed heavily from literature and tactics of Protestant fundamentalist movements in the U.S, as we will see in greater detail in Chapter 2.

⁵ See particularly, Burawoy 1992, 1999; Verdery 1996, 1999; Creed 1998, 1999; Woodruff 1999 whose works offered some of the first ethnographically based critiques of this “legacy” literature.

Scholars and commentators who were once thoroughly convinced of the totality of authoritarianism in the region were baffled by the “sudden” changes, but many initially welcomed the move to “democracy” and the “freedom” of capitalism. Looking back to this time, historian Richard Pipes writes that Russia has been "a great disappointment to those of us who, after the collapse of the Soviet regime, had expected the country to embark on a slow, probably uneven, but still irreversible course of westernization” (Pipes 1996: 30). As hopes of a smooth transition to capitalism and democracy faded, the newly minted field of “transitology” (see Lane 1999) began trying to make sense out of the apparent chaos that reigned and to understand why the affluence of western capitalism was not taking hold more quickly.⁶

The answers were found in Soviet and Russian “legacies,” which served to prevent post-Soviet Russia from entering the modern world (Rose 1995, 2000; Harloe 1996; Pipes 1996; Millar and Wolchik 1997; Saivetz 1997). According to Michael Harloe (1996: 5), the focus within the academic community on legacies initially was a response to IMF and World Bank assumptions that post-Soviet Russia was a “blank slate,” simply in need of capitalist institutions.

My criticisms, however, are not with the notion of “legacies” per se but with the underlying presumptions behind Russian and Soviet “legacies” within this literature. Russian and Soviet “legacies” start out with a presumption of guilt. They are viewed as the cause of enduring problems in post-Soviet society, such as

⁶ Burawoy (1992) argues that it was just this crisis within the field of Sovietology, and their failure to anticipate the collapse of USSR, which led many to advance theories of the inevitability of a capitalist turn.

increases in crime (Szelenyi 1996), poverty (Shelley 1996:136), and the declining health of the population (Rose 1995, 2000; Cockerham 2000; McKeehan 2000; Siegrist 2000). Russian and Soviet legacies are rarely shown in a positive light. And while Millar and Wolchik (1997) note that there were positive aspects within communist society, their edited collection, *The Social Legacy of Communism*, focuses on communism's negative legacies. Because their outcomes are seen as negative and unique to the post-Socialist realm, differences between East and West are interpreted as a result of continuities from the socialist period. At the ethnographic level we see a very different story, one that allows for different interpretations of contemporary events.

Due to the continued influence of Russian and Soviet legacies, so the argument goes, the Russian people do not have the required attitudes and the Russian state does not have the required institutions to build a prosperous and pluralistic democracy⁷. Political scientist Richard Rose develops this idea more fully in relation to the Russian health crisis. Rose characterizes the Soviet health care system as having a collectivist orientation and explains that due to this, patients maintained a passive relationship with the system and did not invest individual responsibility in health. He maintains that the health crisis in Russia has been particularly severe because Soviet society did not promote social cohesion. Ordinary Russians, according to Rose, isolated themselves from the

⁷ This literature is under-girded by Robert Putnam's elaborations on civil society and social capital, which are set forth as the essential ingredient in democracy building and consistently described as missing or weak in post-Soviet society. A large body of anthropological literature has developed in critique of such view. See for example Hann and Dunn 1996. A special issue of *Critique of Anthropology* offers a particularly compelling look at the biases and underlying assumptions within the civil society discourse in the West (see Doane 2001; Hearn 2001; Junghans 2001; Medeiros 2001; Schneider and Schneider 2001).

state and relied on face to face contacts. The resulting social formation was an “hour-glass society” where citizens cut links with the state in order to protect themselves from the repressive totalitarian regime, and while citizens depended on the state for social support, the lack of reciprocal contact meant that supply and demand were often left unmatched. He argues that such “anti-modern’ organizational pathologies created a stressful society with negative effects on human capital” (Rose 2000:1424). The underlying assumption here is that “collectivist” attitudes necessarily lead to passive citizens who are unable to take responsibility for their own lives.

Ideological Struggles in Russia

While it is true that the intension of such academic literature is to find solutions to socio-political problems, a noble endeavor, the biases underlying their works, I argue, obscure the complexities of life as it is actually lived and understood and promote a polarizing discourse that has had adverse consequences inside Russia, where anti-western and anti-globalization rhetoric have become easy tools for targeting opponents and demonstrating the danger of their “anti-Russian” ways. This rhetoric has been deployed in an ideological struggle within Russian society which locates New Age women – as women and alternative practitioners – at the epicenter.

At its core this is a struggle to define and mold “true” Russian culture and society. It is a struggle that sets a conservative, nationalist, Orthodox vision of Russian culture against the pluralistic vision set forth in the new Russian

Constitution. While the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church⁸ has benefited from the changed political structures in Russia, it is currently forwarding a vision that contradicts certain foundational principles of the new state. The Church has pushed – in many cases successfully – for special status – both legal and cultural – above other religious confessions in the country. It envisions a country unified under the rule of traditional Orthodox Christian principles and has been actively working to impose these principles at the legislative level.

In their struggle for greater authority, conservative Russian Orthodox Church activists have been promoting the historical ties between the Russian Orthodox Church and the State. They have called on women to embrace traditional Orthodox gender roles and have worked closely with political leaders for the passage of legislation that is in line with Orthodox values and limits the rights of non-Orthodox religious traditions. Drawing on fears brought on by westernization, globalization, terrorism, and the demographic crisis, the Church is working to portray the New Age movement as a danger to Russian culture and a threat to the Russian nation. At the same time, narrowly defined traditional female roles are lauded as the cornerstone for the establishment of a strong, healthy Russian nation. By tying gender roles to national security, the Church is able to justify and bolster its own conservative platform.

While the struggle has led to outrageous accusations and distorted portrayals of perceived opposition groups, many of their fears are based on actual western interventions into Russian society. Involvement of the IMF, the World

⁸ Here and in further references to the Orthodox Church I refer to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Bank and numerous western NGOs in Russian affairs is well document. Western aid organizations are heavily involved in the sphere of women's health (for example, WHO, Soros, Planned Parenthood). And their goals are not always in line with Russian views. In her study of the WHO's Healthy Cities Program in St. Petersburg, Michele Rivkin-Fish (2005) found that the goals of western and Russian experts were often in dispute and that even organizations with the best of intentions, hoping earnestly to lower the high maternal mortality rate (ten times higher than in the UK according to Rivkin-Fish), often did not live up to their plans to include Russian experts in their projects. Imposing western cultural meanings and outlooks with little understanding of the Russian context promoted further misunderstanding and distrust.

This context of distrust catapults extremist views to the fore of the discursive field, overshadowing and obscuring more moderate and conciliatory voices. Moderate, tolerant, and inclusive voices do exist within Orthodoxy. Some of the strongest advocates for the religious rights of non-Orthodox believers in Russia are in fact Orthodox Christians. Western discourse and interference into Russian affairs, however, provide ammunition to the more strident and fundamentalist factions within Orthodoxy, thereby muting the voices of this more humanitarian based Orthodox tradition, a tradition that draws heavily on the Soviet Orthodox martyr Alexandr Men' and particularly colors intellectual spiritual circles in Moscow, Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike.

The Soviet-Post-Soviet Divide:

Artificial Divisions, Misinterpreted Connections

In contrast to western academic portrayals, this study corroborates earlier anthropological work in post-Soviet and post-socialist societies that called into question and revealed the simplification and shortcomings of macro-analyses (Creed 1998; Burawoy and Verdery 1999). Apparent vestiges of the old order are revealed to be strategies for coping with new realities, and, conversely, seemingly new manifestations of capitalist society are shown to have existed under communism. Building on such work, my study traces the development of spiritual health and healthy life style practices and beliefs back to the final decades of the Soviet era, and reveals how women today are applying and adapting these practices for their own survival, transformation, empowerment, and even happiness. I argue that the democratic pluralism these women's lives embody has been developing in Russian society since before *perestroika*. Their practices and beliefs complexly blend traditions of Russian mysticism, Soviet social values and pragmatic can-do attitudes, creating a unique strain of individualism tempered by a concern for collective well-being. Embracing select culturally constructed notions about their gender and their heritage, they tap into both as sources for self-empowerment. Rejecting certain intolerant and absolutist inclinations of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy as well as the conflict and aggression associated with political activism, these women selectively incorporate Orthodox and Russian traditions into their lives and acquire a sense of spiritual strength from their interactions with the Church and important Christian personages.⁹

⁹ Their complex negotiations between Orthodox beliefs and alternative practices to a certain extent harkens to Orthodoxy's beginnings in Russia. Characterized by *dvoeverie* (dual-belief), this early

Still, many feel a certain alienation from the Church hierarchy and dogmas. They question the Orthodox tradition of redemption through suffering as well as the Soviet virtue of deprivation and self-sacrifice, instead creating systems of belief and practice that acknowledge the lessons to be learned from suffering and crisis but focus on the joy that can be found in life on earth today. The body and physical health are the building blocks for attaining these goals. Similarly critical of autocratic and oppressive practices of the State – both Soviet and post-Soviet – they at once embrace new freedoms of expression and liberty as well as the social rights promoted by the Soviet Union, all the while maintaining deep concerns about the fragility of both.

Rather than finding such social values and collectivist sentiments to be alienating or signs of a passive populous, my work supports Melissa Caldwell's (2004) argument that the behaviors and strategies found within a system of social welfare can foster social cohesion and a flexible and resilient populous. Where she found social cohesion and active individualist agency in the tactics and social lives in Moscow soup kitchens, I found a strong sense of community, a reverence for 'the collective' within Russian New Age circles, where individual achievement was equally admired. Members of the New Age continue to create this sense of a collective community through their participation in spiritual "trainings" and their membership in spiritual health groups.

One of the particularly fruitful innovations of early anthropological work on post-socialist societies can be traced to a reconfiguration of the socialist - post-

Church incorporated many pagan rituals and practices (Levin 1991, 45).

socialist divide that focused instead on dialectical processes and the ongoing production of unique systems of meaning and socio-political contexts. Attending to the productive space of “micro worlds” (Burawoy and Verdery 1999) allowed ethnographers to capture real-life processes in action and to avoid the problems imposed by the term post-socialism itself. Speaking about the support for socialist parties in post-socialist Eastern Europe, Creed explains, “But if we begin instead with the idea that political categories are themselves dynamic, taking on different meanings and functions as they are embraced and deployed, we can see something different happening. Old forms and symbols are being redefined as they are mobilized for new objectives in new political and economic contexts” (*ibid.*: 225). What at first appeared to be holdovers or “legacies” in post-socialist Bulgaria, he found were in fact often quite differently negotiated and understood by Bulgarians themselves. Support for socialist ideas or political candidates often developed out of contemporary real life struggles rather than as a result of ingrained attitudes or nostalgia (*ibid.*: 224). While my work does not focus on the production of political or economic systems, thinking in terms of dialectical processes over time helps to avoid the evolutionary notions underlying the idea of transition and to examine socialist and post-socialist processes on their own terms.

If we borrow from Harvey’s analysis of capitalism and look at socialism as an inherently crisis prone system in a struggle for survival then we are able to steer away from the evolutionary assumptions that underlie “the transition” and we can start to examine the changes in terms of a dialectical struggle between

forces both within the system and from the outside (Harvey 1989). Just as capitalist space is constantly in flux, in a struggle to overcome crises, and as a result transformed from a Fordist to a system of flexible accumulation, so socialism too changed over time in order to cope with crises. For example, if *perestroika* is understood as a socialist attempt to deal with particular crises, then it can be understood as a socialist phenomenon and not necessarily as an early sign of capitalist development. The fact that in the end the socialist system did crumble would then not necessarily be taken as proof that “the fall” was inevitable, (or that it was in fact a “fall”). Creed offers an illustration of this process in his discussions of agriculture in socialist Bulgaria, where he found that villagers’ strategies to accommodate socialist structures to their needs often led to new structures and arrangements unforeseen by state planners. He notes that these at times conflicting innovations “provoked state redress through escalating reform programs, which in turn induced villagers and others to make new accommodations, further integrating the socialist system and provoking more radical reforms” (Creed 1998: 5).

The examination of this dynamic process leads naturally to an interrogation of the very concept “post-socialist,” especially since many of the traits attributed to post-socialism or socialism are so intricately intertwined, as much anthropological research has revealed. Post-socialist implies first of all that what went before was itself socialist and, furthermore, that socialism was a unified system. Second, it implies a radical break from the past, that socialism ended and that now these societies have developed entirely new socio-economic

systems, i.e. capitalist market economies and perhaps political and cultural systems as well. However, while capitalism may be making inroads into the economic system, particularly with the drive towards privatization, elements of the socialist system remain in place in representations, in the imagination and to a large extent in material life. This point is particularly important for the understanding of “post-socialist” societies because of the current struggle amongst various factions (both inside and outside such societies) to represent, define and shape the development of current social processes. This struggle is particularly acute, for, as Harvey notes in reference to the contested vision of the Acropolis,¹⁰ it is “not simply about the proper interpretation of the past, the authenticity of this or that collective memory, but it is also about all hopes for the future. To release a different imaginary concerning the past is to release a different imaginary as to possibilities in the future” (Harvey 1996: 309). Transposed onto the Russian context, this idea underscores the significance and tremendous stakes involved in the polarizing discourse between East and West and in turn the ideological campaigns of the Orthodox Church, which hope to narrow the historical visions of the past and present it in ways that would greatly limit the future possibilities of a plurality of voices inside Russia. It is only a close contextual exploration of the dynamics of these struggles that their contemporary understandings and consequences come through.

Dialectical Constructions of Individualism, Collectivism and the Cultured Citizen

¹⁰ In this case between those “who appropriate the Acropolis as a symbol of the origins of western civilization” and those who “respect it as a living monument embedded in the history of Greek geopolitical and political-economic struggles (Harvey 1996, 310).

It is within this dynamic context that the Russian New Age scene of today must be understood. It is not simply a mix of East and West. It is not western neo-liberalism wedded to Soviet communism. Within the Soviet period unique processes and interactions developed contextually specific understandings of and approaches to such notions as “individualism”, “collectivism” and the “cultured citizen” that do not translate directly into the same culturally constructed understandings of such notions in the West. It is those Soviet constructions that are now in dialogue with the West. I suggest that the practices and beliefs of the Russian New Age reflect a unique Russian interpretation of individualism that incorporates notions of the collective. Rather than standing alone, the support and social bonds created within the collective provide the individual with the confidence to pursue self development and creativity, in other words, the cultured citizen.

This argument is fundamentally different from that put forth by Kharkhordin (1999), who also sees the development within Soviet society of a particular understanding of individualism and collectivism. In his work he explains how “work on the self” was an integral part of the Soviet educational system and ideology, creating a particular focus on the individual that encouraged the development of the Soviet “New Man.” He argues that the focus on the individual here was ultimately aimed at the collapse of individual desires into those of state collective ideals. Soviet citizens, he argues, were called on to develop their wills in order to learn how to control their own desires. Kharkhordin focuses his work on the processes of self-critique and the public

shaming that took place during critiques of individuals within the collective. Here the individual and collective take on the ominous roles of enforcers of Soviet morality. Any actual expressions of individuality were unintended consequences and resulted in duplicitous behavior by people forced to hide their individualism from the collective and the state.

I contend that the individualism expressed so fervently within contemporary alternative spiritual health circles in Moscow is in large part indeed a Soviet cultural construction, reflecting an on-going dialogue with culturally constructed understandings that continues into the present. But unlike Kharkhordin's duplicitous rebels, who publicly abided by the state's practices but privately disagreed with or disregarded them, or the self-criticizers whose sense of the collective was formed by its practices of conforming critique, the women I worked with found comfort and support in their collective spaces and, working earnestly towards self-improvement, they developed strong notions of individual worth, importance and responsibility. Their strivings toward creative individuality included a strong sense of responsibility to the social sphere. They did not fully reject or accept Soviet ideals, but through their actual practices they helped form particular understandings and interpretations of them that they in turn integrated in their lives.

Ever working to elevate and cultivate themselves and the world about them, members of the Russian New Age, in fact, might even reflect the revolutionary spirit of the avant-garde, those members of the revolution whose creativity, intellect and ethics would lead the way. Drawing on Yurchak (2006), I

propose that they are in a sense perhaps even the spiritual avant-garde of the new era. In the Soviet context, according to Yurchak, emphasis was placed on the need for revolutionary education. The ‘liberation of culture and consciousness in communism’ could only come about through the education and cultivation of the population (Yurchak: 12). We find several of the principle characteristics of the New Age encompassed in the seemingly paradoxical ideology that developed during the Soviet period. As the avant-garde became institutionalized, Yurchak explains, “The Soviet citizen was called upon to submit completely to party leadership, to cultivate a collectivist ethic, and repress individualism, while at the same time becoming an enlightened and independent-minded individual who pursues knowledge and is inquisitive and creative” (*ibid*: 11). While presented in somewhat exaggerated form for illustrative purposes, all but the first exhortation characterize the spiritual health community I encountered (and in fact the first can even be seen in their belief in absolute Cosmic Laws). While the goals appear paradoxical and mutually exclusive, Yurchak argues that the late Soviet state allowed for and actually participated in the development of new spaces for expression, what he calls a deterritorializing milieu. Within this milieu citizens could enjoy multiple outlets for creative pursuits – often promoted and supported by the state. In other words, the state to a certain extent was involved in a dialectical process which encouraged enlightenment and independent-mindedness, which, according to Yurchak, contributed ultimately to the demise of the state. Yet the particularly important point Yurchak notes here, which parallels Creed’s (1998) economic model, is that many of these creative actors were not

dissidents or opponents of the state system but in fact were in agreement with many of the basic Soviet values (Yurchak 2006).

With the collapse of the Soviet state, members of the alternative spiritual health community continue their avant-garde role as spiritual and ethical teachers. The significance of civilizing acts, or becoming a “cultured” person is also noted in other anthropological works on Russia¹¹ (Boym 1999; Lemon 2000; Humphrey 2002; Rivkin-Fish 2005; Yurchak 2006), and plays a central role in the philosophical outlook of the practitioners of alternative spiritual health with whom I worked in Russia. I would submit that the continued focus on education and the development of the spiritually elevated individual reflects a certain Soviet individualism that is now interacting with a more globalized Russian space. In other words, not all signs of individualism, personal responsibility and elevated culture are symbolic of westernization. And just as importantly, not all Soviet influences serve to repress and hold people down.

New Age practitioners’ contemporary expressions of this avant-garde spirit, furthermore, are not simply holdovers or reflections of revolutionary socialist thinking or Soviet mentality. Instead they reflect, I suggest, a certain value placed on education and cultural development that was encouraged during the Soviet period and continues to be a source of pride for Russian intellectuals. The avenues for their expression and the ideas and methodologies they promote are not bounded in time but rather continue to transform and develop in dialogue with contemporary Russian life as well as worlds far beyond the borders of

¹¹ And interestingly appears to play a significant role in Chinese health practices (Farquhar and Zhang 2005; Zito (2006).

Russia. And while they promote certain ideals supported during the socialist period, the formulations and understandings are conscious choices made in reflection and interaction with the contemporary world. In other words, the demise of the Soviet system did not leave them either in an ideological void or encrusted in old ways of thinking. Their methodologies and approaches help them to make active assessments of their present circumstances, assessments that see the value of certain structures and ideas from the past.

Only now in post-Soviet Russia a new paradox has arisen. Rather than absolute obedience to the state, the authoritative framework ruling New Age practitioners' lives is the notion of Cosmic Laws, which, ironically, may prove much more difficult to evade or negotiate than Soviet laws. Again, however, the New Age practitioners, much as the late Soviet citizens of Yurchak's work and the socialist Bulgarian villagers described by Creed, have found ways of circumscribing and working within the absolute bounds of these laws without actually breaking or going against them. In the end they subscribe to one primary law, at heart deeply pragmatic: the truth is whatever works.

An Ethnographic View of New Age Women

Through the anthropological approach of listening to people's words and abandoning pre-determined frameworks, I came to learn of the deep roots of these alternative spiritual health practices and of their importance throughout Russian history. This was not a spiritual revival brought on by the end of Communism, as I had originally thought during my studies of religion in the early 1990s. It was an ongoing process. By listening to their stories I came to see the many practices

beyond the officially sanctioned State religions – and I learned that these practices had a long history and were intimately connected with the official religious practices in ways not publicized by the official religions or the State.

By following the stories of women in the New Age, I further came to learn about the New Age itself and what it offers as a way of understanding Russian society and the processes of globalization. The New Age offers a bouquet of diverse and at times conflicting beliefs and practices that defy easy definition and resist simple frameworks. Based upon a syncretic belief system that is inherently global in its world view, the New Age movement freely borrows ideas and practices from cultures, religions and mythologies throughout the world. With a unifying impulse that envisions a plurality of voices joined as one, the movement promotes religious freedom, tolerance and encourages the development of the individual and personal responsibility. It would be easy to mistake this global enthusiasm as support for globalization and westernization more generally. Members of the New Age movement in Russia, however, resist simple binary oppositions that paint globalization as either universally positive and inevitable or universally oppressive and inevitably threatening to indigenous cultural particularities. Acutely aware of the negative social and cultural effects of globalization, the movement offers a critical assessment of the materialization and Americanization that, according to practitioners, has left many in Russia impoverished – both economically and spiritually. Russian New Age practitioners are selective in their borrowings from the West. They find spiritual guidance in Russian authors and practices little known in the West, and despite

their promotion of global unification, many are certain of a coming spiritual rebirth in Russia. Just like life more generally, we find that the New Age in Russia is filled with contradictions rather than easy definition. It is at once universal and hierarchical, global and national, individual and social. It is both a glorification and a scathing critique of globalization, and as such offers a fascinating avenue for exploration that is open to the fullness and depth of life lived in Russian society.

Based on ethnographic methods, this dissertation illuminates the world-views and practices of women involved in a growing New Age movement that is characterized by a focus on healthy living, spiritual eclecticism, positive thinking and the limitless potentials that lie within every human being. These elements all reflect avenues for improving the lives of practitioners and raising the consciousness and quality of life of those around them. This movement draws on many sources, finding inspiration in Western, Eastern, and Russian ideas and often looking deep into ancient or even mythical worlds to bolster the authenticity of particular practices. In contrast to the stereotypical view of Russian women as perpetual victims of suffering, misfortune and discrimination, these women have chosen an active approach which draws on feminine qualities for strength and power, and they search for concrete steps to overcome and learn from the obstacles life presents them. Motherhood is a central part of their value system and practice. No less so in fact than for the more conservative members of Russian society. Again, however, the meanings attributed to motherhood and birth differ significantly. Within the New Age, the ability to give birth and the

intuition and nurturing powers that are thought to accompany this experience are believed to endow women with natural healing and mystical powers, and the high regard for such powers is reflected in the many New Age methodologies and practices that focus on birth and rebirth experiences. The importance of birth cannot be overemphasized. For me this is almost ironic. I began my research determined to avoid the already well analyzed topic of reproductive health, but two of the primary methodologies of the main New Age group I worked with are called Rebirthing and the Birth Canal. Of course the central symbolic value of motherhood and birth are not surprising in Russia. Moist Mother Earth has long been a symbol of Russia, a trope sexologist Igor Kon (1997: 17) suggests was used to denote Russia's eternal weakness and eternal status as a slave. And the powers of folk healers, the majority of whom were women in pre-Revolutionary Russia (Glickman 1991), were regularly called on to perform birth rituals, in medieval Russia considered spiritually significant events (Levin 1991). But today's understandings are perhaps of a different sort, at once mystical and political, for, as Rivkin-Fish notes, female sexuality and motherhood are often central ideological figures within cultural struggles (Rivkin-Fish 1999).

While many of the alternative practices lead women to new worlds beyond the physical sphere, I found the methods and trainings New Age women experience to be at their core deeply personal and grounded. The methods pushed them to reflect deeply upon themselves, the choices they had made in their lives, their relationships and interactions with others, and their dreams for the future. Through methods of self-examination, the women came to see their own role in

creating their destinies – both positive and negative ones – and formulated plans for creating positive futures for themselves and their families. Such methods are notable for the agency they endow, even when the plans themselves are often thwarted. The trainings and courses also provide a physical space for the creation of community, and they offer concrete guides – both spiritual and physical – for their self-exploration and transformation. Through regular meetings, trainings and retreats the women formed close bonds and a sense of family. They also learned concrete steps and guidelines for embarking on self-exploration and found mentors and spiritual guides to help them move forward and grow.

The spiritual health activities also provide outlets for social critique. While few in the New Age seem politically active, these groups were sometimes described as responses to larger social crises that opened avenues for instigating social change at the personal level. Individual behavior, attitudes and even thoughts are believed to influence in positive ways the people and the world around them. Ultimately, many within this movement hope for a transformation that far transcends the personal sphere. Their weekly meditations allow them to extend their reach to social and political issues such as violence, racism, ecological destruction and war. While skeptical of this as a method of direct global influence, the meditations do offer a space for new ways of thinking and open up new possibilities for imagining the world. Some members reach beyond this mental level of engagement and volunteer in activities to help in more concrete ways closer to home, working in orphanages, senior citizen centers, and providing clothing for the very poor. Others have much grander visions.

Imagining Russia as the center of a coming spiritual era, commonly referred to as the Age of Aquarius, they are engaged in activities to help bring their dreams of peace, tolerance and spiritual evolution to fruition at a global level.

Assumptions Cloud the View

The ethnographic look at the lives of women involved with New Age practices revealed shortcomings in some of the assumptions I brought with me into the field. Ethnographic experiences made me confront my personal assumptions about religion, gender relations, the New Age, and scholarly assumptions about the Soviet and post-Soviet divide as well as one dimensional characterizations of Soviet and post-Soviet mentality as passive and dependent on the patronizing guidance and support of the State¹².

My prior research in Russia, carried out in the early 1990s, had focused primarily on the Orthodox Church and Western Christian missionaries. I was aware of their united efforts to ban abortion and promote traditional families – calling on women to return to their “proper” place in the home. In 1994 I had witnessed one of their joint campaigns against non-Christian religions, a conference that painted a broad cross-section of religious movements as dangerous cults. I imagined a deep gulf separated the Christian and non-Christian groups. This opinion persisted despite my own experiences with friends who incorporated a variety of religious practices into their lives. Several of my friends were christened and would occasionally attend an Orthodox service to light a candle or ask for a blessing, and yet they showed interest in eastern religions, learning about acupuncture, yoga, and Chinese horoscopes. Such blending of

¹² See particularly Rose 2000; and Cockerham 2000.

religious beliefs did not at first alter my perception of division because none of these friends were devoutly Christian and none were members of a non-Christian group or even movement. It was only later, months into my new research on women's health, that I first became aware of the complexity of the ways people intertwined their Orthodox and non-Orthodox beliefs.

The first major challenge to my assumptions came when Kostya, a devoutly Orthodox Christian friend, invited me to attend water-birthing classes with him and his wife, which they were taking in preparation for the birth of their second child. These classes were led by two "spiritual midwives" at the latest project of the premier promoter of New Age ideas in Moscow. This event was key to the reassessment of my research goals and initiated the new phase that brought me into close contact with the New Age in Moscow and re-focused my work on the spiritual aspects of women's health and the convergence of the competing ideologies their lives embody. It was only through this ethnographic experience with women committed to New Age beliefs and deeply connected to Orthodox Christianity that I came to understand the artifice and inaccuracy of such clear-cut divisions and to see the underlying political and ideological battle involved with their promotion, as well as the on-going vigilance such a battle imposes on those viewed as standing on the wrong side of the battle field. And it was only through such an approach that I came to see how seamlessly New Age women blend ideas from seemingly disparate spheres. At the level of personal practice and bodily expression these women live the values of democratic pluralism with a sophistication that allows them to find refuge, comfort and a

historical connection with Orthodoxy while at the same time escaping its bounds. It enables them at once to embrace the traditional gender roles of motherhood and childbirth and to gain strength and power from them in some very non-traditional ways. And this sophistication allows these New Age women to welcome practices and beliefs from around the globe without losing themselves in either the conforming or materialistic elements of globalization.

The stories of New Age women contradict “the fall” as the decisive turning point in their lives, pointing rather to the very personal nature of their entrance into the sphere of alternative spiritual health. Certainly the post-Soviet period offered a much more public forum than had existed before and allowed for the blossoming of a fully fledged New Age movement, and post-Soviet Moscow is characterized by tremendous change and economic instability. These women, however, did not view their lives in terms of Soviet and post-Soviet. Many were well on their path to transformation long before the Soviet Union fell. Others only came to the New Age years later. Significant changes and transformations were marked and motivated by personal life events, such as marriage, illness or the birth of a child. Their stories and experiences reveal the centrality of the body as both the impetus for change and the source for personal and social transformation. They challenge the West’s fixation on the dramatic split caused by the fall, and the view of the political-economic transition as the sole frame for virtually all contemporary phenomena in Russia. In these stories we see the fall as simply one of a multitude of events in an ever changing life. They also challenge attempts at simple categorization – both by scholars and ideologues.

Try as I might to elicit descriptions of how their lives changed after the fall of communism, the women I spoke with resisted such easy demarcations. The research presented here contributes to the discussion of transition, but joins other anthropological work that steers away from modernization theories with predetermined assessment. Focusing on real-life situations, my research moves the conversation towards the notion of transformation. What I discovered during my research in Moscow was a large sector of women involved in personal, spiritual and social transformations. This transformative drive was not dependent on a particular political or economic system. Many had created spaces for transformation in their lives long before the fall of the Soviet Union. Rather than viewing their lives in terms of a reaction to the social transition caused by the collapse of the political-economic system, these women told stories of self-transformation that transcended the structural changes occurring around them. I found a strong transformative impulse amongst these women living in Moscow, a drive to transform and improve themselves and the broader society in which they lived as well as the world beyond the geographical borders of the Russian Federation.

Typical of their responses was the somewhat exasperated “Well, I was younger then” given to me by Lena, an engineer in her mid thirties, when I asked her how her life had changed since the fall of the Soviet Union. There was no easy or clear-cut split in their minds between the period before and after the fall. While some spoke of the difficulty of obtaining literature or the need to practice their beliefs in secret during Soviet times, others recalled feeling free in their

expressions of belief, and many of the women's recollections from that period were positive. Perhaps looking back with a note of nostalgia, they often spoke of the so-called "stagnant" Brezhnev period as a time of stability and abundance. One woman delighted in telling me about the caviar sandwiches her mother used to send her off to school with in the morning. Back then it was just the norm for them, she recalled, since they came from the south of Russia. Often the women would light up briefly when they recounted stories of their travels around the country and "near abroad," as they referred to the Eastern European countries open to them at the time. Most could no longer afford such extravagances.

The women I worked with did not by any means long for the return of the Soviet system, but they did express regret at what they saw as the passing of certain values and humane support systems. They did not reject the Soviet system wholesale. They strongly supported the continued operation of state-funded education, medical care and social welfare protections for mothers, the poor and the elderly. Thankful to be working in the open and freely able to promote their work and practices, they feared a decline in the spiritual, ethical and educational levels of the society and were saddened by what they perceived as signs of the devaluation of human relations in favor of material gain. They feared the influence of superficial American materialism or greed and the accompanying increase in crime and human suffering such values produced. But they were by no means anti-American or anti-western. In fact, the main group I worked with bases their method primarily on an American technique. American and European New Age works are widely read and esteemed by this group and the New Age as

a whole in Moscow. And they valued highly their interactions with American and European New Age practitioners, acknowledging a great debt to their ideas and methodologies.

While certainly many of the struggles they discussed with me were grounded in the day to day socio-economic realities of the particular system in which they lived, the women structured their stories along different lines and punctuated them within the language of significant personal events. Time and again the significant moments of transition coincided with changes in their personal lives, be they marriage, the birth of a child, or even the move to Moscow itself. Many of these significant transformations were instigated by changes in their health or the health of a loved one. For many the search for physical transformation led to or coincided with a spiritual transformation, as they explored and searched for answers in various spheres as well as within themselves. The goal of reaching a state of maximum health turned into a maximization of inner potential and spiritual growth that often led to experimentation with ideas and practices far removed from the state medical system, Soviet health propaganda and the religious traditions of the period, be it Soviet or post-Soviet. It is this group of women who were involved in alternative spiritual health practices in Moscow in the early years of this century who became the subject of my research endeavor. And it was indeed a process of becoming – of realizing the significance of women involved in the alternative spiritual health movement in Russia today.

The Transformation of Research

When I originally set off to conduct my research in Moscow in the dead of winter of the year 2000, I was driven by an interest in women's health in the post-Soviet transitional period. I hoped to gain an understanding of how women were coping with the changed social circumstances that had led to the crumbling of state social services, including the health-care system. Over the course of eleven months I visited several hospitals, both private and state-run, and conducted formal interviews with 40 women about their health, their life-styles and living conditions. The bulk of these interviews were conducted in hospital settings – the trauma ward of a state hospital, and the gynecological ward of a state hospital that offers private services for women outside the geographical area it serves. I also interviewed women at a small elementary school and an art work collective. While these were women of various economic and educational backgrounds and their ages varied widely, the common thread that united most of them was an attitude of general avoidance of the state health sector. Most insisted that they only interacted with the state system when they absolutely needed to, which for many it turns out is actually quite frequently. Sick days from work require a doctor's notice, pensioners make frequent visits for medication, and many activities require certifications of health, such as swimming privileges at certain sports facilities. Despite this unavoidable interaction with the state system, it became clear that much was going on well beyond its scope. It also became clear that a significant movement much akin to the New Age movement in the west was taking place in Moscow and that women were a driving force behind it. Far from the stereotype of the passive Soviet health consumer, these women were actively

working to transform their health and the health of the environment in which they lived. And while physical health may have been a starting point for many, those involved with this New Age movement came to see their mission as transcending the physical level and entering into the emotional, moral and spiritual realms.

In my initial interviews women discussed with me the various exercises they did to stay fit, the foods they saw as contributing to a healthy diet, and the herbal and home remedies they took to maintain their health and deal with minor illnesses. I found out that many read the popular health magazines and were familiar with many of the new self-help health books available all over the city. I also discovered some of the myriad avenues some took to control chronic or more serious health issues before finally turning to the state sector. Some of these included more traditional Russian practices such as visits to Orthodox religious healers, clairvoyants, or village folk healers. During these early months of my research I also came across countless alternative healing methods. Some of the more frequently mentioned were yoga, qigong, visits to the chiropractor, attempts to improve health through feng shui, acupuncture, Herbalife, supplements, computer diagnostics and water birthing. The television and print media also offered a glimpse at the health methods available to the general public. Gadgets such as lasers, zirkonian bracelets, exercise belts and fountain of youth water ionizers were regularly advertised on television as were various patented methodologies developed by Russian health “experts”. I put expert in quotations because there were no regulations, and anyone could present themselves as an

expert or even doctor in advertisements without providing a disclaimer¹³. It was difficult to determine the veracity of credentials or claims, and the legitimacy of practitioners and their methods became a frequent topic of conversation and concern amongst people involved with the alternative health sphere.

It was during this initial stage of my research that I also came across for the first time the Russian science of health, Valeology. I was introduced through friends to Yevgenii Kuznetsov, a professor of Valeology, who presented me with a signed copy of his book *New Valeology for a New Time*. He spoke about the importance of harmony - yin/yang – within oneself and between the genders and the power of positive thinking for the attainment of good health and good social relations. At first intrigued that, contrary to western literature about Soviet health, a healthy living movement had developed during Soviet times, I later found key notions from our brief conversation reappearing in other discussions and health methods. Of particular importance is the power and significance of thoughts¹⁴.

It was also through Valeology that I happened upon the simmering conflict currently raging between the Orthodox Church and the New Age movement in general. Kostya, my Orthodox friend taking the water birthing classes with his wife Lena at the New Age center, worked at an Orthodox center called “Life” (Zhizn’) which was established to promote the Church’s pro-life

¹³ For a discussion of this problem see an article by Chizhov (2001) in the Russian newspaper *Argumenti I Fakti*.

¹⁴ I remember being particularly struck by his insistence upon the importance of pleasant and “elevated” classical music and the detrimental effects of rock music, which seemed to both hearken back to Soviet proclamations against rock and to resonate with American campaigns to protect children from harmful music through parental consent labels.

stance on abortion. On a tour of the Center I found that in addition to the western anti-abortion literature and materials, there were prominently displayed Russian pamphlets decrying the “demographic war” on Russia, the dangers of Valeology, and the threat posed by sex education. The Orthodox literature linked together a common nemesis made up of Russian and western New Age sex educators set on trampling traditional Russian values and lowering the birth rate of the nation. The dissonance I found in this episode – between the blending of Orthodox and New Age practices that I encountered with Kostya and Lena (an icon painter by profession) and the outright denouncement of the New Age by the Church hierarchy – sent me rushing back to my field notes from earlier work with the Orthodox Church in Russia during the mid-1990s where I found similar pronouncements that equated the New Age with cults.

Such perilous statements did not resonate with my own brief encounters with the New Age. The kindly and distinguished-looking professor of Valeology with his tweed suit and mild manner spoke about the joys of going to the theater, listening to classical music and living a healthy life style. He certainly did not have a threatening tone nor did he intimate a desire to impose his beliefs on others. Similarly, I felt only warmth and concern for the health and wellbeing of the mothers at the water birthing course. How were these people threatening the Russian nation and contributing to the demographic crisis?

Clearly a new formulation of my research questions was in order. Monumental changes were taking place within the spiritual and health spheres of Russian society, and women were not only an instrumental force behind the

transformation but also a target of new political-spiritual dynamics in which the Orthodox Church and conservative political leaders were joining forces and gaining a foothold in their attempts to influence the direction of the new Russia. At the same time, political-economic changes were at once providing new opportunities for women within the sphere of alternative spiritual health and creating new constraints, stresses, and hardships that made the alternative practices all the more appealing to women. Although, as noted, they are generally not overtly political in orientation, the movement provides women with a space and language to critique the social conditions in which they live (economic globalization, heartless capitalism, empty Americanization, as well as oppressive tendencies of the Church) while offering them tools for transforming and empowering themselves to flourish in their new circumstances, providing them with access to intellectual and spiritual ideas from around the globe, and helping them to enact change in the world through methods that fit with their spiritual orientations.

In order to capture a slice of this New Age movement in Russia and the women involved, I revamped my proposal, closed the book on the hospital environment, and set forth to immerse myself in the New Age sphere in Moscow. The result was a study that explores the sphere of New Age through the activities and workings of one particular Moscow organization, Voskhozhdenie (Ascension) and its members. My involvement with this organization and friendships with several of the members led me through a journey that extends far beyond the methodological, philosophical and geographical confines of this one

particular group. In fact, I found that people involved with the New Age movement in Moscow tend to be on a journey of self exploration that leads them through many different practices in the form of “trainings” and many different spiritual orientations which are augmented with readings, lectures, rituals and pilgrimages (both mental and physical). While they may make their spiritual home within one particular organization, none limit their experiences to one particular method or philosophy. Through my involvement with this one group I was able to participate in several types of trainings. Lectures, retreats, interviews and conversations introduced me to far more practices and philosophies, opening up whole new worlds and ways of seeing I had never before considered or taken seriously.

In fact, while initially drawn to New Age participants for their warmth and tolerance of multiple viewpoints, I entered into this sphere with plenty of my own biases against the New Age in general. Certain key figures and organizations, such as Rajneesh and Dionetics have been vilified in the western media as frauds and even sexual deviants, who conned adherents out of their money and possessions. Rajneesh was charged with immigration fraud and deported from the United States in 1986. Mostly, however, I did not connect the New Age with organized cults. Instead I associated the New Age with people disconnected from reality, who preferred superstition and magic to science and real world matters. In my mind New Agers were people with their heads in the clouds. They were a bit too hokey, even wacky. I felt that their beliefs served as obstacles to reasoned debate on serious issues of the environment, globalization and human rights.

Eliciting eye-rolling from western scientists and academics of all persuasions, their tree-hugging idealism tainted progressive movements, turning them into easy targets. What I discovered instead was the role the biases of academic communities have played in thwarting the participation of New Age believers in such debates. The New Age practitioners I found in Moscow were highly educated, many with strong scientific backgrounds. Rejecting neither science nor religion, they sought out ways to integrate the two. And while their beliefs and practices incorporated elements not visible to the human eye, their orientations and applications were grounded in real world issues, geared toward the solution of real problems, be they personal, social, environmental or global. I also found that the scientific community seemed much more open to New Age ideas, as the directors of Voskhozhdenie were frequently invited to participate in academic scientific conferences.

At their core, the methods developed and used by Voskhozhdenie are practical guides to living and finding happiness, a state not often associated with Russia, known more for its Orthodox martyrs, each more suffering than the next, or the sad suffering characters of Dostoevsky, Chekov and Gogol. The nineteenth century Russian philosopher Rozanov captured this more common sentiment when he noted: “We chose a religion of suffering. And see, now we suffer and suffer” (Nekrasov 2002: 88). Anthropologist Nancy Ries found during *perestroika* even a ritualization of every day talk where each person tried to out do the next with their stories of suffering (Ries 1997). The directors of Voskhozhdenie disregard such stereotypical behaviors. Their first book is even

called *How to Live in Happiness or the Latest Model of the Universe*, pointing to the practical as well as elevated elements of their methods and embracing the value of emotional happiness.

Voskhozhdenie is a spiritual and esoteric movement and their world view is constructed from these unseen elements. At the same time, they are a psychological organization and their methods aim at helping people improve their wellbeing here in the visible world. Their methods involve the integration of the spirit, the mind, and the body. Based on Jungian theories of the unconscious mind, they point to the untapped potential of the human brain to empower and heal. Their methods offer practical guidelines for discovering one's inner potentials (a notion very close to the "human reserves" research conducted by Soviet scientists), for improving one's self image and enhancing relationships in the home and work place. They also serve to heal the physical body. Underlying all of their methods is the notion of personal responsibility. People are responsible for their own happiness, for the quality of the relationships in their lives, and for the health of their physical and spiritual bodies. And they have the personal power to transform and create better lives for themselves and their loved ones.

Ultimately, however, Voskhozhdenie and many other groups envision a transformation of a much grander scale and they see a central role for Russia in this approaching New Era. In fact, employing the chakra system (traditionally understood as the energy system of the human body), the directors of Voskhozhdenie developed a chakra map of the world, placing Russia in the

spiritual heart chakra. It is towards the development of Russia as the heart center of the world that Voskhozhdenie embarked upon their latest project, the Temple of Peace, which, inspired by Theosophy and Russian mystic Daniil Andreev, aims to unite all religions and provide a space for academic exploration of the issues and concerns of the New Age.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter Two of the dissertation sets the ideological context within which the women at the heart of this study currently live, exploring two ideological campaigns that, I argue, have been fueled and exacerbated by the distorting dichotomies arising out of western hegemonic discourse. These two ideological campaigns by the Orthodox Church particularly affect women involved with alternative spiritual health practices on multiple levels. The first part of Chapter Two examines the Church's campaign against "totalitarian cults," a campaign that threatens the very existence of alternative practices. The Church's broad definition declares virtually all New Age alternative practices to be "dangerous cults" and therefore illegal according to the new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. The second part of Chapter Two follows the Church's campaign to reorganize gender norms and legislation in conformity with its conservative vision. I examine how the Church has used the demographic crisis to politicize individual behaviors, locating the solution within the traditional Orthodox model of family and gender relations.

Chapter Three sets forth the spiritual health context in Moscow. I outline the fundamental traits of the New Age in general and link them with practices in

Moscow. This chapter traces my attempt at understanding the world view of the New Age in Moscow, as presented to me through the practices and every day workings of the primary group of this study, Voskhozhdenie. It is here that I discuss my own entrance into the world of the New Age in Moscow, how I met and came to work with Voskhozhdenie and participate in their spiritual healing methods. I touch here upon my own skepticism and ambiguous feelings about the New Age and how I came to be more sympathetic to the group and its methods.

Chapter Four is an exploration of the intellectual appeal of the New Age in Moscow. Here I explore the mysterious and complex hidden world of this highly educated community and their attempts to cultivate within themselves spiritually and ethically evolved personalities and to raise the cultural, spiritual and ethical levels of Russian society and the global community. It is here that we see most dramatically the avant-garde spirit of the New Age practitioners as well as the paradoxical conundrum of integrating individual enlightenment and empowerment with the absolute laws of the cosmos. Along this journey we learn how their conceptual world and such esoteric notions as subtle bodies, chakras and thought forms help them develop practical methods for self discovery and spiritual development, as well as ways of bringing more joy into their lives. I explore how the personal powers obtained through such concepts help inspire individual creativity and responsibility – to oneself and society as a whole. Out of these explorations we discover the broader New Age influences on these particular practices and how these current configurations of practices and beliefs

have been colored and filtered through particular cultural and historical trajectories that differentiate them from similar New Age practices in the West.

Chapters Five through Seven of the dissertation are devoted to spiritual life stories of women involved with alternative spiritual health practices in Moscow. In Chapter Five I explore New Age practices of the Soviet Period. Based on interviews with women involved with alternative health practices during the late Soviet period and literature and newspaper accounts from that time, this chapter explores some of the state sanctioned alternative practices and research and the private underground groups that were active at the time. Here we see certain alternative practices were discussed and promoted by State channels while others were either publicly debunked or repressed. We also learn how during the Soviet period such notions as personal responsibility and the power of the mind and will to heal and promote wellbeing were being explored and encouraged at both the State level and by individuals involved with alternative health practices.

Chapter Six follows the contemporary spiritual journeys of transformation and empowerment of women involved with New Age in Moscow. Here I take a more in-depth look at the practices, lives and dreams of three women involved in spiritual health practices today in Moscow and the transformations they themselves have experienced and envision for themselves, their families, society and even the world in the future. Based on excerpts from interviews, this chapter retells the story of how women have found empowerment and strength through their alternative health practices. This empowerment comes most often from utilizing and highlighting “feminine” traits that are particularly prized within the

New Age sphere. Here we see the central importance of motherhood, childbirth and struggles to create a nurturing family life. Some of this empowerment is seen through the very practices themselves. In this chapter we also learn some of the ways women have built community and space for themselves through participation in the various “trainings” and groups and some of them have utilized these practices for social critique and change.

Chapter Seven returns to the conflict between the Orthodox Church and the New Age, only this time we see it from the point of view of women involved with the New Age. Rather than focusing on conflict, we learn the complex ways that women in the New Age blend their alternative and Orthodox practices in ways that suit their needs. Through their stories we see how they have come to value both the historical place of Orthodox Christianity in Russia and the spiritual power of the figures, beliefs, and ideas within the religion itself while at the same time maintaining a critical distance from the Church hierarchies and dogmas. Their stories also illustrate how they have each entered into this space in their own ways, interpreting Orthodox concepts through their own spiritual prism and freely incorporating them into their own alternative practices.

In Chapter Eight I conclude with a brief exploration of some of the lessons Russian New Age women’s lives can offer as well as the limitations and drawbacks of some of their approaches. I relate here some of my difficulties immersing into their world and my inability to fully suspend my disbelief and skepticism. And I discuss how despite seeing limitations and illusory notions in their methods and views, in the end I came to see the practical lessons they could

serve, particularly in shattering preconceived assumptions and habitualized thinking.

Methodology

I have employed a number of anthropological methods in order to capture the full complexity of the world of spiritual health practices in Moscow. One important source of information is the personal experience I have gained through living and studying in Russia. During the period from September of 1991 to August of 2002, I spent nearly four years in the city of Moscow. Some of the data in this current work stems from research conducted in 1994 on the religious “revival” in Russia. I incorporate field notes, interviews, flyers, and materials from a conference I attended during that year into chapter Two, which discusses the Church’s campaign against new religious movements.

Subsequent field work for this dissertation was conducted in two stages in Moscow. The first stage, from December 2000 to November 2001, helped me to set the groundwork for my later ethnographic study. During this early stage, as previously recounted, I was concerned with women’s health in Moscow more broadly. I collected newspaper and magazine articles on women’s health, watched television programs and advertisements and listened to radio programs on women’s health, spoke informally with female acquaintances about their health and conducted formal interviews with women about their health practices. During this first stage I conducted interviews at two hospitals, the Moscow Medical Academy Sechenogo and State Hospital #64 with doctors, nurses and patients. The patients came from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds

and varied in age from 18 to 70s. During this initial stage I also conducted formal interviews with women outside of the hospital setting. These were conducted with teachers at the school “Start”, with artists at a Union of Artists studio and with a woman working out at a fitness center.

In order to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic position of women in Russian society, I participated in a three week seminar held by the Moscow Center of Gender Studies in April 2001 entitled “Gender aspects of social politics and economics”. The participants in this seminar were experts in gender studies from across Russia and the Ukraine, including two men, one of whom teaches gender studies at a Moscow military institute. Lectures were given by the Center’s own experts as well as invited guests from the sphere of politics, statistics and law, and covered topics such as the health care system, the protection of women’s socio-economic rights, the feminization of poverty in Russia, the development of gender-based statistics in Russia, and gender equality and politics. In addition to the lectures, discussions and informal conversations with the participants, I also interviewed Elena Ballaeva, the Center’s expert on women’s health, who provided me with valuable data on the general state of women’s health and the health care system in Russia. While the focus in this first phase of my research was not alternative health, the theme repeatedly was brought to my attention over the course of these eleven months.

The second phase of my research was conducted between February and August of 2002 and is the focus of my ethnography. This phase was characterized by intensive participant-observation of the alternative health scene

in Moscow, with particular focus on women involved with one alternative health organization, *Voskhozhdenie*. I attended the weekly lectures held by *Voskhozhdenie* in a lecture hall rented from the Oceanic Institute, located along the inner circle of Moscow near the metro Park Kul'tury. I also regularly attended meetings and social events held in the home of *Voskhozhdenie's* directors. A large portion of my time during this ethnographic stage was spent participating in "trainings". These are intensive courses that teach the philosophy and techniques of a particular healing method. Most methods consist of several stages of trainings, and many are geared towards training health practitioners. I attended multiple trainings held by *Voskhozhdenie* and was introduced to trainings outside of the organization by members I met there. Here I learned the basics of their method, Holodynamics, as well as rebirthing, the birth canal, shaking therapy, and kinesiology. I also regularly had holodynamics "processes" conducted on me by members of the organization and had my "spiritual portrait" mapped out according to the directors' own methodology. Trainings I participated in outside of *Voskhozhdenie* include NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), Reiki I and II, and Norbekov's courses on general health, Sufi massage and intuition development.

In order to gain a broader perspective on alternative health in Moscow, I attended various lectures and demonstrations held at the two main New Age stores, *Put' k Sebe* (Inward Path) and *Belye Oblaka* (White Clouds). I was also given a tour of the most popular books by an employee of *Belye Oblaka*. Again, during this second phase I collected newspapers, magazines and books, this time

focused particularly on works recommended to me by members of the alternative health community. I also interviewed the editor of the *Encyclopedia of Traditional Folk Methods*, and the editor of the New Age magazine *Piataya Izmerenie* (Fifth Dimension) and met with the contributors to the journal *Zen.ru*. A summer retreat held outside of Moscow gave me a glimpse of the many practices being used throughout Russia. This was an event attended by an estimated one thousand participants from across Russia. The retreat has been held yearly since 1983 and is a space for practitioners to share their ideas and methods. It was at this retreat – towards the end of my research - that I was finally able to personally experience the Birth Canal method I had heard so much about during the previous six month.

A large portion of my ethnography is based on in-depth interviews with 20 women involved with alternative spiritual health practices. While I interviewed fewer women involved with alternative health than not, these interviews were held after several months of interaction and are much fuller and more open than the formal interviews from the first phase of my research. Many of the interviews are essentially spiritual health life histories. It was through these interviews that I learned the most about the personal nature of women’s involvement in this sphere and also where I gleaned a history of alternative health that reaches far back into the Soviet period. Their stories are the substance and true foundation of this dissertation. Ranging in age from early 20s to mid-sixties, all are well-educated and would be considered part of the “intelligentsia”, which shows in their elegant retellings of their spiritual journeys. Although most were not economically well-

off, their career backgrounds tended toward the professional – college professor, lawyer, psychologist, economist, music teacher, translator, engineer. I found a high level of education and intellectual curiosity to be typical characteristics of people involved with alternative spiritual health practices more generally, and they were often united by the literature they shared in common. They also shared a strong sense of compassion and a deep commitment to improving their lives, the lives of their loved ones, and the world about them.

It is these women and their limitless compassion and patience that allowed my research endeavor to even take place. They opened their lives graciously and warmly, transforming an initially bleak and trying research project into a joyful experience that taught me much about myself as well as the New Age movement in Moscow. Their stories do not simply illustrate a theoretical viewpoint or capture a moment in time. They helped bring forth and bring to life the very ideas that emerge here and helped me to experience and see the richness and complexity of their worlds, although certainly much remained hidden from my grasp. Defying simple classification and explanation, their stories once again confirmed the possibilities that can be unlocked through work – be it anthropological or the self-transforming work of the New Age - that attends closely to the actual lives of people.

The theoretical lessons their lives offer are many. They remind us of the importance of perspective - that we tend to find what we seek. Work that focuses only on the negative, crisis, decline, is sure to paint a sorrowful picture. Their lives offer up the possibility of finding joy, even if still burdened with the

condition of being human. Their lives also remind us of the ever present influence of our own beliefs, discourses and actions, and how their interaction can escalate in the most unpredictable of ways. The possible global consequences of such influences are many and bleak, as illustrated by the recent political tensions between Russia and the U.S. over the regulation of NGOs. Putin's recent attempts to limit the influence of western NGOs were met with outrage in the West, which still envisions Russia as ever teetering toward autocratic rule (Myers 2005). Just one month later found Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reorganizing the U.S. Agency for International Development, with plans for a new program of "transformational diplomacy," for which Russian language training is currently taking place (Graham and Kessler 2006). Once again we have played into the hegemonic global discourse, increasing global political tensions and adding fuel to anti-western factions whose ideological struggles continue their work to narrow the opportunities of women in the New Age in Russia. It is to these struggles that we now turn in Chapter Two.

Chapter Two

Ideological Campaigns

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the political discourse in Russia became ensconced in debates about the ideological vacuum and moral chaos that many feared would wreak havoc on Russian society now that Soviet Communist ideas had been discredited and discarded. With a sense of urgency that hearkened back to 19th century debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers, public figures began negotiating and redefining the “Russian idea” and setting forth plans for ensuring the future survival of the Russian state. Much of the discussion revolved around the reestablishment of the authentic Russian culture that had been destroyed and lost during the years of communist rule. The Russian media painted a picture of a grand struggle between liberals and traditionalists. On the one side we had those who hoped to see Russia reestablish its European ties. These modernizers held the Soviet system responsible for holding the country back economically, technologically, and even culturally. Now they hoped for a period of flowering pluralism, creative freedom, and swift economic recovery. Gaidar’s shock therapy and Yavlinsky’s 500 day plan were going to modernize and lift Russia up to the European standard of living in a matter of months. The traditionalists, on the other hand, hoped to rediscover and promote the authentic Russian values the atheist regime had worked to destroy. These values were to be based on the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church and called for a strengthened role of the Church at the governmental level, a return to the traditional family structure, and a rejection of western influences.

The polarization of these two visions of Russia was exacerbated by a larger global discourse that cast Russia as a backwards “Oriental other,” lagging far behind the modern West and thus in need of western intervention and aid. At the ground level, however, the struggle inside Russia is not dualistic. Ethnographic research suggests that people do not fit neatly into such factions and often identify with elements of both. This binary opposition has been employed, however, as a political tactic, one which the western discourse and intervention has ironically helped arm. This chapter explores how the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church¹⁵ has employed such polarizing rhetoric, intensifying the sense of “us” vs “them” in the society, in order to gain more power within the State structure and to promote its particular version of the Russian idea. The “us” in the equation are the “true” Russians, the Russian Orthodox and patriots who are striving for the sanctity and security of the Russian State. The “them” are those ill-defined others who threaten the security of the Russian State and Russian culture with their dangerous non-Orthodox ideas and globalizing efforts. New Age women find themselves in the middle of this equation as gender roles are politicized, identities defined more narrowly, and practices maligned by the Orthodox Church.

As noted, the women at the center of this research generally abstained from politics and focused their efforts at transformation, primarily on themselves, their immediate surroundings and their families. Even those who

¹⁵ As we shall learn in greater detail in chapter seven, members of the Catacomb or True Orthodox Church, which grew underground during Soviet period in protest to the infiltration of the Church by the KGB and its close ties with Soviet State, have actively criticized the political activities of the Church, and some are actively working to ensure that freedom of conscience exists for all religions in Russia, including those identified as cults.

envisioned sweeping changes in the future felt that evolutionary changes would start at the personal spiritual level. With the evolution of individual consciousness would come a universal transformation far greater than any political movement could even imagine. What they think is needed is a critical mass of spiritually developed people. When the consciousness of enough people has been raised then this will start a chain reaction that will transform and raise the consciousnesses of the entire planet. So while their ideals are often in line with ecological and leftist political movements, most do not feel a need to get involved in the political system. This is clearly not the case with the Orthodox Church. The Church is actively involved in a political struggle to increase its power within the state. It is working with the Duma to change legislation to bring Russian society more in conformity with its doctrines, and it is working to gain more influence over the Ministry of Education for the same reason. Certain political campaigns by the Church affect New Age women on several levels: as women, as practitioners, as Christians, and as people trying to negotiate a variety of allegiances and identities.

In this chapter I discuss how the Orthodox Church has used polarizing rhetoric to subsume widely disparate groups under an umbrella of opposition. Having been positioned as the backward opposition within the hegemonic western discourse, the Church has found a ready enemy and a strategy. By linking groups, ideas, and people they oppose to a united front of globalizing foreign non-Christian forces, the Church is able to mark them as anti Russian, anti-Christian, and therefore a threat to society. This chapter focuses on two campaigns by the

Orthodox Church, both of which have fed into fears about the future of the nation. Focusing particularly on fears about the health and safety of children, these campaigns have contributed to a hysteria that has increased the apparent validity of more extremist views. The first part of this chapter looks at the Church's campaign against cults. I explore how the church has fed off and promoted hysteria around certain "cults" that have appeared in Russia and how they have managed to link these "dangerous cults" with New Age alternative beliefs and practices more generally. The centerpiece of this section is a conference on "totalitarian cults" I attended in 1994. This was the first of a series of conferences and round tables hosted by The Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church in conjunction with the Information and Consultation Center of St. Irinaeus of Lyon, an organization established to provide information about cults and which works under the auspices of the Church. In the second part of the chapter I explore the Church's politicization of gender roles and how it has capitalized on the demographic crisis in Russia in order to promote its conservative vision of gender norms. The Church has developed a complex propaganda campaign that implicates New Age ideas, reproductive rights, and "modern" or "western" modes of behavior in the decline of the Russian population. At the crux of this campaign is what the Church calls the Demographic War against Russia. Underlying this campaign is the idea that Russia's population crisis is not an accident, but rather the result of a war planned and carried out with the explicit aim of destroying the Russian nation. The Church has taken elaborate measures to convince the legislature and the general

public that the West, with the help of New Age groups and reproductive rights organizations such as Planned Parenthood, is in an all-out demographic war against the Russian people and culture. This link between the New Age and a demographic war is particularly ironic given the reverence and central role of birth within the New Age scene in Moscow. According to the Church, this war is being carried out at the level of the individual. The non-traditional behaviors and relations of women – polluted by western feminism and non-Christian ideas – are leading to the decline in population, and therefore pose a threat to the very existence of the Russian culture and nation. This second section looks at some of the ways the Church has managed to link these groups together as part of a united front aimed ultimately at the destruction of Russia. Drawing on widely-held gender norms in society and politicizing women’s behavior, the Church has created an equation in which traditional conservative gender norms are the key to Russia’s successful opposition to this Demographic War.

IDEOLOGICAL CAMPAIGN I

The Church’s Campaign against “Totalitarian Cults”

Through the exploration of one heated conference in 1994, this section reveals how the Moscow Patriarchate uses anti-western sentiment to gain a foothold for its particular vision of Russian society and at the same time discredit and impede the development of competing groups and ideologies.

A Flowering of Religion on the Streets of Moscow

In the fall of 1991 my Russian language teacher at the Moscow State Pedagogical University in the Name of Lenin relayed an odd experience she and a

group of students had had the previous year. They were invited on a trip to the U.S., all expenses paid. All they had to do was attend a few lectures once they got there. Unable to pass up such a rare opportunity, the group accepted the offer and when they arrived even wore the t-shirts their American sponsors provided them. It was through these t-shirts – and the remarks they elicited from passersby on the street - that they came to learn that their cultural exchange had been arranged by members the Unification Church, headed by the Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Cults had officially arrived in Russia. In fact, in 1990, the same year as my teacher’s trip to the U.S., Gorbachev met with the Reverend Sun Myung Moon himself in the Kremlin. With the passage of the Law on Freedom of Conscience in 1990, religious organizations of all persuasions began to trickle into the Soviet Union. But with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 a virtual flood of religious groups rushed in to help save and enlighten the millions of atheistic souls imagined left helpless in the rubble of communism. Many promised earthly happiness and ethical guidelines for living in this world as well. Initially these groups were welcomed to Russia with open arms, particularly by the struggling Federal government.

In 1992 the Russian Deputy Minister of Education Aleksandr Asmolov called on American Christian volunteers to teach in the public schools, stating that “Russian education today is open to Christian values.” Speaking to an audience of American evangelical Christians in California, he proclaimed, “For 75 years, we were in the desert of communism. But the truth is that people's mentality can be changed through education.” (“CoMission” 1992: 54). Hoping to stem criticism

from the Orthodox Church, Asmolov noted, "We are supposed to give a plurality of approaches because a single ideology in education means an absence of individual thought. We have long been slaves of ideology. No one will want to be a slave again. Only free choice can give faith" (*ibid.*: 57). That same year Billy Graham returned to Russia for a Renewal Crusade that filled Moscow's Olympic stadium for three straight days and resulted in over 40,000 baptisms. Meanwhile less famous Christian missionaries were making their way to Russia. According to *Christianity Today*, immediately following the fall of the Soviet Union over 60 Christian educational and evangelistic organizations united to transform Russian society with their new curriculum "Christian Ethics and Morality: A Foundation for Society" (*ibid.*: 54). According to a report by the Campus Crusade for Christ, by 1999 over 48,000 teachers in Russia had been trained in the use of this curriculum. The influence of western missionaries was dramatically revealed in a 1994 poll which indicated that 70% of Russians believed Billy Graham represented the Orthodox Church.

In the early 1990s foreign missionaries and representatives of nontraditional religions were a frequent visible presence on the streets of Moscow (See Fig.1). Groups of American missionaries passed out religious pamphlets and anti-abortion postcards in busy central areas of the city. Youth groups performed religious skits on the sidewalk of what was then Gorky Street. One pamphlet I received, titled "Is Jesus God?", set out to explain to Russian atheists Jesus' statement "I am the truth" in the following way: "You may say, 'That may be true for you, but it's not true for me.' But that is not the way it works. If Lenin was

the first Party Secretary of the Communist Party, that is not only true for you, but it is true for me and the rest of the world. If George Washington was the first President of my country, that is not only true for me, but it is true for you and for the rest of the world. Therefore, if Jesus Christ is “The Truth,” then it is true not only for me but for the world.” Not surprisingly, many Russians came to view the missionaries as simplistic and resented their ignorance of Russian religious history.



Fig. 1. Unidentified spiritual group on the Arbat in 1994.

Non-Christian groups were also out on the streets actively seeking followers to their faiths in the early 1990s. Hare Krishnas, who first started organizing groups in Russia in the 1970s, could be seen in their familiar peach robes singing and playing drums and selling Russian translations of the Bhagavad-Gita along the Arbat, Moscow’s historic pedestrian street in the city center. Members of Aum Sinrikyo – of the infamous Tokyo subway sarin

poisoning incident – began appearing in subway stations in Moscow in 1992 passing out colorful leaflets that proclaimed “the truth will bring you happiness.” The truth they spoke of came not only through Jesus, but was a synthesis of world religions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, and yoga. They also predicted the end of the world to be April 16, 1995. 1991 saw the official re-establishment of the Russian Theosophical Society, and UNESCO declared it the year of H.P. Blavatsky. This same year a Scientology reading room was opened in the halls of Moscow State University. One Scientology flyer I came across didn’t promise the truth, but offered a one day holiday “to improve your life, abilities and health without drugs, hypnosis or other physical means.” Soon pictures of an odd looking woman in a white robe, holding a staff in one hand and raising two fingers of the other hand in the Old Believer style of prayer began to appear everywhere in the Metro (See Fig.2). This was the infamous Maria Devi Khristos of the White Brotherhood¹⁶, a Ukrainian woman who convinced thousands of followers in the former Soviet Union that she was the mother of the world. She had predicted the end of the world to be November 24, 1993. She and her partner planned to crucify themselves on this day and then three days later, so they claimed, they would return to lead their followers out of the apocalypse on earth and into heaven. There were rumors of a mass suicide planned by her followers, and it is generally held that this act was prevented only by police intervention.

¹⁶ This is a direct allusion to Theosophy and Blavatsky who referred to her spiritual masters as The Great White Brotherhood.



Fig. 2. Flyer of Maria Davi Khristos I was given in 1993.

The atmosphere in Moscow in the early '90s was one of a full-fledged religious revival. Political leaders made appearances at important religious holiday events. People began getting baptized en masse and wearing crosses around their necks. The talk on the ground was that religion had become fashionable. But there was also a sense that Russians were particularly vulnerable to the foreign religions that were streaming into the country. What was behind those ever-smiling faces? How could one distinguish a “good” religion from one of the dangerous “cults” they read about in the paper that were brainwashing their children to commit suicide? In fact, for a period of time in the early 1990s there was almost a sense of hysteria about cults in Russia. Government committees

formed to deal with the new dangers. Even families joined together to work against cult activities. Much of the talk revolved around the Ukrainian-based White Brotherhood. Many of its members were adolescents and young adults, and the media focused a lot of attention on the cult's brainwashing and zombification of children, who were said to be forced to break ties with their families. Such reports led to far-reaching panics amongst parents throughout Russia and Ukraine.

Dangerous Cults

When scandals erupted around the Japanese group Aum Sinrikyo and the White Brotherhood, many came to associate their syncretic beliefs with New Age practices in general. The perception that dangerous cults were about to envelop Russian society was promoted by certain factions within the Russian Orthodox Church and by foreign Christian missionaries and became a brief point of convergence for the two Christian movements. The Orthodox Church established centers to inform the population of the dangers of cults and the techniques used to attract new members and indoctrinate them. One of the most prominent new organizations to combat cults was the Information and Consultation Center of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, which was established by Alexander Dvorkin in 1993. Dvorkin is an American citizen who left Russia in the mid-1970s and studied at the Russian Orthodox Seminary St. Vladimir's in New York. After returning to Russia in 1991 he studied at the Dialog Center in Denmark and proclaimed himself the Russian representative of the American Cult Awareness Network (CAN). Dvorkin coined and popularized a new term, "totalitarian cults", which

quickly became the general parlance of media accounts of “cults”. Within the context of post-Soviet Russia, the use of the term totalitarian is pointedly political, highlighting the destructive and negative qualities of cults. He also wrote the anti-cult brochure “Ten Questions for the Obtrusive Stranger”, which was to be used to help people identify totalitarian cult proselytizers. This pamphlet offers examples of specific cults to avoid, such as the Society of Krishna Consciousness, the Unification Church, the Church of Latter Day Saints, the Family, and the Church of Scientology. It also warns readers to beware of those groups whose beliefs unite many religions: “As many thousands of years of history have shown, such artificial “unions” lead only to further divisions and isolation. It’s not an accident that the founders of the most evil totalitarian cults of the 20th Century, starting with Lenin and Hitler and ending with Moon and Rajneesh, declared that they had found the magic formula of universal unity” (Dvorkin 1995). This one small paragraph is very telling and powerful. In one fell swoop it connects totalitarian cults directly to the sources of the “totalitarian” Hitler and Lenin, and connects the term with all groups that seek a unity of religious beliefs, which includes virtually all New Age groups.

In the write up to a conference on cults he organized, Dvorkin describes totalitarian cults as destructive organizations ready to exploit Russians left “spiritually destroyed” by the communist state. These organizations, according to Dvorkin, exist primarily to gain power and money and strive for total control over the minds of their members. But their goals are much grander. As Dvorkin explains, “the activities of totalitarian cults and the proselytizing of their members

(which goes unchecked by law) is overtly expansionist in nature and is aimed at undermining the security, civil peace and institutions of the Russian State.”¹⁷ And so the direct link is made for us. New Age beliefs are totalitarian, as dangerous as Hitler and Lenin, and ultimately are aimed at the destruction of the Russian State. The links were set forth in greater detail at the conference, which Dvorkin invited me to in 1994. This was the first of many conferences on “Totalitarian Cults in Russia”.

Conference on Totalitarian Cults

In the first years after the fall of communism, the Orthodox Church and Protestant missionaries found common ground in two key issues: abortion and cults. Protestant missionaries provided anti-abortion and anti-cult literature, pamphlets, and videos to their Orthodox counterparts, and they worked together to organize seminars, conferences and to write appeals to the Russian state. By 1994 the Orthodox Church was vocally expressing concern that the moral void in Russia was being filled by less than appropriate sources, and certain factions within the Church began using scare-tactics to prove this point. The tactics they used involved two tiers: blaming the West and lumping all non-traditional religious practices into what came to be known as “totalitarian cults”. In May of 1994 I was invited to attend the first conference on “totalitarian cults” in Russia. This was a five-day conference organized by the Department of Religious Education and Catechism of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church and co-sponsored by the Dialog Center in Denmark. Representatives

¹⁷ My English version is an unpublished copy handed out to conference attendees. A Russian version of this report is available on line at: <http://ao.orthodoxy.ru/arch/002/002-itog.htm>.

from several branches of the Orthodox Church participated, as did representatives of the Lutheran Church, Evangelical Christians, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church. Four academic experts on cults and new religious movements also spoke at the conference. All four worked at evangelical Christian colleges and were active Christian apologists and anti-cult activists. While the official objective of the conference was to educate one another on cults and point out ways for identifying dangerous ones, the Orthodox Church used this conference to forward two other agendas: to discredit alternative religious practices and to promote its proposed version of a new Law on Freedom of Conscience. The Church hoped to gain a more privileged position in the Law and to restrict the activities of non-traditional religious groups in Russia, ironically, including those of the conference's co-sponsors.

The tone of the conference was set early, and it soon became clear that the aim of the conference was to instill fear about non-Christian and non-Orthodox practices and beliefs. Virtually all non-traditional religions and several non-religious organizations fell under the label totalitarian cults at this conference. Western liberalism, tolerance, and environmentalism were also targets. In his write-up of the conference, Dvorkin drew attention to the "dishonest propaganda of teachers of syncretic cults who aggressively demand 'tolerance'." This was a closed conference and known Orthodox dissenters and members of organizations deemed cults by the conference organizers were barred entry. At one point during Dvorkin's talk he stopped mid-sentence and pointed to someone in the audience

whom he recognized as a cult member. This person was immediately escorted out of the auditorium.

Some of the main targets of the conference were well-known groups such as the Unification Church, the Society of Krishna Consciousness, Aum Sinrikyo and Mormons. Many of the speakers focused on groups that had criminal incidents in their pasts, such as the Family, which has been accused of sex crimes against children, and the Church of Scientology. Johannes Aagaard of the anti-cult Dialog Center in Denmark noted that Scientology was second only to Hitler and Stalin in its destructiveness. But a large number of the talks were concerned specifically with the New Age and groups typical of the New Age movement in Russia and abroad. In fact, virtually all alternative religious health practices fit within the category “totalitarian cult” according to this conference. A simple review of some of the paper titles at the conference gives a general idea of the implications of this conference for alternative religions. On the opening day we have among others, “Totalitarian Cults and their Methods of Mind-bending” followed by “New Religious Movements: Why? Where? When?”¹⁸ The second and third days of the conference were devoted almost entirely to papers about groups which would fall under the heading “New Age”. In fact, the first paper is called “New Age”. This was followed by “Astrology and Ufology”¹⁹, “Cosmism”, “Occultism, Demonism” and “New Satanism: A threat to our Children”. I think the link between the New Age and Satanism is made pretty clear here. Other papers linking New Age groups and practices to “totalitarian

¹⁸ In 1994 the Bishops council of the Russian Orthodox Church declared the excommunication of all members of new religious movements (Buida 1999).

¹⁹ The study of UFOs

cults” include “The Doctrine of the Rerikh Family”²⁰ (Their works and life are widely alluded to in contemporary Russian New Age circles.), “Theosophy and Anthroposophy” (two of the founding philosophies of the New Age movement in the West and currently at the core of many contemporary Russian New Age groups), and “The White Brotherhood and the New Age” (clearly linking this much publicized group with the New Age more generally).²¹

A closer look at a couple of these talks further illustrates the extent to which the conference hoped to promote the notion that alternative, New Age organizations were harmful to society. In his paper about new religious movements, Aagaard focused on the New Age and what he referred to as “one new occult”. This new occult is the unification of the New Age in counter to the Christian cult. According to Aagaard, the new occult is the direct opposite of Christianity, and is characterized by a focus on man and the transformation of the old into the new. For example, Buddhism becomes neo-Buddhism. With Theosophy, reincarnation becomes reincarnation and evolution. The main thesis of the New Age, Aagaard explained, is that there is no other God than Man. The goal is to transform oneself into a divine being. In fact, Aagaard regards the New Age as simply “secularism in religious garb”. While their beliefs are in opposition to Christianity and their “systems are demonic,” Aagaard noted that New Age believers themselves are not demons. The problem with New Age

²⁰ In 2000 the Orthodox Church posthumously excommunicated Russian mystics Nikolai and Elena Rerikh (Drobychev n.d.).

²¹ Such critiques of Theosophy, the Rerikhs and New Age ideas are not new; in 1944 the Russian Orthodox Church anathematized all those who professed such beliefs (see Lunkin and Filatov 2000).

believers, according to Aagaard, is that “they are so open minded that their brains fall out” which makes them easy prey to these demonic structures.

Sergei Chapnin, chairman of the Brotherhood of St. Tikhon, opened his talk with a play on words that at once indicated the vagueness and incoherence of New Age ideas and hinted at their unacceptability for society: “*eto bezobrazno*”. When the accent is placed on the first ‘o’ this means that something is vague or, literally, without an image. But this also alludes to a very common Russian phrase, said with the accent on the ‘a’, which means it’s disgraceful or outrageous. Chapnin explained that the New Age pretends to be new but is really just a mixture of ancient wisdom. Practitioners hope to use this wisdom to gain power and say they work with “energy”. The problem, he noted, is that they are not concerned with the source of this power. According to Chapnin, New Age movements can often be identified by their pantheistic beliefs, and often ecological organizations and Green movements are run by New Age practitioners. Chapnin’s answer to the spread of New Age beliefs in Russia is the revival of the missionary traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Dvorkin’s final report on the conference sets in writing the notion that New Age groups are totalitarian cults and highlights key New Age concepts to beware of, such as syncretism, tolerance and neo-paganism. This report also links the New Age with dangerous western ideas. Furthermore, it is in this document that the second agenda of the Church becomes clear. This report sets forth 22 points that summarize the main findings of the conference panelists. In point three Dvorkin writes, “We Christians express our indignation at the systems and

the way the Gospel and Christianity is interpreted in occult theosophical systems...” As we have seen, theosophy is a key part of many New Age philosophies. Again New Age ideas are implied when he writes in point 12, “We draw attention to the dishonest propaganda of preachers of syncretic cults who aggressively demand ‘tolerance’.” The direct connection with cults is made in point 16: “We cannot remain silent in the face of the active propagation of an anti-Christian movement which includes theosophy, anthroposophy, the “Living Ethics” of the Rerikh family and “New Age” cults....In all responsibility we declare that the teaching of the Rerikh family is that of a religious cult which is not only incompatible with Christianity, but overtly hostile towards it.” The dangerous western roots of New Age totalitarian cults are made clear in point 5: “The experience of Russia has shown that a country in which Christian spirituality is destroyed is susceptible to the dangerous development of the most primitive pagan superstitions and practices arising both from within the country and brought in from without. We note with dismay that those people in the West who have fallen away from Christ are now preaching their neo-pagan and occult doctrines in Russia. We are stating that the activities of totalitarian cults and the proselytizing of their members (which goes unchecked by law) is [sic] overtly expansionist in nature and is [sic] aimed at undermining the security, civil peace and institutions of the Russian State”.

The final sentence of this point is important. It refers directly to the Law on Freedom of Conscience, which states that the first grounds for the liquidation of a religious organization or for banning their activities are the undermining of

social order and security or threats to the security of the State. With this one sentence the report links New Age ideas with totalitarian cults, points out why they should be banned in Russia, and bolsters the Orthodox Church's argument for stricter control over the new religious organizations in Russia, which was the second agenda of the conference. This was a sensitive topic at the conference itself because the conference was co-sponsored by several western evangelical organizations that would be adversely affected by a stricter law. The intentions, however, were quietly inserted towards the end of the report in point 20: "We believe that legislation in Russia on religious activities still needs further improvement. In particular, the current legislation is weighted in favour of those religious groups who evade registration as religious associations." Armed with reports such as this one, and bolstered by round tables conducted at the Duma, the Church has successfully pressured state legislatures. In 1995 the agreement the "CoMission" of American evangelical organization had with the Russian Ministry of Education to teach its course "Christian Ethics and Morality: A Foundation for Society" was abruptly cancelled. According to Mark Elliot, director of the Institute for East-West Christian Studies at Wheaton College, "The restrictions placed on the CoMission could very well be a sign of increased state pressures on minority religious groups, in part coming from pressures from the Russian Orthodox Church" (Lawton: 52). Eventually, in 1997, the Church succeeded in pushing through the new Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. This new law gives a privileged position to the Russian Orthodox Church while recognizing the spiritual history of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism

in the country. All other religious organizations, groups, and associations were required to re-register and from then on file yearly reports with the government. Government approval of re-registration was not automatic, and those organizations that did not re-register by the 1999 deadline were at risk of liquidation. Full protection of rights was only given to those organizations that could prove they had existed in Russia for at least 15 years. Furthermore, while foreign organizations continue to be allowed to exist in Russia, they could not “engage in liturgical or other religious activities and do not receive the status of a religious association as established by this federal law.”²² In 1999 the Salvation Army found itself the first victim of this new law when its registration was denied on the grounds that it is a paramilitary organization of foreign origin.

Not satisfied with the results of the law, the Orthodox Church continues its battle with “totalitarian cults” to this day. More recently the Church has tried to link such groups directly with terrorism, westernization and the destruction of the state. At times such sentiments are supported by the academic community and the media. In 2001 an article titled “USA accused of using sects to destroy Russia,” quotes Rostislav Prokopishin, a scientific associate of the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, as arguing, “It is no secret that various cults are one of the instruments of USA's defense of its geopolitical interests. In the 80s the most active cults were selected in USA that could become weapons for the destruction of USSR. What we now observe, not only in Russia but also in Europe, could be the result of a previously devised strategy” (Khodorych, Konashenok and Sutdnev 2001). In 2002 Patriarch Alexei II

²² From a translation of the law by Lawrence Uzzell of the Keston Institute.

reported that "In the atmosphere of freedom in the past decade, all of us have been witnesses of how many different sects have flooded Russia, often totalitarian and exotic ones that have a destructive nature. Many of them have ceased to be a problem after action was taken against them. But the Satanists and the notorious Japanese sect Aum Supreme Truth are still operating here and are trying to fill the spiritual vacuum that developed in Russia in the years of atheist dominance" ("Russian Orthodox" 2002). And in October 2003 Dvorkin organized a round table in Moscow, one of many he continues to hold around the country, entitled "Totalitarian Cults – Weapons of Mass Destruction," which declared that "Totalitarian cults in Russia have today become the "suppliers of personnel" for terrorist acts. Fighting this ill-will requires a combination of state, church and society" (Lipich 2003).

In sum, the Russian Orthodox Church is working closely with the state legislature to establish competing religious voices as dangerous and threatening in order to restrict, control and even eliminate them. By connecting such groups with westernization and the corruption of children, the Church is able to draw on personal and social anxieties to heighten the perceived threat these non-traditional groups are to the Russian nation. The activities of the Church have a particular impact on women who have chosen the path of self-transformation through alternative spiritual health practices, as part two of this chapter illustrates.

IDEOLOGICAL CAMPAIGN II

The Demographic War Against Russia:

Implications for women in the New Age

As an adjunct to the war on cults, the Church has developed a complex propaganda campaign that implicates New Age ideas, reproductive rights, and “modern” or “western” modes of behavior in the decline of the Russian population. At the crux of this campaign is what the Church calls the Demographic War against Russia. By uniting these disparate groups under the umbrella of a “demographic war” perpetrated by outside, “western” influences, the Church is appealing to nationalist sentiments and security fears and is able to cloak its religious social agenda under the guise of concern for national security. This tactic serves to heighten the perceived threat posed by each of the offending groups. Through its detailed description of a complex intertwining global movement, the literature evokes an image of an alien menacing force that has already taken hold over much of Russian society and is determined to destroy it. Drawing on widely-held gender norms in society and politicizing women’s behavior, the Church has equated the restoration of traditional conservative gender norms with the salvation of Russia from the Demographic War.

Church Lobbying Efforts

Since the late *perestroika* years, the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church has taken an active role in determining the direction of Russian society. The Church and associated groups implement a wide range of methods for reaching the population beyond the walls of the church. We examine here some of the lobbying activities undertaken by the Orthodox Church which directly and indirectly affect the lives of New Age women. The immediate goals of this campaign are the abolition of abortion and the elimination of sex education

courses in the classroom. The Church is actively involved in direct lobbying of the State Duma and the Ministry of Education, supplying literature, and sponsoring conferences and round table discussions in which abortion, sex education, and non-traditional gender roles are depicted as integral elements of the demographic war and directly responsible for the decline of the Russian population.

The idea of a demographic war against Russia sounds initially like the workings of an extremist group or conspiracy theorists. Originally, I found pamphlets about this conspiracy at the Orthodox Medical Education Center “Life,” one of the main pro-life centers in Russia. In fact, however, the demographic war conspiracy theory is promoted by several mainstream groups within the Orthodox Church and the State Duma. The theory is a popular topic in Orthodox literature, journals, and conferences, and is a frequent topic at legislative sessions, hearings, committees and round tables at the State Duma.²³ Here I focus on the activities of two groups that work together to promote the Church’s agenda and conceptualization of the demographic war to the legislature: the Center “Life” and the Union of Orthodox Citizens.

According to the Orthodox Church’s theory, the instigators of the demographic war hope to deplete the Russian population through the promotion of abortion and the spread of AIDS and view this as best accomplished in the public schools with courses on sexual education that encourage sexual promiscuity and condom use. The ultimate aim of such a war is global domination. The mastermind behind this war is the United States and other

²³ <http://www.duma.gov.ru>

international organizations that are viewed primarily as handmaidens to the US globalization project. Such organizations include the UN, UNESCO, UNICEF, the WHO, Planned Parenthood, the World Bank, and the WTO. Strategies include economic domination and the spread of such western notions as individuality, tolerance and immoral life styles.

It is well-known that the Russian population has been declining for some time. According to the report *Vital and Health Statistics: Russian Federation and United States, Selected Years 1985–2000 With An Overview of Russian Mortality in the 1990s*, compiled jointly by the CDC in the U.S. and the National Center for Health Statistics in Russia, the Russian population declined 45 percent between 1990 and 2000. Much of this decline is due to the reduction of the birth rate, which declined 35 percent between 1990 and 2000. By 2000 the birth rate was 43 percent lower than in the United States. Interestingly, within that same period, the abortion rate in Russia decreased 52 percent (Komarov 2003: vi). There has been considerable debate about the causes and solutions to this problem within the academic sphere and at the political level.

One avenue the Church uses to promote its particular theory on the demographic state of Russia is through religious organizations such as the Union of Orthodox Citizens. This organization frequently holds round table events at the Duma to discuss the demographic crisis and Orthodox Christian values. The Union of Orthodox Citizens is a religious-patriotic organization established in 1995. One of its founders is Deputy Alexander Chuev, who has been instrumental in the formulation of abortion legislation in the State Duma.

According to the Russian journal *The World of Religion (Mir religii)*, the Union consists of organizations, institutions, foundations and individuals interested in discussing politics from the Orthodox Christian standpoint. The first organization listed is the Orthodox Medical-Educational Center “Life.” The two main objectives of the Union are: 1) the protection of the Russian Orthodox Church; and 2) to counter inter-party strife with “true cooperation in bringing into all spheres of life those high spiritual values that have for centuries been maintained and supported by the Orthodox Church” (“Soiuz Pravoslavnykh” n.d.). The sphere of concern elaborated by the Union includes specifically political processes and governmental structures. In order to bring about their goals they work through the media to influence government legislation so that it corresponds with the norms of Christian morality. The Union has a close relationship with the leadership of the Orthodox Church and in 2000 received a congratulatory award from the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexei II. In fact, Alexei II personally congratulated the head of the Union and the lead editor of the journal *Orthodox Discussions (Pravoslavnie Besedy)*, Valentin Lebedev, on his fiftieth birthday in order to express his appreciation for Lebedev’s socio-political activities based on Christian spiritual-moral principles (Alexii II 2003).

On April 2 and 17, 2004 the Union organized a Round Table in the State Duma entitled “Demographic Catastrophe in Russia and the Problems Associated with its Resolution”. According to the final report from this conference, the demographic situation in Russia is critical. The participants dismissed suggestions that low birth rates are characteristic of developed countries, arguing

that in Russia the population is dying out. The situation is particularly tragic in the central and western regions of the country, according to the report. The participants estimate that in 35-50 years the core population of the European territory of Russia will decrease two fold and soon will be unable to support its own territory. The demographic crisis, furthermore, is leading to several serious threats to the country. A primary concern for the participants in the round table was the potential threat of immigrants and the territorial aspirations of neighboring countries, particularly near Siberia and the Far East where 40 percent of the world's natural resources are located. This is especially of concern, according to the participants, because of the attempt of developed countries to maintain Russia as the "raw material appendage of the civilized world." A second concern is the overpopulation of large metropolitan areas and the desertion of provincial regions, which will lead to the end of the conditions necessary for the "normal social-economic functioning and development of the country" ("Demograficheskaia katastrofa" 2003).

According to the summary report, economic hardships and compromised health care are not the primary cause of the decrease in population. More significant are such problems as the sense of helplessness, the sense that life has no meaning, the lack of security about the future, the disappointment with unjust reforms. Furthermore, the report states that "a huge role is played by such negative factors as the loss of the traditional family structure, sexual promiscuity, divorce, abortion, the government's neglect of family issues, and the propagation of policies that support the artificial decline of the birthrate" (*ibid*). This final

point was of particular concern to the participants, who declared that not only is there a serious problem with propaganda that supports the depopulation of Russia, but that such propaganda actually is working towards the extinction of Russia. As proof of this problem, the report argues that there were “hysterical reactions” to the proposed school course “the fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” by the media and particular political circles while there has been no protest over the many years that the Russian Association of Planned Parenthood has “inculcated in Russian schools propaganda programs that are directed towards a total reduction of the birthrate, the destruction of the family and morals...” This is testament that “nihilistic processes have struck deep into the social consciousness and that Russia’s return to the path of her 1000 year spiritual tradition is a matter of her preservation and survival.” The participants were particularly disturbed by the activities of foreign organizations in Russia that “with the permission of the government and under the guise of working to improve the health of women, children and adolescents are instead carrying out projects of ‘demographic correction’ aimed at lowering the birth rate” (*ibid*).

The report emphasizes that the demographic crisis in Russia cannot be overcome without the active participation of the Russian Orthodox Church. The organizers argue that Russia needs to develop state policies aimed at the prevention of a demographic catastrophe, and suggest seven measures that will work to that end: “1) The creation of a council of demographic policies within the cabinet of the President of the Russian Federation that would include the participation of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church; 2.) The creation

of a Church-societal council on demography; 3) Allowing the Russian Orthodox Church to present information geared towards the protection of the traditional values of the family, marriage and morals through national media outlets; 4) Supporting the introduction of the elective course “the Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” in Russian schools; 5) Removing members of foreign organizations from participation in demographic policies. Removing the activities of the “Russian Association of Planned Parenthood” from the educational system of the Russian Federation; 6) Allowing law enforcement agencies to investigate the activities of foreign organizations that disseminate information that offends the tastes of believers, discredits generally accepted norms and morals and that is directed towards the corruption of minors; 7) Supporting the legislative motions (taking into consideration the wishes and recommendations of the leaders of the traditional confessions of the Russian Federation) of State Duma deputies S.U. Glaz’ev, V.V. Gal’chenko, and A.V. Chuev of the Union of Orthodox Citizens” (*ibid.*). Some of these legislative initiatives include: a bill on the social partnership of the government and religious organizations; changes to the Federal law on advertisements; legislation to protect the life of unborn children; legislation requiring psychological counseling before obtaining an abortion; legislation granting free housing to mothers with many children and the reinstatement of taxes on those without children; a bill to make it a criminal offense to infringe upon a person’s freedom of conscience and religion, to offend the feelings and convictions of a citizen in relation to their religion (*ibid.*).

The Orthodox Medical-Educational Center “Life”

The declining population and perceived “demographic crisis” has made women’s reproductive health a hot political topic. The high mortality rate has become an issue of particular interest for researchers and policy makers in Russian and the West. The primary causes most commonly cited are cardiovascular disease, alcohol poisoning, cancer, trauma and infectious diseases. Many of these are attributed to lifestyle choices. High maternal mortality rates, high infant mortality rates, and low birth rates are also seen to contribute to the negative growth rates in Russia (Hesli and Mills 1999: 73). Surveys indicate that average Russians are very concerned about the current mortality rates and the decline in population. In fact, Hesli and Mills, cite a 1995 survey by the Russian public opinion polling organization VCIOM that found that fifty-eight percent of Russians agreed that the population of Russia was in serious danger of physical extinction. Russians interviewed attributed this decline to poor living conditions, alcohol and drug abuse, environmental devastation and the poor state of the health care system (Hesli and Mills 1999: 77).

While the Orthodox Church focuses on the decline of the traditional family and the absence of Christian morals as a primary cause of population decline, studies on the health care system in Russia indicate that pre-natal care, the availability of emergency care during childbirth, and increased sex education and the use of birth control all lead to lower infant and maternal death rates and could significantly stem the decline of population in Russia. The maternal mortality rate in Russia is dismally high. Whereas in the West the maternal mortality rate is negligible, in Russia it poses a serious threat to large numbers of

women. As part of the St. Petersburg, Russia Healthy Cities Project of the World Health Organization, L. Louise Ivanov investigated patient satisfaction with prenatal care services. Her study found that many of these deaths are attributed to absent or late prenatal care and that an estimated 84 per cent of maternal deaths in Russia could have been prevented (Ivanov 1999:159). According to her study, maternal mortality rates and the infant mortality rates are exacerbated by the conditions of maternity facilities, which operate independently of hospitals and have few facilities for emergencies. A separate epidemiological study published in *JAMA* found that high risk pregnancy detection is not standardized and that deficiencies with the immunization program in the Soviet Union had led in 1990 to infant vaccination coverage rates of 67% for DPT and 74 % for polio and measles (Tulchinsky 1996: 115,116). The study noted that since abortion was legalized again in 1955, abortion has been the most common form of birth control in Russia. Contraception was not widely available and there was virtually no education on the subject. Tulchinsky indicates that this reliance on abortion contributes considerably to the high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality (*ibid*: 115).

The sheer numbers involved with abortion, the high mortality rates and sterilization rates associated with it in Russia and the moral authority of the Church have combined to make abortion a primary focus within the debates over the demographic situation in the country today. Furthermore, while certain ethnic populations in Russia have seen an increase in population and birth rates, such increases do not stem the concern over depopulation because the primary worry is

about a decline in the Slavic populations. Abortion has essentially become a rallying point for nationalist Christian family values propaganda – under the banner of a demographic crisis.

With the new tolerance towards religion that began with Gorbachev's law on the freedom of conscience and religious organizations in 1990, religious organizations and practitioners of various beliefs began openly proselytizing and organizing educational campaigns around social issues of particular concern to their members. With one of the highest abortion rates in the world, abortion was an issue of concern for large cross-sections of Russian society, including religious, feminist, and health sectors. In 1991 Orthodox monks and nuns could be seen handing out flyers in the subway system and in busy market areas in the center of town. Dressed in long black cassocks and holding collection pots, they often would sing hymns as they passed out literature printed on stiff brown paper that looked homemade. Some of the literature they distributed was Church news. Some were short prayers, including prayers for unborn children. While some continue to spread the word in this simple manner, the 1990s and early years of this century have brought about great technological changes in Russia, and the Church has embraced them in its efforts to appeal to contemporary parishioners and to compete with an ever-increasing flow of spiritual practices. In particular, the technology of the internet has facilitated easy and direct contact with the State Duma.

Some of the innovations adopted by the Church were implemented with aid from American and European Christian organizations. Soon after the fall of

the Soviet Union in 1991 many Christian organizations provided humanitarian aid, bibles and other Christian literature to interested parties in Russia. While some of the connections between the Russian Orthodox Church and western Christian missionary organizations have been contentious, some groups were able to find common ground around the issue of abortion. Most American groups worked quietly on this issue during initial contact. Russia continues to have an exceptionally high abortion rate, second only to Romania as of 2002, according to Catholic World News (“Russian Abortion Rate” 2002). According to the reproductive rights organization, Engender Health, three out of five pregnancies in Russia end in abortion. They currently are working on health projects that integrate post-abortion care in order to increase accessibility and knowledge of contraception in hopes of decreasing the numbers of repeated abortions (“Country by Country” 2005).

The Orthodox Medical-Educational Center “Life” was one of the first anti-abortion centers to open in Russian. Established in 1993 by the Orthodox community of the Annunciation Church, the Center’s web site declares: “The goals of the center are: to provide people with the reliable information about abortions, contraceptives and their consequences, to offer a Christian witness to this and to coordinate the efforts of those who oppose abortions in order to form a Pro-Life movement in Russia.”²⁴ The Center works on several levels to accomplish its goals. Volunteers and staff consult directly with women seeking abortions in state clinics and during other outreach campaigns. They also conduct frequent lectures on the topics of abortion and contraception. According to their

²⁴ See <http://orthomed.ru/zhizn/english/index.htm>.

web site they have conducted over 1300 lectures in schools and hospitals. By far their most far-reaching efforts come from their publication and distribution of informational materials, which include their own original pamphlets and essays as well as translations of western materials. These educational materials have been distributed to 700 medical institutions in Moscow, and the Center distributed 900,000 copies of its leaflet “Thou Shalt Not Murder” to cities across Russia. The Center also maintains ties with the media, speaking on radio and television programs and publishing articles in newspapers and magazines. The internet has opened up a vast new audience for their materials. Their materials are widely available through the Orthodox Medical Server. And they publish their articles through Slaviansky Mir, an information agency that publishes materials on the web site of the State Duma.²⁵

While I had read about the Center in the late 1990s while conducting preliminary research, I first visited it in the summer of 2001. My friend Kostya, who we met in Chapter One, and who in 1994 helped put me in contact with the Orthodox community in Moscow, had started working at the Center and was helping to establish a charity organization that would provide some basic material needs to poor women who opted out of abortion. He was also involved in creating promotional literature for the Center’s large-family campaign. According to Kostya, the charity would work in concert with the hospital consultations as part of their multi-layered strategy to discourage women from having abortions. This strategy includes educating women about the Orthodox Church’s stance on abortion and discussing with women the moral and spiritual

²⁵ See <http://www.stmichael.org/Zhizn/histor.html>

consequences of abortion for Christians. As Kostya explained, many women seek abortions because of financial strain. In fact, until the decree signed August 11, 2003 limiting abortions, financial duress was grounds for legal late term abortions. The literature provided by the Center offers guidelines for establishing consultation centers inside hospitals and for conducting counseling sessions with women considering abortion and strategies for changing their minds. One strategy includes explaining why economic hardship is not a valid reason for having an abortion. The center hopes eventually to ease the financial worries of women by providing food and clothing for them and their newborns. At some point they hope to be able to guarantee such help until each child is old enough to attend nursery school. According to Kostya, the center was even in deliberations with companies such as Pampers, to arrange for free supplies for underprivileged women who opt-out of abortion.

Humanitarian aid is not the only method the center uses to influence women, however. The center “Life” has collected materials from western pro-life groups and has written its own educational materials on abortion and related topics. Much of the material aims to convince women that the fetus is a living creature and that abortion is essentially infanticide. Some of the videos show graphic footage of late-term abortions. Movies such as *The Silent Scream* aim to shock women out of getting abortions. Other materials discuss the dangers of abortion to women’s health, claiming that abortions lead to cancer, infertility and often death. These materials offer suggestions for conducting consultations with women considering abortion and provide short scenarios of consultations with

women of various backgrounds, for example, how to conduct an interview with a poor woman, a woman from a rich family, a drug addict, a non-believer, a woman with asocial behavior, and how to discuss abortion with fathers (Center for the Protection of Motherhood).

Another program at the center “Life” is the large-families program, which is intended to encourage more people to have several children. As part of this campaign, volunteers at the center were gathering a photo album of beautiful large families to be used in a brochure. While the volunteers I spoke with acknowledged the severe problem of orphans in Russia, they hoped ultimately to be able to work towards a solution and noted that they had been involved with a few foster-parent arrangements. Ironically, despite the demographic crisis, the problem of orphans is severe in Russia, a fact which complicates the abortion debate and works counter to campaigns that push for larger families. The program “Assistance to Russian Orphans” estimates that approximately one third of the world’s orphans live in Russia. By some estimates, 95 percent of orphans in Russia have living parents but have either run away or been abandoned (Klimko 2002). According to Pravda.ru the number of official orphans has nearly doubled since 1994, reaching 867,800 as of January 2003 (“Number of Orphans” 2004). The problem is compounded by the absence of a tradition of adoption in Russia or the institution of foster families. In fact, the problem is so acute that President Putin devoted a large portion of his 2002 Women’s Day speech to the orphan crisis.

One of the Church's primary means for reaching the public and transforming public opinion is through the dissemination of its own literature as a counterbalance to the mainstream media. The Church publishes educational literature on a wide range of topics intended to inform members about various dangers within contemporary Russian society. These works are published on line, in pamphlet form and as books, and for many readers they are likely the primary, if not sole, source of information regarding these issues. The importance of the Church's opinions and writings is highlighted by the influence of the Church on Russian society as a whole and by the weight Church pronouncements have over the parliamentary decision-making process. According to a ROMIR poll taken in 2003, 71 percent of the Russian population consider themselves Russian Orthodox Christians ("Tolerance as Cornerstone" 2004). While polls indicate that many Russian believers feel a historical rather than religious connection with the Church, and many do not adhere strictly to the teachings of the Church, the Church still holds a strong emotional tie for many Russians. The Church's influence over governmental activities is clear from various legislative decisions, party platforms and the close ties between the Church and State Duma.

Much of this literature is provided to the State Duma and made available on its official web page. The effort is multi-tiered, involving people from all levels of the Church Hierarchy, from the Patriarchate to volunteers who work at the grassroots level. Political parties and organizations have been established that work directly within and in conjunction with the State Duma. The goal is to establish the moral and spiritual authority of the Orthodox Church and to legislate

Orthodox Christian morality. While hearings at the Duma generally present several view points, the pro-life activists from the center “Life” are well represented and have close ties with members of the Union of Orthodox Citizens party and the Liberal Democrats, who support their conservative, nationalist and traditional family platform. Because of the political clout of the Orthodox Church, these writings become very significant and influential despite their seemingly extremist and at times absurd rhetoric.

Slaviansky Mir

One of the primary vehicles the Church employs to influence the legislature is the information agency “Slaviansky mir” (Slavic World). This agency publishes material and information on a range of themes from an Orthodox perspective, including social-political, social-economic, demographic, philosophical, as well as issues concerning national security, geopolitics, history and culture. This agency works with the Federal Assembly of Russia and publishes the *Information Bulletin* on the activities of the State Duma and issues related to those activities. The demographic crisis is of particular concern to this agency, which has published numerous articles on the topic. Many of these articles involve or are produced by the Center “Life”.

It was through Slaviansky Mir’s Information Bulletin that I came to learn about a new movement in Russia that focuses on promoting Orthodox traditions at the state level and ending the demographic crisis. “Orthodox Russia” (*Rossia Pravoslavnaia*) is a movement supported by the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church with the stated aim to “consolidate the positive powers of society on the basis of

the Christian ideals of harmony and Orthodox morals.” The movement considers Russia to be in the midst of “the most difficult spiritual crisis of our nation” and includes among its many goals: strengthening the family, exposing views and teachings that are destroying the traditional Russian family structure, and working towards an end to the demographic crisis (“O sozdanie” 1997).

In a later issue, September 1998, Deputy Pavel Burdukov, chair of the Security Committee of the State Duma, wrote a piece in *Slaviansky Mir* about the demographic situation in Russia, which linked the crisis directly with the destruction of the traditional family. In the piece he noted a two-tiered solution to the problem. The first involved tightening immigration laws and restricting immigration into Russia. The second involved changing social attitudes towards the family. This will require a comprehensive program of change from elementary school up through the level of politics and the media. According to Burdukov, Russia must inculcate into mass consciousness the prestige of two and three child families. Furthermore, strict measures must be taken to root out the immorality that is propagated today and is a direct factor in the destruction of the family and the lowering of the birthrate. In other words, Russia needs a “moral revolution” – a return at the level of mass consciousness of the ideals of the traditional patriarchal family.” While not key points, Burdukov does acknowledge that economic wellbeing and housing are also important aspects of the problem that need to be addressed (Burdukov 1998).

The Center Life’s Literature

I learned of the direct connect between the center “Life” and the state legislature through an exploration of the official web site of the State Duma. It was on a visit to the Center in 2001, however, that I first became aware of that the Church believed there was a demographic war being conducted against Russia. While Kostya was giving me a tour of the facilities, housed inside the Khram Blagoveschenia, just off of Metro station Dinamo, my eyes were drawn to several pamphlets arranged prominently along the wall just inside the information office. The titles were in bold black lettering: “The Demographic War against Russia”, “Children and Sex Education,” and “What is Hidden behind the Mask of Valeology?” I was immediately intrigued by the connection between the three pamphlets. It was only five months since I had been introduced to the philosophy of Valeology and had even met Professor Evgenii Kuznetsov, a prominent valeologist, and received a signed copy of his book, *A New Valeology for a New Time*. He was a mild-mannered and cultured elderly gentleman who spoke about the importance of healthy living and positive thinking. He explained that Valeology was a science of healthy living first developed during the 1980s. At the time I was surprised that Russia had developed such a science because the western health literature I had read on Russia so often spoke of the need to teach Russians the importance of healthy life styles. But was I missing part of the picture? Was something more sinister going on? Could this kindly gentleman actually be part of a demographic war against Russia?

A brief overview of these brochures is very illuminating and reveals how the Church has woven a complex web that manages to indeed connect sex

education, abortion and Valeology (and by extension, all New Age practices) in a demographic war against Russia. The pamphlets are straight-forward and clear about the enemies, but they are selective and deceitful about the information presented, often offering half-truths, slandering people or groups through association, and digging out embarrassing historical events and figures to tarnish the current groups and organizations. The main conceptual enemies are occultism, globalization, feminism, and non-traditional life styles, and Valeology or healthy life styles (which the Orthodox literature explains is a code for sex education). They oppose such notions because they are viewed as detrimental to the traditional family, anti-Christian, and leading to behaviors that pervert children, increase crime, and lower the birth rate. They are seen as especially dangerous and pernicious because of their outside funding, which indicates their globalizing mission and concerted effort to destroy the Russian population and Russian culture. Interestingly, however, the Center itself employs foreign tactics and materials to promote its own values and objectives. Much of their information on abortion is from western pro-life sources, and their information on condoms, sex education and population control is straight from American and African conspiracy theory books and websites.

The first chapter of the pamphlet *Children and Sex Education* lists the main organizations that are involved in the conspiracy against Russia, although some of the people and organizations on the list are Russian: The International Federation of Planned Parenthood, The Russian Association of Family Planning, The UN Population Fund, UNESCO, the political party Women of Russia and its

leader, deputy Y.F. Lakhova, American sexology organizations, firms that produce contraceptive devices, the Ministries of Education, Health, Labor and Social Development, the “Sex Mafia”, and organizations “supposedly” leading the fight against AIDS (Gaiduk 2000: 3). The pamphlet *The Demographic War against Russia* places the United States government at the head of this conspiracy to destroy the Russian population. Its main tactic: lowering the birthrate “under the guise of ‘family planning’.” According to the authors, this war is being successfully executed through a campaign of “Orwellian disinformation” in which destructive actions are repackaged as healthy and good for the population. Campaigns to promote abortion, contraception, perversion, non-traditional life styles and to decrease the birth rate in Russia are instead called “protecting reproductive health” or ‘reproductive rights,’ ‘healthy life styles’ or even ‘safe maternity.’” The authors equate this ‘manipulation’ with Hitler’s program to destroy deficient people, which he called ‘Healthy Nation.’ (Medvedeva and Shishova 2000: 3-4). Of course, given the U.S. government’s history of using euphemisms, particularly in regard to issues of war, casualties and terrorism, it is not difficult to believe that such manipulation of words could be at play here.

The primary proof the authors of this pamphlet offer for this demographic war against Russia is the National Security Study Memorandum-200 (NSSM-200), which was classified until 1989. According to Medvedeva and Shishova, this memorandum played a key role in American foreign policy from 1975 until at least the year 2000 and was a determining factor in world development during that period. This plan was commissioned by President Nixon in 1974 with the

aid of then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, according to whom its goal was “a study of the impact of world population growth on U.S. security and overseas interests. The study should look forward at least until the year 2000, and use several alternative reasonable projections of population growth.” According to Kissinger, who wrote an introductory letter for the memorandum, the goal was to “focus on the international political and economic implications of population growth rather than its ecological, socio-logical or other aspects.” Special attention was to be placed on the following questions: “1) What, if any, new initiatives by the United States are needed to focus international attention on the population problem? 2) Can technological innovations or development reduce growth or ameliorate its effects? 3) Could the United States improve its assistance in the population field and if so, in what form and through which agencies -- bilateral, multilateral, private?” (NSSM-200).

Certainly, the focus of Kissinger’s letter is on the strategic role of population control in U.S. foreign policy. If one reads this with the preconception that the United States is undergoing a war to decrease the global population, it could be imagined that the U.S. is manufacturing a “population crisis” in order to further its own goals of global domination. The national security of the United States, not the suffering of people in overpopulated countries, is the main concern of Kissinger’s letter. Further bolstering the claims and worries of the Russian pro-life activists, the memorandum does discuss the role of family planning programs and other American and international aid organizations, such as USAID, the UN Population Fund, UNICEF, the WHO, and UNESCO in working

to promote education, economic opportunities, and health initiatives that would lower the birth rates in developing countries with rapidly increasing populations. The pro-life authors claim that part of this plan involves spreading feminist ideas and gender studies (Medvedeva and Shishova 2000: 13). While the memorandum never mentions feminism or gender studies by name, it does quote a research proposal from Harvard University's Department of Population Studies that suggested that education and non-traditional roles for women contribute to lower fertility rates (NSSM-200).

The memorandum does not discuss weakening populations as a strategy for global domination. In fact, the aim seems to be the creation of stable socio-economic factors and improved living conditions. American interests are certainly the main concern here, but according to the report, global stability and well-being would be in the best interest of U.S. national security. It is because overpopulation is seen as a factor leading to instability, in fact, that population control becomes so important. A section of the memorandum dedicated to India states, "There will probably be a weakening, possibly a breakdown, of the control of the central government over some of the states and local areas. The democratic system will be taxed and may be in danger of giving way to a form of dictatorship, benevolent or otherwise. The existence of India as a democratic buttress in Asia will be threatened" (NSSM-200). While certainly elements of propaganda for American democratic ideals are present, the aim does not seem to be the destruction of Indian society or government structure.

While a list of countries of key political and strategic interest is provided in the memorandum, the Soviet Union is not among them. In fact, the memorandum notes that “fertility rates in RSFSR and the republics of Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia are below replacement level. This situation has prevailed at least since 1969-1970 and, if continued, will eventually lead to negative population growth in these republics.” The memorandum mentions the concern of the Soviet Union regarding the low fertility rates amongst Slavs and Balts and contrasts the attitudes towards this demographic development in the United States and the Soviet Union. While, according to the memorandum, the United States government aimed to lower and stabilize its population, the Soviet Union seemed to be trying to increase its birth rates. Despite these attempts to raise the population rates in the USSR, the authors of the memorandum write that projections of Soviet and East European population rates – even if they actually start to rise – indicate that they pose no threat and had no “important implications for east-west power relations” (NSSM-200).

Of course, given the history of Kissinger and given experiences with the manufacturers of the sterilization drug Quinacrine and Planned Parenthood’s history of forced sterilization and early connection with the eugenics movement, some of the claims made by the pro-life organizations do seem plausible. Moreover, many Russians have been adversely affected by the economic changes since the fall of the communist system and not all of the United States-influenced globalization efforts, humanitarian aid, and business activities are improving the lives of the general Russian population. Studies indicate that while in the 1980s

10 percent of the population lived below the minimum subsistence level, by 1999 over 35 percent of the population lived below this level (Shorrocks and Kolenikov 2000).

Studies about Memorandum NSSM-200, however, indicate that it was never implemented by the United States government, a notion that is clearly supported by the actions of the Reagan administration and both Bush administrations. In fact, since 1973, the Helms Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act has prohibited the use of U.S. funds for abortion services abroad. While some agencies got around this law by using U.S. funds for other reproductive health services and non-U.S. funds for abortion services, this loophole was closed in 1984 by the Reagan administration and its “global gag rule,” which banned the use of U.S. funds for any program abroad that offered abortions, even if the abortions were funded from non-U.S. money. The gag rule also applied to agencies that received federal money within the United States. While the intention of the rule was to limit abortions, reductions in U.S. aid ultimately led to hardships for organizations that provided reproductive health care in general, including neo-natal care, contraception, and sex education. As often such organizations were involved in a wide range of health projects, organizations working on AIDS prevention were also adversely affected by these laws. The Clinton Administration lifted the gag rule in 1993, but George W. Bush reinstated it on January 22, 2001, his first day in office, which, symbolically, corresponded with the 28th anniversary of Roe v Wade.

What the “Life” pamphlets fail to recognize is that the underlying goal of increased U.S. security does not automatically negate the negative effects of overpopulation and does not make population control a necessarily evil idea. Furthermore, the fact that the organizations mentioned in the memorandum were involved in improving population health and reducing birth rates does not necessarily imply a conspiracy between them, particularly one with the aims stated by the pro-life activists: the perversion of children, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, the promotion of homosexuality, increased drug use and the overall destruction of traditional societies. In fact, many of the programs work to prevent AIDS and STDs, decrease drug dependency, and increase awareness about sexual abuse. When such work is done in the guise of ‘women’s rights’, however, the pro-life organizations are already suspicious. Women’s rights in western literature is taken to mean feminism, which the pro-life groups interpret as anti-Christian, anti-family, and promoting sinful lifestyles such as homosexuality or free love. Some of the literature goes as far as to call such groups satanic because of their views on sexuality (Medvedeva and Shishova 2002).

While the pro-life activists fight for maternal rights and family rights, they are suspicious of groups that promote women’s rights. As we have seen, they instead interpret such groups as destructive agents of an American conspiracy to undermine the Russian population through spreading disease and promoting abortion. The pamphlet *Children and sex education*, states that Planned Parenthood actually determines the success of its programs by the number of

abortions performed at each location. The more abortions, the more successful that particular branch. Some of the disinformation offered by the pro-life groups include: 1) “scientific proof” that condom use leads to the spread of AIDS because the virus is smaller than the pores of latex. This in turn is offered as proof of the nefarious intentions of Planned Parenthood 2) the “fact” that sex education leads to abortion, STDs, and the rapid decrease in the birth rate (Gaiduk 2000: 9). 3) Planned Parenthood is an occult organization. In fact, the pro-life and anti-cult movements are closely intertwined.²⁶ One of the tactics of the campaign is to link sex education and abortion with occult, anti-Christian, and non-Russian groups and ideas. One pamphlet produced by “Life” is even called *The scent of sulfur: the occult roots of “Planned Parenthood.”* Oddly enough, I bought this pamphlet at the Inward Path, the main New Age store in Moscow, where readers would likely be favorably disposed to occult ideas. The picture the Church literature creates is of a close-knit group of conspirators working toward the perversion of Russian children and the destruction of Russian society as a whole. The literature itself discourages its readers from seeking out alternative information on the subject or even entering into discussions with proponents of Planned Parenthood and Valeologia. The brochure “Children and Sex Education,” published by the All-Russian Committee for the Protection of the Family and Life, states that “debating with those people is the same as entering

²⁶ The center “Life” provided Slaviansky Mir with information regarding the suit brought against the Orthodox Church by Gleb Yakunin, the Church of Scientology and the Society of Krishna Consciousness. This suit charged the Orthodox Church with defamation of character for publishing Alexander Dvorkin’s pamphlet “Ten questions for persistent strangers, for those who do not want to be recruited” and accused Dvorkin of inciting religious hatred. See: (<http://www.duma.gov.ru/search/kmpage/84200017/ii/sootech/slavmir/sib5fev.htm>).

into a discussion about morals with a sex maniac...” (Gaiduk 2000: 4). The exact same statement, although this time attributed to Father Maksim Obukhov of the Life center and made in reference to Valeology, is quoted in the booklet *What is hidden beneath the Mask of Valeology?* (Dobrosotskii 2000: 53).

Medvedeva and Shishova offer up as proof of the occult nature of Planned Parenthood its listing in the directory *New Religious Organizations of Russia of Destructive, Occult and Pagan Character*, which is published by the Moscow Patriarchate (Medvedeva and Shishova 2002: 28). Not only is Planned Parenthood listed as an “occult center,” but Medvedeva and Shishova implicate it in direct involvement with the Church of Satan and ritualistic abortions and cannibalism (Medvedeva and Shishova 2002: 20). To demonstrate the satanic elements of Planned Parenthood they quote an excerpt from a Lyndon LaRouche article called “The Theory of the Satanist Personality,” which explains how to spot a Satanist in your midst or in your child’s school. (Medvedeva and Shishova 2002: 26). The perennial presidential candidate and affirmed conspiracy theorist regularly gives speeches about Memorandum NSSM-200 throughout the developing world and is the source for many of the conspiracy theories that have developed around it.²⁷

²⁷ On an interesting side note, LaRouche has delivered several papers at scientific and political conferences in Moscow. In April 2004 he gave a paper called “Entering the Economy of the Noosphere” at a conference at the Vernadsky Geological Museum. In this paper he expounded on the importance of Vernadsky’s notion of noosphere for the evolutionary development of mankind: “This applies to the needed development of those kinds of systems of management of mineral resources which anticipate the requirements of a growing and developing Eurasian population, an area in which Russia’s science has a predetermined historical qualification. We must think in terms of managing the Solar system, to bring it ultimately into the reign of our Noosphere” (LaRouche 2004). In June 2001 LaRouche spoke before the Economics Committee of the State Duma, calling for the total reform of the global IMF monetary system and again gave a paper on Vernadsky, this

Within the framework of the demographic war, Valeology is portrayed as a western movement aimed at corrupting Russian youth by promoting sexual promiscuity and anti-Christian ideas. The pamphlet *What is Hiding behind the Mask of Valeology* declares Valeology the “Third wave of spiritual aggression.” Funded by Soros, the UN Population Fund and others, the pamphlet explains, Valeologists spread the propaganda of healthy life styles, which can be interpreted as a “cult of health” in which health and the body are the highest values in life. The pamphlet informs us that Valeology teaches children such dangerous notions as “freedom of choice,” independent thought, and personal responsibility, thereby diminishing the authority of the parents and Church and leading to moral chaos.²⁸ They also attempt to cultivate sexuality in children at a very young age, in some cases even preschoolers are taught sexual positions, according to the pamphlet, although I could find no such lessons in the Valeology literature I reviewed. In fact, Valeology is often said to be just a mask for sex education. The pamphlet also shows us that the moral ambiguity promoted by Valeology is not entirely random or undirected. Valeologists promote the ideas of their funders: American businesses and organizations. I. Y. Medvedeva, a clinical psychologist and co-author of several pamphlets and articles on Planned Parenthood and the demographic war on Russia, is quoted in the above pamphlet about Valeology and foreign companies: “Russia has been occupied by various foreign companies.

time speaking about the importance of Vernadsky’s biosphere idea, the importance of independent thought and non-Euclidian thinking for the development of human minds able to make the type of discoveries that Vernadsky made, and the importance of directing global energy towards the transformation of the biosphere.

²⁸ Note that these notions – freedom of choice, independent thought, personal responsibility – are all said to be promoted by a science developed during the Soviet period.

When you read the programs for Valeology you see – if a program is sponsored by Colgate, then there is a lot of attention given to dental hygiene. If the sponsor is Proctor and Gamble, then they focus more on how to care for one’s hair. And Johnson and Johnson has three programs: sanitary hygiene, gender education and sex education, which they are actively inculcating in our schools” (Dobrosotskii 2000: 51). That these companies promote American values is also made clear in the literature. In the pamphlet *Valeology: ideological, scientific and religious aspects*, Gamayunov writes that the “science” Valeology was developed in the United States and “it would be more honest to describe Valeology not as a science about healthy life styles but rather as propaganda for the American style of life with its extremely primitive notions about humans and the meaning of life” (Gamayunov 2002: 20).

The Orthodox Church and Education

In addition to the dissemination of literature, the direct lobbying of the legislature, and grassroots efforts directed at individual women, the Church also has turned its attention to the Ministry of Education in order to increase its influence in the determination of the curriculum at state educational institutions. Two of the main campaigns instigated by the church have been the promotion of its own course, “The Foundations of Orthodox Culture,” and the elimination of courses on sex education. Because some of the Valeology courses offered in the state schools discussed issues of sex education, this subject became a primary target of the Church.

According to a Ministry of Education news summary, Moscow Patriarch Alexii II has been trying for many years to convince education bureaucrats to allow the Church to participate in the Russian education system. In 2002 Alexii convinced then Education Minister Vladimir Filippov to send a letter to the regional departments recommending the institution of an elective course called “the Foundations of Orthodox Culture.” The course was never introduced into the official Russian school curriculum. Upon the installment of the new Minister of Education, Andrei Fursenko, Alexii II immediately began renewed efforts to push such a course. Initially Fursenko agreed that such a course would be useful, but he later backtracked and announced that what he meant was that he would support the introduction of a course on world religions. More recently, at a round table “Science, Education, Childrearing and Religion” organized by Moscow State University in honor of the Patriarch’s 75th birthday, Minister Fursenko explained in detail the principles of the separation of church and state and made explicit his intentions to keep the church from becoming involved in the education system. Representatives of the church argued that children cannot be raised properly without religion and that without religion schools could not raise well-behaved, upstanding patriotic citizens.

The principal (rector) of Moscow State Universtiy, Viktor Sadovnichii, spoke out against Fursenko’s stance on the separation of state and church, arguing that such a separation displays ignorance of Russian history. Furthermore, he made the case for the intimate connection between science and religion by pointing to his own background in mathematics: “As a mathematician I often

come across the notion of infinity, but what does that mean? This is a serious question that unites scientific and religious minds” (“Ministr Fursenko”).

The government did implement the program “Youth of Russia,” (Referendum number 1015 from December 27, 2000) designed for the Ministry of Education with the goal of “creating and developing the legal, economic, and organizational conditions necessary for developing in youth a consciousness of citizenship within the conditions of a democratic society, the market economy, a legal government, and the individual self-realization of young people as active participants in the transformation of contemporary Russian society” (Kas’ianov 2000). The main goals of the program are to develop the military-patriotic consciousness and spiritual-ethical development of Russian youth. This was a comprehensive, multi-tiered program that aimed to combat all of the problems facing Russian youths today, including drug abuse, unemployment, crime and delinquency. A further danger facing youth, according to this referendum, is the ill-effects of non-traditional religions. These ills were to be combated by, amongst other things, instilling in young people a sense of culture and propagating a program for healthy living (Kas’ianov 2000). Despite the patriotic and spiritual aspects of this course, the Church remained dissatisfied due to the inclusion of “healthy living” in the curriculum.

In 1996 the Ministry of Education introduced a new medical-pedagogical discipline into the system of higher education: Valeologia, with the qualification of pedagogue-valeologist. Strategies were developed and plans made for introducing courses in Valeology into the public school system for students in

grades 1-11. Over the course of five years a social-organizational structure was developed for conducting and evaluating such courses. Between 1996 and 1999, according to Valeologist V. Tsirkin, 36 universities throughout Russia attained licenses from the Ministry of Education to offer students this new discipline. During that same period, high schools in 50 regions began offering the new subject “Valeologia” (Tsirkin 2000). Valeological centers and institutions quickly began developing around the country. In 2000 the Ministry of Education suggested introducing the subject “Valeologia” into the Federal component of the school academic plan, which would have provided ready-made school positions for graduates of this new discipline (Kondakov 2000). That same year, however, the Ministry of Education chose instead to sharply cut the activities of valeologists at both the university and high school levels (Tsirkin 2000).

Following the announcement by the Ministry of Education in 2000 that plans were being made to introduce Valeology to the list of required school subjects, Russian Orthodox leaders began organizing campaigns protesting this decision. Metropolitan Kostya used the opportunity of his traditional “Christmas Educational Readings” at a conference at the International Slavic Center on 27 January to urge all Orthodox believers to write to the Minister of Education and the President of the Russian Federation to demand that the new courses be rescinded. The official themes of the two part conference were: “The world of religious sectarianism: Experiences with overcoming problems” and “Orthodox rehabilitation centers for drug addicts, alcoholics and the mentally ill.” The Metropolitan remarked that the introduction of this course into the mandatory

curriculum was particularly offensive given that courses on Orthodox Christianity were not even allowed in the schools as electives. He attributed this and other problems with the schools to a clash between the liberal idea and traditionalism. The harm of liberalism, according to the Metropolitan, lies in the absence of the notion of sin and the presence of the notion of absolute freedom. This combination is leading to the creation of a civilization incapable of living because “human passions and instincts within conditions of civil freedom possess a horribly destructive power.” Liberal institutions in economics, politics and the social sphere are morally justified only if they are not practiced in conjunction with the ideas of philosophical liberalism regarding human individuality but are instead counterbalanced with traditionalism in the realm of the individual (“Vos’mye rozhdestvenskye” 2000). On February 1, 2000, the Ministry of Education chose to eliminate Valeology from the curriculum. The main points of contention regarding Valeology revolved around concerns about sex education classes in the schools and the introduction of nontraditional religious beliefs and practices.

The campaign against Valeology was vast and multi-tiered. The Orthodox Medical Server, which hosts the website for the Russian Orthodox medical center “Life,” has a section entitled “Protecting Children from Depravity.” The first and longest section is devoted to sex education, with 51 articles on the dangers of this subject. This section is followed by 17 articles on the dangers of Valeology, including a letter written to the Minister of Education on behalf of participants in a conference on Valeology held February 9th, 2000. One example of these articles

is “The danger of safe sex,” written in 1998 by a biology student at Moscow State University who discusses how the pores in latex condoms are known to be larger than the AIDS virus, and therefore their use actually promotes the spread of the disease. According to the Church, sex educators are secretly promoting the spread of AIDS as part of their Demographic War against Russia. The writer recommends instead implementing abstinence programs such as those promoted by the Christian right in the United States. This information regarding AIDS and condoms was later reprinted in the Orthodox pamphlet “The Demographic War on Russia.” The scope of this campaign is revealed in an analysis of letters to the Duma. According to the Information Bulletin of the State Duma, an analysis of letters from constituents received between November 28 and December 19, 2000 shows a disproportionately large number of letters concerned with the school subject Valeologia and the sex education programs associated with it. Of the 2695 letters grouped under the subheading of social issues, 510 concerned these courses. Raising pensions and the Labor Code project were the only topics to receive more letters during that period, with 646 and 869 letters respectively (“Obzor obrashchenii” 2000).

According to Igor Kon, Russia’s most renowned sexologist, surveys through 1997 indicate that most Russians are in favor of sex education in the schools. While several attempts were made to introduce such courses in the 1980s and 90s, they were generally under-funded and the teachers often ill-equipped to teach them. In order to counter this problem, and to work to lower the teenage pregnancy rates and deal with the rapid increase of sexually

transmitted diseases and AIDS, in 1996 the Russian Ministry of Education launched an experimental three year program in 16 schools. The program worked in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund and UNESCO to develop an appropriate curriculum and textbooks. The program immediately came under fire by religious organizations, some of whom called the project a “Western ideological plot against Russian children” (Kon 2001). Members of the clergy and lay church activists began an intense grassroots and media campaign. As part of this campaign, the Orthodox Medico-education center “Life” hosted a conference on March 6, 1997 called “Protecting Life and the Family.” The proceedings for this conference are available on the State Duma web site, courtesy of the information agency Slavianskii Mir. While the conference included panelists from both the religious sector and academia, including the Russian Academy of Education, the tone of the conference is made clear by the opening remarks: “...today we stand on the threshold of a new revolution aimed against the family and thus also aimed against society and the State. The events and activities aimed at the perversion of children and population control have reached such a scale that we now are essentially dealing with a war of genocide directed against the population of Russia” (Gaiduk 1997). The primary enemies in this war are Planned Parenthood and the sex education program proposed by the Ministry of Education. Rather than call the program sex education, however, the author of the summary refers to it as the “program of required perversion of young children,” using quotations marks to infer that he was employing an actual quote from the program itself.

Igor Kon attended this conference and explained in his article “Sex culture and politics in contemporary Russia,” that while the religious participants were opposed to any form of sex education in the schools, several of the academics were put off by the foreign elements of the project. He quotes the academic Antonina Khripkova as exclaiming, "We don't need the Netherlands' experience; we have our own traditional wisdom." The panel concluded that the UNESCO project should be shelved and a new Russian program developed that would focus on moral education “with some elements of sex education,” which according to Kon was the phrase used in the 1960s when an earlier failed attempt to introduce sex education into the schools was made. The Church, however, rejected even this version and all programs for sexual education were scrapped (Kon 2001).

Political Debates

The Church’s campaign to influence gender norms at the level of legislation has resulted in some highly publicized, heated and sensationalistic exchanges among political figures. At times these political debates about reproductive rights and sexual freedom have veered into the absurd and comical as personal behavior is linked directly to the national security of the Russian Federation, and the rhetoric turns toward a war between the genders. In 1994, arguing in favor of legislation that would have made abortion illegal in Russia, the nationalist politician and writer, Edvard Limonov declared that abortion was no longer a personal issue for women, but had become a governmental matter. Abortion is a crime against the state, depriving the state of 3 million citizens a

year, he declared (“Fantazii Savenko” 2003). According to an interview in the Russian version of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, Marina Arbatova, a popular feminist author, was called a fascist, murderer and other names when she spoke in the State Duma against the most recently proposed bill banning abortion. She explained that abortion was an issue that involved two people but because Russia is a patriarchal society, the new bill only calls for punishment for women. The hall, she said, was aghast when she proposed setting punishments for both men and women (“Abort” n.d.).

A bill banning homosexual acts between men was proposed around the same time that the debates about banning abortion were raging in 2003. Alexander Chuev and his People’s Deputy Party proposed a bill banning propaganda for homosexuality and homosexual acts between men. This same bill, if passed, would have introduced prison terms of up to 12 years for performing abortions after the 12th week. People’s Deputy Party member Raikov explained that making homosexual acts illegal would help eliminate STDs, AIDS, child prostitution and pornography. He bolstered his argument with statements that many civic institutions, particularly religious ones, were supportive of the measure (“Deputaty budut sazhat” 2002). Another member of the People’s Deputy Party argued that the measure was in part proposed in order to help women. In an interview with the journal *Ogonek* in 2002, Vadim Bulavinov explained: “Of course, we’re also thinking about the women who are suffering because there aren’t enough husbands. You wouldn’t believe how many women call the Duma with words of thanks and tell us that we’re doing the right thing

because there aren't any normal men left anymore. Homosexuality in the rectum is very dangerous for society!" The bill not only helps women, however. Homosexuals themselves would benefit from the law, according to Bulavinov, because a sentence of prison or mandatory treatment would be better than if "some sort of alternative movement of skinheads came after them on the street and shoved batons up their a**". I'm convinced that with a social problem as complicated as anal sex the State Duma should not simply sit with its head in the sand like an ostrich" (Semenov 2002). The article did not make clear where Bulavinov got his information regarding homosexuality, but it closely resembles that of the United States' Christian right and their propaganda about the "gay agenda." He portrays homosexuality as a dangerous life style that has become fashionable. It is an unnatural situation that can be changed with treatment or prevented through punishment. Furthermore, his party has close ties with the Orthodox Church and the Pro-life movement in Russia.

In response to Chuev's bill banning homosexuality, Deputy Alexei Mitrofanov of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia prepared a bill that called for the criminalization of lesbianism. He introduced this bill allegedly because he believed the bill banning homosexuality discriminated against men. Mitrofanov explained that lesbianism was actually far more dangerous for society than homosexuality between men because "women should have children, and they should have four, five, six children like in the East, but lesbianism disrupts the creation of a proper family" which he argued should not be allowed given the current demographic crisis in Russia. The crisis is so grave, he said, that in order

to raise the birth rate in Russia he would consider a ban on condoms or the criminalization of the use of any form of contraception (“Mitrofanov pobezhdaet” 2002). While some argue that Mitrofanov’s bill was simply a joke response, given the history of his party and its leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, it does not seem implausible that the comments reflect his actual views.

In January 2004 the Duma committee on civil, criminal, arbitration and procedural law concluded that the anti-homosexual law contradicted the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which guarantees the inviolability of the personal lives of citizens regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. Foreign opinion also seemed to play a role in the outcome. When the legislation was proposed several deputies remarked that Russia was now the laughing-stock of Europe and that if such a bill passed they would never be taken seriously by the European Union. The bill banning lesbianism was also thrown out, but in September 2003, a bill limiting the circumstances under which women can have an abortion between the 12th and 22nd week of gestation was signed into law. Under this law abortion is legal during this period only in cases of rape, imprisonment, the death or severe disability of the husband or a court ruling stripping the woman of parental rights. By March 2004, Chuev already had proposed a new bill banning the advertisement of abortion clinics and services. That same year he proposed a bill for the special protection of pregnant women. Interestingly, in 2003 Raikov’s name was on a bill with feminist politician, Yekaterina Lakhova, of the Women of Russia movement, that guarantees equal rights between men and women. This bill passed in the Duma after the first

reading with 342 deputies in favor, 2 abstaining and one voting against the measure.

While “the gay agenda” so feared and demonized by the far right in the West may not be of central concern to the Russian Orthodox Church, the Church takes a negative stance on the subject and stays abreast of legislative and ecumenical acts related to the issue of homosexuality. In 2002 the *Orthodox Journal* reported on the ban on homosexual acts proposed by independent People’s Deputy Gennadii Raikov together with several other bills geared towards strengthening morality amongst the Russian people (“Deputy Gosudarstvenoi” 2002). And in November 2003 the Church officially cut ties with the Episcopal Church in the United States after Gene Robinson, an openly gay priest, was elected Bishop. Calling the election “antichristian and blasphemous” the Russian Orthodox Church stated that homosexual contact had always been considered a serious sin within the church, and that while the church “doesn’t refuse help to those unfortunates who are possessed by this illness,” it cannot approve of this “perversion of human nature as determined by The Creator.” Furthermore, the Moscow Patriarch declared that the liberal views of the Episcopal Church are the “path to the destruction of the very foundations of the Church” (“Russkaia Pravoslavnaia” 2003).

The results of the Church’s campaigns have been mixed. Abortion is still legal. They did not succeed in criminalizing homosexuality. But their rhetoric has entered the public sphere and is shaping political debates. They have also succeeded in altering State legislation, have successfully intervened in the

workings of the State educational system, and to a certain extent may be instigating changes in public opinion. In 1998 the State Duma cut off federal funding for family-planning centers. Valeology and sex education courses are no longer part of the Ministry of Education core curriculum and teachers who teach such courses face legal problems. In 2003 a law was passed placing restrictions on abortions performed after the 12th week. The efforts may also be paying off in changed public opinion about abortion. According to Igor Kon, a national public opinion poll conducted in 1994 found that 73 percent of men and 88 percent of women supported a women's right to abortion (Kon 1999). A smaller poll conducted in 2003 during deliberations about the bill in the State Duma restricting abortion, indicated that 62 percent of Russians would not support the ban. While these two polls are not equivalent, taken together they could indicate a decrease in support for abortion in Russia (Weir 2003). Despite these successes, the Union of Orthodox Citizens continues its campaigns implicating Valeology, sex education and feminism in the decline of the Russian population. In a 2004 report in *Russkii Vestnik*, the Union expressed its opposition to the election of Deputy Ekaterina Lakhova as head of the committee on the family and youth, declaring, "We are categorically opposed to such a project, about which our sources in the State Duma have informed us... Ekaterina Lakhova is one of the lobbyists for the Russian Association of Planned Parenthood, which introduced the sadly well-known courses "valeologia" into Russian schools. In essence, these are lessons in depravity where in the name of 'sexual enlightenment' children were introduced to all sorts of sexual deviance and were offered propaganda about abortion.

Experts consider the goal of the 'Planned Parenthood' to be the intentional lowering of the birthrate in Russia and a planned demographic catastrophe" ("Protiv izbranie" 2004).

The Role of Gender Norms

The social norms and gender roles promoted by experts and accepted by the general public create an atmosphere conducive to the ideas promoted by the Orthodox Church. The call on women to return to traditional roles resonates with many parts of society. Not only Church leaders, but politicians and even popular psychologists are encouraging women to focus more on their roles as mothers and to develop their feminine selves. In fact, both Gorbachev and Yeltsin called on women to stay home and raise children. While women's nature is often a topic of conversation in Russia and has a long history of politicization, the demographic crisis has made it a legitimate political topic. At the street level there is a general consensus about the inherent nature of gender differences, which makes the political turn seem more natural and more readily accepted. The phrase "the weaker sex" is still commonly used in every day conversations, as are such colloquialisms as "a memory like a girl." And a popular TV talk show the Domino Principle in 2002 addressing the topic "Should women have the right to drive?" elicited a wide range of caller and audience responses, many of which answered the question in the negative.

The differences between men and women and their roles are quite pronounced in Russian society and are frequently pointed out and discussed without critique. Some attribute this partly to the attempted social engineering

that the State encouraged during WWII and afterwards. With Stalin's assumption of power, communist slogans of equality between the sexes quickly gave way to campaigns promoting motherhood and glorifying the nuclear family. As part of the campaign to promote larger families, abortion was made illegal and educators and social scientists were advised to develop ways to promote the socialization of traditional sex roles amongst school children. At this same time financial barriers were erected for obtaining divorce and a tax was levied on adults without children (Clements 1991: 225-227). Interestingly, as noted above, the reestablishment of this tax on childless adults has been discussed recently in the State Duma as one possible solution to the demographic crisis. While the ban on abortion was lifted after Stalin's death in 1953, the socialization of sex differences continued. During the period known as the "thaw" under Khrushchev, more freedom was allowed in social science research. In the new field of sociology, as well as in psychology and pedagogy, scientists and teachers were instructed to seek out and encourage the differences between the sexes. At the same time that programs for socialization into gender roles began, biological predisposition was taught to be the main reason for this socialization. Soviet pedagogues Khripkova and Kolesov explain that "recognition of the character of one's own sexual group is the basis for the formation of the psychological structure, which defines the behavior acceptable in a given society for members of the male or female sex. Therefore, the formation of the ideas about the necessary type of behavior of a boy or girl, young man or woman, is an aim of upbringing" (Attwood 1985: 67). These necessary types of behavior reflected the traditional

belief in male strength, bravery, objectivity and reasoning ability, and the female inclination to caring, emotionality, intuition, impulsiveness and “a natural attraction to domesticity.” Women were therefore taught it was their natural duty to both work and care for the children (Attwood 1985: 66-69).

The modern feminist movement in Russia has been working to promote women’s rights and examine the position of women in society since the late 1970s. The movement worked underground during the Soviet period and some feminists were exiled because of their views.²⁹ Since the early 1990s the movement has grown extensively. Gender studies programs and research centers have opened up across the country. A military college in Moscow now even offers a course in gender studies – taught by a man who is a graduate of the Moscow Center for Gender Studies summer seminar program. In 2001 a textbook on “feminology” was even available for the general public at one of Moscow’s largest bookstores, Biblio-Globus. Women of Russia, a feminist political party, and its leader Elena Lakhova, hold positions of power in the Russian government and have been working to pass equal rights legislation and legislation promoting reproductive health and the rights of mothers. Still, the feminist movement is not widely accepted in Russian society. Misconceptions abound about the nature of feminism and feminists themselves. Many assume feminists are man-hating lesbians who cannot find husbands, a notion confirmed and promoted by psychologists and pedagogues. And while the type of systematic social engineering that took place under the Soviet Union may not be taking place currently, contemporary school textbooks, psychology books and health books

²⁹ See *Woman and Russia -First Feminist Samizdat*

continue to discuss and promote different social roles for men and women, and there is a general tendency to promote traditional lifestyles and pathologize behavior outside of the traditional range. Orthodox Christian ideas about women's roles, the family and abortion fit easily into this picture and are readily accepted as proper and natural.

One textbook intended for tenth and eleventh graders in the course the Fundamentals of Medical Knowledge and Healthy Life Style even goes so far as to directly connect women's roles with the national security of the country. The text states that among women's many social roles, childbirth and care for children during the first years of life are the most important because "only a woman can guarantee the production of the population, and thereby solve the demographic problems of the government and its national security" (Smirnov, Mishin and Izhevskii 2002: 21). In a later chapter on marriage (defined as a union between a woman and a man) we learn the importance of understanding the psychological differences between the sexes. Women, we learn, are "more inclined to confiding conversation, are more emotional and less reserved. For women, the ethical-psychological attractiveness of a man is of primary importance; therefore, they always want to hear tender words. Men, however, "love with their eyes." Therefore, they often prefer at first an attractive appearance and only later are capable of judging the other qualities of a woman" (*ibid.*: 94). Although only one page is devoted to women's roles in society, three whole chapters of this high school textbook are written on the institution of marriage, and another focuses on what to expect during pregnancy and how to take care of a baby. The small

section on sex education is devoted to the evils of sex at a young age and the various sexually transmitted diseases a person is sure to get: “Early sexual relations always have negative affects on a person’s health, particularly their reproductive health” (*ibid.*: 51). No information is provided about safe sexual relations in this textbook and no mention is made of non traditional families or relations.

Contemporary psychology books and women’s health books offer a similar slant on gender roles and norms of behavior. Women are encouraged to be “feminine” and “womanly” and men to be strong and confident. Marriage and sexuality are always presented as between a man and a woman, with a harmonious nuclear family as the goal. In his 1999 work *Gender and Sex in Contemporary Society*, Psychologist Dmitrii Kolesov notes that even the expression of proper gender mannerisms is important for harmonious relations between a husband and wife: “most often the unsuccessful and unhappily married women are those who, as if on purpose, try to hide signs of femininity: cigarette in their mouth, a harsh voice, too free, a rude way of carrying themselves, purposefully using a masculine manner of speaking...” (Kolesov 1999: 56). Kolesov implicates feminism in many of the problems he sees amongst the married couples and troubled single women he works with. Feminists have created a war between the sexes and have lumped men and women into opposing categories, thereby depriving all people of their individuality. But such a war is natural for feminists, because, according to Kolesov, feminists are women without maternal instincts who are unable to feel pleasure from intimate relations with

men. No happily married woman with children would become a feminist. In fact, Kolesov explains that the medical term for feminism is frigidity. He considers feminism dangerous for women and argues that “the attempt to bring the notion of ‘emancipation’ into the family is very dangerous for society.” It leads to a weakening of the family and all of the known consequences of that: drug addiction and crime (Kolesov 1999: 69-70).

When non heterosexual relations are mentioned at all in works about women’s health and psychology, it is always within the context of deviant or abnormal behavior (the main exception to this is the work of sexologist Igor Kon). It is said to lead to unhappiness or worse. A work by psychologist and sexologist D. Yenikeeva places homosexuality at the top of a long list of sexual perversions and deviant behaviors, a list which includes necrophilia, pedophilia, gerontophilia, and incest (Yenikeeva 1997). Yenikeeva does not, however, view homosexuality as a danger to society and does not blame it for the psychological problems of her patients. Kolesov also notes that homosexuality is not a mental illness, but he too lists it among the sexual deviations and implicates it in the weakening of the family.

Conclusion

While the social norms and gender roles promoted by experts and accepted by the general public create an atmosphere conducive to the ideas promoted by the Orthodox Church, sympathy with Orthodox ideas does not automatically translate into conformity with them. Several of their campaigns have met with resistance by both the general public and political representatives.

The experiences of women in the New Age in Russia reveal that on the ground the boundaries between factions are much more blurred than the ideological campaigns portray. Removed from the hysteria promoted by western hegemonic discourse and interference, the spiritual health sphere of women in Russia looks far less combative and far less clear cut. Women continue to work outside the home, have abortions, prefer smaller families, and are active in both the alternative spiritual health movement and the Orthodox Church. While debates have been heated within the State Duma over such issues as abortion, orphans, gay rights and religious freedom, so far the Church and its supporters in the Duma have had little success in legislating their conservative views.

At the same time, Russian New Age practitioners are not actively pro-abortion, pro-feminist, or pro gay rights. Many I spoke with had in fact had abortions at some point in their lives, but these were more often than not offered up as painful examples of lessons learned through the tragedies of life. And while the women I encountered in the Russian New Age were strong, free-willed and career-orientated, they draw on their historical role as healers and capitalize on particularly feminine qualities such as intuition, sensitivity and emotionality, which are highly valued within this sphere and believed to be gained by women through the activities of birth and motherhood. Within the New Age, women emphasize these feminine attributes and traditional heterosexual female identities and roles. But while they prize such roles and attributes, they do not surrender their identities as individuals, individuals with infinite room for personal and spiritual growth. The nurturing mother role provides them with motivation,

lessons and a source of strength and respect within the spiritual health movement as they carve their paths of self-transformation and empowerment, as we will see in their spiritual health journeys in chapters Five through Seven.

Chapter Three Introduction to New Age in Moscow

When I began my exploration of the New Age in Russia, I was not completely unaware of New Age practices and beliefs. I had heard of auras, astral planes and crystal healing. I had frequented the local New Age store in my home town since my undergraduate years, although mostly as a source of unique gifts, and I knew people who practiced massage therapy and polarity therapy. I was also familiar with Theosophy, Madam Blavatsky, Gurdjieff and Nicholas Rerikh from my Russian studies. And while I never bought into the notion that New Age groups were dangerous “totalitarian cults” bent on destroying Russian culture and Christianity more generally, I had never taken New Age ideas seriously and had little understanding of their main tenets, theories or practices. In fact, I had trouble getting past the mental images the term “New Age” conjured up, such as the serenely smiling Yanni, the feel-good Oprah guru Deepak Chopra or Cleopatra reincarnated as Shirley MacLaine. Yet here at the Center Voskhozhdenie (Ascension) I was confronted with people who were well-educated and informed and who not only seriously studied New Age principles but also incorporated them into their everyday lives. I entered a realm with a language and world view that I at first found incomprehensible. People spoke about and studied chakras and subtle bodies and cosmic laws as if they were as real as the world I had hitherto lived in. I learned that there were schools where I could learn how to become a psychic or develop such skills as healing with the hands, aura diagnostics, or clairvoyant hearing. I could even develop a protective membrane around myself to fend off energy vampires and other bio-energy

threats. I could learn how to attain financial success through control of my own mind, or I could discover paths to spiritual enlightenment.

What struck me was that the people I encountered in this realm were highly educated and yet were immersed in serious study of these phenomena. As a life long agnostic and skeptic, this didn't make any sense to me. In fact, I had initially hoped to investigate the campaigns by scientists and other skeptics who are trying to educate the population and protect them from pseudo-scientific swindlers. I even exchanged emails with the head of the Moscow Skeptic's Society, but was side tracked when he took ill and was unable to meet. It was during that fateful period when he was trapped somewhere in a state hospital that I met the group that is the main focus of this study. As I became more involved with the actual activities taking place within the New Age in Moscow, I began to understand the value and meaning that alternative spiritual health techniques were providing people. I came to see how women used the methods to deal with difficult personal situations and to develop themselves as individuals. And I experienced how the methods and common activities created a warm and loving atmosphere where everyone felt welcomed and safe.

This chapter is in a sense a recreation of my struggle to understand the New Age in Russia, and a glimpse into the ways in which the women I worked with transformed and defined my perspective on the spiritual activities taking place in contemporary Moscow. Beginning with the initial bombardment of New Age activities I faced, this chapter grapples with the concept of New Age itself, aims to depict the general New Age landscape that so influenced my initial

perspective, and introduces some of the people who helped bring about a transition in my thinking by opening their lives and sharing their own transitions and spiritual paths.

Struggling to understand the New Age Movement

My understanding of the alternative spiritual health landscape in Russia came to me in bits and pieces. It started with certain names that I would hear repeated time and again. Or terms that linked seemingly distant or unrelated people together in a sort of enigmatic whole. There was also a tendency for Russian practitioners to assume that I was familiar with these works and ideas, particularly since I was visiting from the United States, but more often than not I found myself searching the internet and scouring the book stores in order to understand this new world opening up around me. At times the interconnectedness of everything became so overwhelming that I was nearly convinced that everything from the beginning of time was somehow involved with the New Age movement in Moscow. Part of the problem with defining the parameters of the movement is the ubiquity of the term New Age itself, and in the most disparate of situations. This is further complicated in Moscow, where the term has only recently entered into the mainstream vocabulary. Often Russian publications use instead the term New Era when speaking of groups I would consider part of the New Age movement. More often, however, the term was not used at all in Russia.

So the question arises, why use the term New Age at all as a defining category. I settled on it reluctantly, especially given the often derogatory

connotations that have arisen around it in the United States since its popularization in the 1980s. But I chose to stay with this term for both historical and theoretical reasons. The activities and ideas now popular in Moscow today have very close historical ties with the New Age movement in the United States. These ties take on the form of a remarkably circular transfer of ideas and practices moving in both directions across Continents. This transfer continues to this day.

Theoretically, the term connects my research with a growing body of social scientific work on this sphere in the United States and Western Europe which has been utilizing the term since the early 1990s.³⁰ Social scientists have not developed a simple definition for the term New Age, and perhaps given the conglomeration of disparate groups involved, such a definition is impossible to make. There are, however, some general tendencies and ideas that most authors agree on when discussing the New Age in the West. There is a general consensus that the New Age is a synthesis of movements with roots in the American metaphysical tradition, Theosophy, Spiritualism, New Thought, and more recently the human potential movement. According to James Lewis, a scholar of new religious movements, Robert Ellwood's list of General Characteristics of new religious movements can also be used to define the New Age movement. These include 1) an emphasis on healing; 2) a desire to be "modern" and use scientific language; 3) eclecticism and syncretism; 4) optimism, success orientation and a tendency to evolutionary views; and 5) an emphasis on psychic powers (Lewis 1992: 7). Further traits of the New Age include holism, an emphasis on

³⁰ See Michael York's *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*.

transformation, anti-authoritarianism, potential inner abilities, unity with nature, and a belief that the collective consciousness of the planet will eventually bring about the New Age commonly referred to as the Age of Aquarius. Within this broad definition there are particular ideas and practices that have become associated with the New Age movement in the West, the most common of which are terms such as karma, auras, chakras, astral planes, and such practices as reiki, yoga, visualization, body work, homeopathy, massage therapy, and crystal healing. The final method I use to identify membership in the New Age movement is through the body of literature that unites adherents with a common world-view and set of core beliefs. These include works by Ram Dass, Richard Bach, Carlos Castaneda, Rajneesh, and general works on Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Sufism, runes, shamanism, and astrology.

Over the course of my study, I began to recognize some definite divisions within the sphere of the New Age in Moscow, although many of them do overlap. Some of these divisions became clear by the accusatory language used for describing and warning against swindlers. Certainly, swindlers abound in Moscow today, though they tend to come from the category of healers that I call external. I have identified three broad categories of alternative health practice - “external” healers, nontraditional medicine, and “inner” healers. External healers use their own healing energy to cure other people. According to the women I worked with, not all external healers are swindlers, but people must be careful in choosing external healers and should learn how to protect themselves from the swindlers. In fact, most of the women I met in the New Age sphere practiced

forms of external healing themselves, although most found such methods superficial and their benefits temporary. This category would include such sensationalistic clairvoyant healers as Anatoly Kashpirovsky, a popular late Soviet television personality, and the charismatic healers who Swedish-Russian anthropologist Galina Lindquist writes about (see Lindquist 2001).

While I was not involved with such groups or practitioners, I did have occasion to meet a clairvoyant healer whose books are very popular in Moscow. I met him late in my research, long after I was immersed in a very different kind of healing, so this may have colored my views, but my first impression of him was not at all positive. In fact, the most precise word I could think to describe him at the time was ‘creepy.’ I had actually gone to his center to meet with a journalist who specializes in alternative health, but he introduced me to the clairvoyant, who agreed to an interview. I was first put off by his office and the large men with buzz cuts who looked like bouncers or Mafioso standing guard. The clairvoyant was in a gold filled room with huge icons and was sitting at a big wooden desk in what looked like white pajamas. In the photos in his books he looks like a regular healthy man in his fifties. But in reality he was shriveled up and sickly looking. He said he was free to talk as long as I wanted, but he didn't seem to want to answer my questions. He gave what sounded like official statements from his advertisements. When I asked how much it cost he said it was a trade secret. He didn't seem to like that I was asking about the Soviet times and appeared irritated by my ignorant perplexity and questions about his training during that time. Eventually I got flustered and just ended the interview. Mostly I was put off by

his mean demeanor, which was in sharp contrast to the group of people with whom I would become most closely involved in the New Age sphere. But generally people I spoke with in the New Age were suspicious of such characters who claimed to cure solely through their own energy and cited hidden fees as a key sign of a swindler.

In the second category I would put such methods as “Oriental” medicine, Chinese medicine or Ayurvedic medicine which have long and established traditions in the East as well as *znakharstvo*, the Russian healing tradition³¹. While many of the women I worked with used and incorporated such techniques into their own practices, these practices are distinct from those found in the third category. The third category involves what I call inner healers. Such healers are the focus of my study. While certainly a part of the broader New Age movement, these groups are united in their emphasis on self-help, the importance of thoughts and the mind and the development of innate human powers for self improvement. This focus on the self and the inner potential of each human being is an important distinction that unites these groups and separates them from practices that require external intervention. As will become clear, the members of these groups do incorporate some external practices into their lives, and many of them actually started their spiritual health paths by developing healing energy powers to treat others. Those currently involved with self development do not reject the power of such practices as clairvoyant healing. Their experiences, however, led them to believe that such practices are inadequate because they do not reach the root cause

³¹ For fascinating historical accounts of the important role of female healers in Russian society and in the development of *dvoeverie* (dual-faith – or the complex intertwining of pagan and Orthodox traditions) see Eve Levin 1991 and Rose Glickman 1991.

of illness, which, they believe, lies within the self, the individual seeking treatment.

Alternative spiritual health landscape in Moscow

Pinning down the term, unfortunately, still does not solve the problem of painting the spiritual landscape of Moscow. And while a unified picture slowly developed over time, there were moments when I felt bombarded with the world of the New Age from every direction. One of the most striking visual manifestations of the New Age can be found in the Moscow subway system, or Metro. In fact, nearly every Metro station in the center of Moscow is a market for New Age and alternative health products. With a rider-ship of 8 to 9 million a day, the Metro not only connects people with shopping markets throughout the city, but itself has become a flourishing network of commercial enterprise.³² Inside most Metro stations shopping kiosks line the corridors selling seemingly everything. One can find newspapers, cosmetics, clothing, religious articles, electronics, books, CDs, movies, souvenirs, internet and phone cards, alcohol, candy, flowers, pantyhose. I even found cafes selling “vegetarian burritos” - micro-waved tortillas filled with textured vegetable protein.

³² Since I first went to Moscow in 1991 kiosks had always been a common sight outside the entrances to most Moscow subways stations as well, but newspaper accounts indicate that this may be changing. After the terrorist bombing in the Metro on February 6, 2004 that left 42 people dead, Mayor Yuri Luzhkov passed an ordinance banning commercial activity within 25 meters of the entrance to subway stations.



Fig. 3. Kiosks are lined up outside this Metro station in Chertanova

In the wide halls men and women set up tables or simply stand and hold up the wares they bring to sell. Oftentimes they are reselling items bought at department stores located just outside the subway doors. Some of the most popular items for sale are horoscope materials. There are booklets devoted to individual signs, magazines about love and economic fortune, and calendars with horoscope advice for every day. At the centrally located metro station Biblioteka imeni Lenina one can usually find a woman behind a table covered with an array of incense, spices and recipes from India. Here too I would occasionally grab a burrito, which would taste surprisingly good after a day of traversing the city. While the numbers of people wandering around the subway system wearing the “Do you want to lose weight?” buttons of Herbalife³³ decreased significantly after the mysterious death of its founder Mark Hughes in 2002 at the age of 44, sellers

³³ This is a diet supplement that was very popular in Russia in the early and mid-1990s, and many of the people I worked with had tried it or even sold the product.

were still about in 2001. Ironically, when I went to the home of one distributor I met in the subway station, she brought out the video of an Herbalife awards ceremony and gushed about the amazing health and youthfulness of Mr. Hughes.

Many Metro stations are home to both a medical pharmacy and an alternative health pharmacy. The “Life” natural pharmacies offer the latest health pills and secrets from around the world. Here one can find potency pills and menopause tonic from China, Ayurvedic antiseptic lotion from India, copper bracelets to cure arthritis, home laser kits that claim to cure nearly any disease, and expensive vitamins from the United States that offer youth, beauty and vitality for the price of the average Muscovite’s monthly salary. Herbs and lotions and essential oils promise to cure everything from eczema to heart problems. The unusually friendly pharmacists are happy to sort through the various wares and recommend products for virtually any ailment. One even offered me her secret folk recipe for soft and silky hair: a combination of lime tree oil, honey, lemon and vodka. My Russian host³⁴ and I set a goal for ourselves to use this recipe once a month, but unfortunately it was far too messy and sticky and we each only managed to get through the process twice. Sometimes, more expectedly, the pharmacists are less helpful, and betray a cynicism not generally seen within the New Age sphere. I went to one such kiosk to buy some ginseng and found that the Russian bottle cost 18 rubles and the fancy Chinese one cost 150 rubles (about 30 rubles/\$1). When I asked the pharmacist the difference between them, she said “There are swindlers there and swindlers here. Try for

³⁴ This is the mother of a friend I met in 1991. She opened her home to me on several occasions, sometimes for several months at a time.

yourself and find out.” So I bought the Russian one. Later that evening when I showed the ginseng to some friends of mine who worked in the theater, they tried to convince me of the health benefits of shots of ginseng and vodka. They seemed serious, but given their careers as actors I was never quite sure.

Most underpasses within the subway system also house various newspaper and book kiosks. Self-help books are very popular in Moscow now. On one visit to some of the subway book stores I saw books on weight loss, improving eyesight, diets for particular blood types,³⁵ exercises for an aching back, herbal remedies, how to lure back one’s husband, feng shui for women, urine therapy, vodka therapy, honey therapy, aura healing, karmic healing, past-life healing, healing with precious stones, guardian angels and healing. Many more books on alternative health are found in the regular books stores in the city. If self-help is not to one’s liking, a ride up the escalator will likely bring you in sight of full sized advertisements along the wall with the telephone number and address of psychic healers who will do the work for you. Each session is individualized, so prices cannot be determined before hand.

All of these ideas and practices are explained or offered through want ads in the many newspapers and magazines devoted to issues of health and spiritual matters. These have a tendency to cloud the picture of the New Age movement in Moscow even further, however, through their indiscriminate inclusion of all

³⁵ In 2001-2002 the American doctor Peter D’Adamo’s books on weight loss based on blood types was extremely popular. His books were on the top of all the best seller lists in Moscow, and people were talking about them on the street and offering up advice based on them. Upon learning that I was (by Russian standards) a vegetarian, I was told on more than one occasion that my blood type required that I eat red meat, and that its absence from my diet was the cause of any energy, emotional or health problems I may have been suffering from.

imaginable topics. For example, the journal *Tselebnik* – (the Healing Book) – offers advice primarily on natural herbal healing methods. But issue number 14 from the year 2000 starts out with brief reports on scientific discoveries from around the world. We learn about a Chicago psychologist who found that a good mood is the best protection for the human immune system. And there’s mention of an English scientific study that showed that marriage has a positive influence on joints. These brief reports are followed by longer articles on the healing powers of herbs that can be grown in the garden or at the dacha. We learn that the flower calendula has great antibiotic powers, and recipes are given for a whole series of ailments, including ulcers, bronchitis, and angina. A section called “inward path” offers advice of a more spiritual nature. In this issue the meditative and purifying properties of fire and candles are discussed and the rules for properly performing a cleansing ritual are set forth. The tract combines references to the modern notion of energy bio-fields with folk beliefs such as curses and the evil eye.

Of course, the New Age landscape extends beyond the reaches of the subway system and kiosks. Outside the Metro system, indications of the popularity of New Age ideas can be found in Moscow’s main bookstores. Dom Knigi (House of the Book), Biblio-Globus, and Moskva all have large sections devoted to works on New Age themes, and many of these books make it onto the stores’ bestseller lists. But out on the city streets New Age practices are no longer as readily visible as they were in the early 1990s and generally require participation in a particular organization or attendance at training or

demonstration sessions that are held regularly in the two main New Age stores in Moscow. It is at just such an event that I truly entered into the New Age sphere, it is through these subsequent groups and trainings that I was able to better sort through the seeming chaos of the New Age movement in Moscow. It was also here that I began to focus my attention on what I call spiritual health groups.

Instant Karma: field work starts to pan out

Given where my research ended up leading, it is ironic how everything started to fall into place. After months of roadblocks and dead ends, everything changed the day I returned the change the cashier overpaid me. It was as if I experienced instant Karma. It was an overcast day but warm for a Moscow winter. I remember being irritated at the mist in the air because it made my hair frizzy, evidence of which is captured in the aura photograph I had taken that same day at Moscow's premier New Age store, Put' K Sebe (Inward Path). Upon the advice of a Masha, a college student I met a few days earlier at Projekt Ogi, a 24-hour café-night club popular with young bohemian Muscovites, I went to Inward Path to gather phone numbers and addresses from the message board in hopes of finding a research site. I was looking for a group involved with alternative health practices, and Inward Path was the perfect place to start.

Sasha Yakovleva, the original owner of the Inward Path, was a pioneer in bringing New Age and alternative ideas, books, and practices to Russia. In 1990 Yakovleva started a New Age journal also called *Inward Path*, which published articles about American, European, Indian and Russian New Age and holistic health practices and practitioners. Early editions included interviews with

Richard Bach and articles about the Indian guru Rajneesh, Louise Hay and the healing power of affirmations, Carlos Castaneda, as well as articles about yoga, vegetarianism, and rebirthing, to give just a few examples. Her journal served as a market place for formerly banned or unavailable books and provided information about schools, clubs, courses and lectures that were taking place in Moscow and throughout Russia. Subscriptions grew rapidly throughout the early 1990s and then dropped off in the mid-1990s when the market was flooded with competing journals, newspapers and books. The late 1990s saw the internet take off in Russia, creating yet more competition. While internet access was available in Moscow as early as 1990 with the establishment of Glasnet, wide-spread internet use only became viable after the modernization of the telephone system and later with the increased popularity of personal computers and the growth of an internet café culture. The first large scale internet provider in Russia opened for business in 1995, and by 1999 internet cards for home dial-up service were as common a sight as international calling cards in Moscow kiosks. By this time most print and television media sources had established web versions (aif.ru in 1997, ng.ru in 1999, pravda.ru in 1999, and ntv.ru in 2000) and many stores had opened on-line shopping sites. The Inward Path store joined this trend in 2001 with its own web site, featuring upcoming events, popular books and articles on relevant themes. By this time the store had changed hands and the journal had become more specialized, focusing primarily on Zen Buddhism.

The new Inward Path store reflects many of the changes that occurred in Moscow in the late 1990s and later. When I visited the original store in 1994 it

was located on a side street and most of the products were arranged Soviet-style behind the counter or inside glass display cases. The store occupied two small rooms. The main room was dimly lit and carried books, New Age music and various paraphernalia commonly found in New Age stores, such as healing rocks, talismen, incense and candles. Downstairs a room just large enough for two customers housed a glass counter with a small selection of health food, dietary supplements, and herbal teas.

The latest incarnation of Inward Path is at a more prominent location along Leningradskii Prospect, one of Moscow's many busy wide avenues. An archway from the avenue leads to a small courtyard and sitting area where people read and talk and enjoy various healthy drinks from the phytobar³⁶ when the weather allows for it. Inside one is greeted by the expected scent of incense, essential oils and votive candles, the sounds of chimes and relaxing music, and such familiar sights as healing stones, dream catchers, lucky bamboo, hemp clothing, tea sets and more. In other words, it is much like a New Age store in the west. The new store is of a much grander scale, on two stories, and offers a full range of New Age products, including a gift shop, health food store, book and video store, and café. It is also home to a tarot card reader, astrologer, and an aura reader equipped with a high-tech aura-reading camera. While the equipment is advertised as the latest western technology, I learned that the original

³⁶ From the Greek word for plant, phyto products are promoted as naturally healthy life extending concentrations of herbs and green algae. The word phytobar has gained popularity in Russia and Europe as a place selling healthy rejuvenating drinks. Such bars are popular in luxury spas and salons.

technology, known as Kirilian photography, was developed in Russia by Semyon and Valentina Kirilian during the 1940s.

The store is very successful and is very popular. Nearly every inch of space, including the walls and ceiling, is filled with products for sale, making for a somewhat magical atmosphere that appeals to all of the senses. What little space remains is always filled with people precariously weaving their way through the narrow aisles and ducking to avoid the chimes and dream catchers above their heads. According to an article in the Russian business journal *Yat'* the very success of the store is what eventually led Yakovleva to move on to other spiritual health projects (Zhukovskaya 2001). Ironically, although we exchanged emails, I never met Yakovleva because during the time I was conducting research in Moscow she was residing in Woodstock, New York. Yet, it was at an event at her new project, Matritsa (the Matrix), that I confirmed the need to branch out into the realm of alternative health methods. Kostya, the same friend who had introduced me to Masha at Projekt Ogi and who works at the Orthodox Christian anti-abortion Center "Life", had invited me to a seminar he and his wife were attending on water birthing at the spiritual center Matritsa. During this seminar I learned that a popular method of water birthing was developed in Russia in the 1970s by Igor Charkovsky, who, I later discovered, was part of the same underground health movement as the founders of Voskhozhdenie, who I first met that damp winter day in 2002 at the Inward Path.

I did not meet them immediately, however. First I went searching through the flyers Masha had told me about the previous evening. I found the notice

board on the back wall of the first room, right next to the aura reader. There were flyers and newspapers from a wide range of New Age, spiritual, and alternative health groups in Moscow, as well as individual practitioners seeking like-minded colleagues or clients. Yoga was by far the most common service offered, with guest lectures and seminars from Indian swamis or by people with Indian-sounding names. Several groups offered courses on spiritual development, meditation, Zen Buddhism, as well as seminars on Reiki, and psychic spiritual health retreats or spiritual tourism. Many of these organizations revolve around a particular method or philosophy. Some were developed by Russians, others imported, but most were a hybrid of many different philosophical or religious perspectives and practices. Several schools advertised their degree programs in various esoteric or alternative health practices.

On this particular day, the Russian-Indian Academy “National Property” advertised lectures by the Indian master teacher of classic Yoga, Swami Dhirendry Brahmachari, on such topics as healthy lifestyle, healthy family, healthy consciousness, and healthy self-perfection. The Zen-Center offered courses in meditation, Zen-yoga, and tea ceremonies. The Transcendental Meditation center advertised that thousands of Muskovites were already finding new success in their lives and discovering the hidden potentials of their brain power through TM’s simple mind techniques. Yuri Pichugin’s School of Clairvoyance and Psycho-Energy guaranteed results from his three level methodology, which he claimed demonstrates that clairvoyance is not a miracle, but a technique that can be learned by anyone. The Society for Krishna

Consciousness offered courses such as Absolute Truth and Contemporary Science, Sanskrit, Spiritual Ascension, the Culture of Song, and the Culture and Ethics of Vaishnav at the University of Vedic Culture. The School of Doers listed courses in clairvoyance and other abilities that allow one to become conscious of and take control of one's own life. The Studio of Breathing offered courses in breath work, rebirthing, holotropic breathing and Vivation for the restoration of health and self perfection. The Center for Travel and Esoterica offered tours to India with fanciful names like the Golden Triangle in India, the Lotus and the Heavens, Fairytale Kerala, the Pearl of South India, and the Ashram of Sai Baba. It was only much later that I would learn what a prominent role Sai Baba plays in the New Age scene of Moscow. Later that very evening, however, I could not help but notice the smiling Indian man with the big afro in the many photographs, buttons, and even a clock hanging on the wall of the home of the directors of my new research site.

While gathering flyers and information on groups, I could overhear the aura reader explaining her diagnoses to her clients. After a while my curiosity got the best of me and I decided to get a picture of my aura (See Fig. 4). Although intrigued, I found the prospect of revealing my aura quite nerve-wracking. What if it I had a bad aura or a weak aura or the photo revealed some hidden negative quality about me? The process itself was very simple and quick. I sat in a chair with my hands on two metal plates formed in the shape of large hands. The aura reader then asked me to close my eyes and relax and she snapped my photo. The result was a Polaroid picture of me shrouded in a swirl of greens, gold and light

orange. Much to my relief, the diagnosis was overall positive and quite complimentary. Surprisingly, it also seemed to accurately describe my current occupation and state of mind. She said I had a very pure and good aura, that I was kind and people liked me, and that I had a natural ability to heal and that my primary work was intellectual and creative. She said I had a potential for leadership because people look up to me but that I lacked some confidence. Of course, this description probably fit most of the clientele of the New Age store. Still, an ego boost never hurts, especially in the middle of fieldwork. Later I came to conclude that practices such as aura readings, tarot and astrology, when conducted in a positive environment, often serve to help raise the client's self-esteem by pointing out positive qualities or traits that simply need to be developed or expressed.³⁷



Fig. 4. My aura

³⁷ Sociologist James Tucker discusses such therapeutic aspects of the New Age in his article “New Age Religion and the Cult of the Self” in *Society*, Jan/Feb 2002.

After the aura reading I went upstairs to the book store where they were setting up chairs for an imminent lecture on a new healing technique in just a few minutes, so I decided to stay and listen. While they finished setting up, I browsed the two rooms of books and videos and listened to the end of an astrological reading. The astrologer was equipped with a computer and for 400 rubles (30rb=\$1) she would provide a person with a chart and explanation. While not cheap, it was far less than the \$100 the astrology professor from the Russian Academy of Astrology charges for a personal reading.³⁸

The bookstore held a wide range of books, many of which were available at the larger general bookstores in Moscow. Topics included esoterica, astrology, Tarot cards, magic, nutrition, herbs, yoga, healing stones, healing exercises, massage, Eastern religions, Orthodox Christianity, Slavic paganism, shamanism, karmic healing, aura healing, Valeology, self-improvement, subconscious-mind development, NLP, UFOlogy,³⁹ ESP, Reiki, Runes, Shambhala, and Theosophy. Nearly a whole wall was devoted to books by Osho, otherwise known as Rajneesh. Other familiar authors were Blavatskaya, Elena Rerikh, Gurjieff, Ouspensky, the Teacher Ivanov, Richard Bach, Carlos Casteneda, and Ram Dass. I even found an awkwardly translated version of the *Tao of Pooh*, which used pictures from the popular Russian animated version of the Pooh series. There were also many books by authors with whom I was unfamiliar at the beginning of my research, but whose names kept coming up repeatedly in conversations with people I met over the next few months. Such authors include the Americans

³⁸ This Professor gave regular lectures at Voskhozhdenie and several members were full time students at the five-year Russian Academy of Astrology.

³⁹ The study of UFOs.

Louise Hay and her series of books on healing through positive thinking and affirmations; Neale Donald Walsch and his book *Conversations with God*; the Uzbeki healer and Sufi practitioner Mirzakarim Norbekov and his book *The Experience of a Fool*; Brazilian author Paulo Coelho; the Indian guru Sai Baba; the Bulgarian religious leader Aivankhov; and Stanislav Grof, a Czech doctor who developed healing breathing methods after his research into the mind-altering effects of LSD became problematic. Some of the more frequently mentioned contemporary Russian authors include S.N. Lazarev and his series of books on healing Karma; Vladimir Migre and his Anastasia series (not the former tsarevna) which sets forth plans for a return to a pagan-centered ecological utopia deep in the Russian forest, based on the spiritual teachings Migre learned from a simple girl from the heart of Russia, Anastasia, who some believe is alive today and others envision as living purely in the spiritual realm; and Avessalon Podvodnyi and his work on *egregores* and spiritual ethics. Popular esoteric writers from the Soviet period include Kora Antarova, whose work *Two Lives* is said to have been dictated to her by El Morya, the same spiritual inhabitant of the Shambhala who earlier dictated Elena and Nikolai Rerikh's *Agni Yoga* and Madam Blavatskaya's *Secret Doctrine*; and Daniil Andreev and his *Rose of the World*, also inspired and partially dictated by a series of spiritual mentors. All of these works have been integral to the spiritual development of the people I came to know either directly or indirectly through Voskhozhdenie, the organization holding the lecture that evening at the Inward Path.

While the directors of Voskhozhdenie, Sveta Prival'skaya and David Persits, set up their diagrams and the Temple of Peace emblem, I found myself seated directly next to the section of books dedicated to Russian Theosophists and similar Russian esoteric thinkers. Sveta began the lecture with a broad smile and the pronouncement that their beliefs could definitely be called esoteric. I was immediately drawn to her down to earth smile and her humorous approach. She is a short rather plump woman with a round face and long brown hair usually pulled back away from her face. There is a distinct hint of Madam Blavatskaya in her appearance, and Sveta suspects she may well have been Blavatskaya in a former life. This evening Sveta was dressed all in black, but she wore a professional style pantsuit that did not evoke images of magic or someone trying to appear otherworldly or endowed with secret powers. In appearance David and Sveta are strikingly different. He is a small bony man, with a crooked arm left permanently stiff from an accident. He wears his dark hair combed slick back, and he sports a long graying beard which gives him the appearance of a spiritual guru or revolutionary, especially when he is dressed casually in his worn sweats, boots, and green army jacket. On this occasion, however, he too was dressed up in a suit. The two shared their humor and revealed the gentle teasing that characterizes the affectionate way they are able to handle their often disparate views. David holds a PhD in mathematics, and he generally espouses the more extreme views. Sveta worked for 30 odd years as an engineer and is more practical and grounded.

ХРАМ МИРА



Fig. 5. Temple of Peace Emblem

With the brightly colored Temple of Peace (Khrām Mira) emblem prominently displayed beside her, Sveta began with a brief introduction to the spiritual paths she and David had taken, and then David discussed the theoretical side of their current methods (See Fig. 5). With solid careers and scientific backgrounds, they started delving into alternative health practices with the ideas of Porfiry Ivanov, a Ukrainian health guru who promoted a physical approach to healthy living that focused on bathing in ice water and walking barefoot in the snow. While they both continue to incorporate some of Ivanov's teachings into their daily lives, they came to realize that a purely physical approach was unable to provide the deep satisfaction they sought. They then turned to psychology, particularly Jungian, and experimented with Reiki and various breathing techniques, some of which are integral to their current methods. Eventually they came to realize that life itself is a career and that there are many lessons to learn. No single way is the answer. A person should constantly seek out the truth and should accept different orientations but should never trust anyone else completely. There is a decidedly non-authoritarian world view. Sveta emphasized that she

and David also did not hold the answers and offered no final Truths about life. What they offered was a practice, a methodology for changing one's life and finding success and happiness.

David took over the lecture with a question: What is it that prevents people from attaining success and happiness in their lives? His answer was that we are not happy because reality is not always the way we want it to be. We have two choices: change reality or change ourselves. David explained that the first choice was the path generally taken in the West. The second choice is the path of the East. Russia is in the middle between East and West and therefore is able to connect the two paths together, he said. And so it is with Sveta and David's two primary projects, Voskhozhdenie and the Temple of Peace. Within the organization Voskhozhdenie they teach people how to transform themselves. Their Temple of Peace project aims to transform the world. Connecting the two are the changes that each individual change brings to the world, and the transformations that arise from group meditations.

Sveta and David describe their world view as holistic, and at the core of their healing method is a technique called holodynamics. It is this inclusive holism that is reflected in the Temple of Peace emblem, which is composed of the symbols of 12 religions or spiritual practices. The Temple of Peace represents the apex of their broader goal, which is to see the world in harmony and prepared for the coming Age of Aquarius. Before such a global transition is possible, however, changes are needed at the individual level, which is the primary level that holodynamics addresses. The holo in holodynamics also refers to the

holographic nature of the universe, which hypothesizes that the whole of the universe is contained within each part, just as the whole of a hologram is contained within any part of the hologram. Holodynamics, however, is only one facet of their approach. They delve beyond holodynamics as it was developed by American psychologist Vernon Woolf and incorporate many religious, psychological, and philosophical ideas into their own unique healing techniques. Anya, a member of Voskhozhdenie who we shall hear more from in later chapters, describes their innovations as follows:

And in fact it is really similar to gestalt therapy. There are very small differences. But the differences might be due to the creative approach of Svetlana Prival'skaya. Sveta changed it. She brought to it that very spirituality. Vernon Woolf – for him it was about the perfection of forms – as they should be in nature. He didn't write about who needs these perfect forms. But Svetlana Romanova Prival'skaya wrote that the full potential is the same as god and the archetypes are saints. That is, those ideals and archetypes that we'd like to have or our memory, our ancient memory, it brings down to us that information from generation to generation. It's already physiology.⁴⁰

Sveta and David's holodynamics is infused with spiritual teachings, where Jung's archetypes become spiritual beings who take an active role in people's lives. Another important innovation is their focus on the emotion of higher love. The field of love is always present in their methods, as Zoya, who discusses her spiritual journey in Chapter Five, explains below. Note also her warnings against unscrupulous healers.

⁴⁰ The focus on physiology here is interesting in light of the suggestion by Alexei Yurchak (personal communication) that the focus on physiological nature of psychic phenomenon during Soviet times was perhaps what made psi-research a viable option for Soviet scientists. Anya was involved in alternative spiritual practices during the Soviet period and worked with a well-known psychotherapist-hypnotist.

In general, in Moscow now a whole lot of various systems have turned up. And a lot of people play off of that. As they say, whenever things are bad in Russia she always turns to mysticism. And there are of course a lot of groups that just play with people's minds. You need to be careful. It's complicated. You need your intuition probably. I don't even know. But maybe if you consider that everything in the extreme, even religion, is harmful. You've got to be measured. I've tried other systems. I went to Maslova – that's holodynamics like at Sveta's. But I liked it at Sveta's a lot more because with her from the beginning there's the field of love. It's very interesting at Maslova's but it's all science there. It's completely different there, and the basis of holodynamics – out of which everything grows – the field of love – isn't there.

Sveta herself notes the spiritual emphasis of the Russian holodynamics in contrast to the more materialistic American version. This is important because there is a real distinction between the individualism, sense of personal responsibility and pluralism promoted by their teachings and the American individualistic model that emphasizes self-sufficiency while denying structural constraints. Sveta and David acknowledge structural constraints and understand the need for social support networks and collective efforts, and they emphasize the immature nature of material desires, focusing on people's attitudes in relation to the structural constraints about them.

Vernon Woolf, sometime I think in 1995, after a period without seeing him, he saw how we worked and he said, "That's fabulous, but it's not exactly holodynamics." Of course, at its core it is holodynamics, but the mentality of Russians and Americans are different. And in spite of the fact that the leading part of American psychologists and spiritual figures all these years have been coming to Russia with new methods. The ideas come from there, from America. But somewhere there is a ceiling. There is a particular level that so far Americans don't seem to be able to overcome. At least, I haven't seen it. There's some sort of barrier. That is, we get the impulse from there, but they don't develop the ideas far enough. Maybe it's because as the classics of Marxism once said, we have nothing to lose but our chains. But we receive ideas from them and remain thankful for that but we go further.

American society is built on success, on outward success in the real physical world. We don't say that it's bad. It's excellent. To a point. When you have already become successful. When you've learned how to do that, have learned how to live well, to succeed, it would be good to move forward. But that doesn't happen. Probably that's natural. Because we received a certain quantity of knowledge and habits and we develop them further. What does development consist of? For example, Vernon Woolf has a certain method in holodynamics called potentialization. A person has a particular wish or dream, for example here to get a car. It's not a dream in America, but here it's a whole event. And it's possible to use holodynamics so that that dream is realized, and relatively quickly. And you begin to look around. Not because it's a bad wish. It's normal to want a car. And you want something else. You want to travel to Hawaii. It's normal. But it's not completely compatible, that is, working towards such a dream, to manipulate your fate with the goal of realizing that type of dream, in my opinion is not completely mature.

We see here a hint of Sveta's spiritual avant-garde spirit as well as her sense of the elevated spiritual level of Russians more generally, although at other moments she is clear to point out that not all Russians are equally spiritually evolved. American's materialism, however, in her mind keeps them spiritually stunted, unable to make the necessary step for enlightenment, and this conviction strongly sets her understanding of individualism and personal responsibility apart from American interpretations.

Still, the method begins at the individual level. At this level the main concern of holodynamics – both American and Russian – is with energy and blocks within the subconscious mind. Key to the Holodynamics method is the notion of resonance. Sveta and David refer to this variously as the theory of the tuning fork or the boomerang theory. Boiled down, this means that the energy we give out is the energy we receive in return. As David explained it at the lecture at

Put' k Sebe, each time something causes us to feel upset or dissatisfied it is because there is something inside of us that resonates with that outside stimulus. If we are annoyed by someone at work, that feeling of annoyance is a reflection of something similarly annoying inside ourselves. Most likely we are not even aware of that something. Often it manifests itself as a block in our subconscious. Such blocks keep the very subtle cosmic energy from flowing freely into us, and they cause lower, denser forms of energy to flow from us. Due to the law of resonance, the dense energy sent out by the blocks resonates with the dense energy sent out by others which may cause us to feel negative emotions or even develop illnesses.

Such negative reactions are to be embraced, however, and not rejected because they are gifts that allow us to become conscious of our imperfections. These gifts allow us to learn from life and move up the ladder towards perfection. It is when we are faced with difficult situations that we begin to live our lives consciously. And, living our lives consciously, we gain control over our lives, and our emotional state is no longer dependent on outside circumstances. This could be interpreted as a cop out; a way of reconciling with a world we are powerless to change or avoiding the social action required for such change. Ultimately, however, individual change is thought to lead to outward change within the broader society. These changes act through the material force behind the energy of our thoughts.

According to holodynamics blocks are manifestations of immature thoughtforms, or holodynes. Holodynes are made up of energy and are said to be

material. They can be both mature and immature. At the individual level immature holodynes can prevent a person from progressing in their lives, spiritually or otherwise, and can lead to interpersonal disarray and even illness. Collectively, immature thoughts can hold back an entire group, be it a family, club, society or entire nation. Immature holodynes cause blocks in the subconscious, but within each immature holodyne there is a hidden positive intention. Our goal is to uncover that hidden intention and transform the immature holodyne into a mature holodyne which emanates a higher, more subtle form of energy. That is the function of holodynamics. Holodynamics works by tapping into the subconscious and uncovering the physical manifestations of our immature holodynes and blocks. Much of the work takes place through the visualization of points of physical discomfort or pain in the body. An individual begins the work of transforming immature holodynes at this very personal level, but as more and more mature individual thoughtforms develop within a group or society, the spiritual level and health of the whole is believed to be raised as well.

To help explain how their approach to holodynamics works, David displayed a large diagram of the Ladder of Ascension. This diagram shows the seven steps we must go through to reach a state of enlightenment and complete absorption into the Universe. The seven steps correspond to the seven main Chakras of the human body, and transformation takes place within each of our seven bodies (our physical body and six subtle bodies⁴¹). As one moves up the seven steps of Ascension, the subconscious mind plays a greater and greater role. It is within the subconscious that various blocks develop and eventually lead to

⁴¹ I offer a more detailed explanation of chakras and subtle bodies in chapter four.

illnesses or dissatisfaction. Illness, dissatisfaction or negative events are all necessary within this scheme because they provide opportunities for lessons and growth, allowing one to move up the ladder towards spiritual perfection. Blocks can be caused by experiences in the womb, in our past or even in our past lives or can be passed on to us in our DNA. If we can tap into our subconscious and transform the blocks then we can get to the root of our illness or dissatisfaction and we can transform ourselves. Of course, such a transformation takes far more than 7 steps and generally, according to Sveta and David, more than one life to accomplish. Not everyone, however, is acutely concerned with becoming one with the universe. Often there are more immediately pressing issues such as a difficult boss, a meager paycheck, a chronic illness of some sort or a conflict in the family. Holodynamics offers help for all of these situations, and the methods Sveta and David developed in conjunction with holodynamics help one to move beyond the mundane level of self-improvement towards greater and greater spiritual development and fulfillment. The primary method used is called a holodynamics process.

In order to demonstrate the method, David called on a volunteer, and together they went through a mini process, which lasted several minutes. Full-blown in-depth processes can sometimes last hours. A woman named Tanya who looked like she was in her mid-forties stood up to try the process. She was an architect and was having problems with her career, which she said started with the onset of *perestroika*. Tanya was trying to decide whether or not to change careers. Before starting the process with Tanya, David asked all of us in the

audience to create a field of love around her to help the process along. He asked her where in her body she felt discomfort or pain and then asked her to describe the pain and what it wanted. But the process did not go well as the woman seemed very self-conscious and had a difficult time describing the problem in terms of images or locations on her body, as is necessary with holodynamics. At this point David asked us all to think about the feeling of dissatisfaction. He explained that when we feel dissatisfaction, the dissatisfied feeling is part of something that dissatisfies us inside of ourselves. When we are dissatisfied with boorishness around us we are actually expressing dissatisfaction with the boorishness that is inside of us. Tanya did not seem completely convinced by this explanation.

After a couple of other volunteers attempted the method, Sveta led us all through a holodynamics meditation. This is a particular type of guided meditation, where one identifies immature holdynes and transforms them into mature images. This is an inherently social event where individuals in a group work to solve specific problems. This is done by first calling up an image – or immature holodyne - of the problem, then finding the positive intention of this holodyne and transforming the negative image into a positive one. Before the meditation people generally share what problems they want to work on, although in this demonstration Sveta guided us through a very general meditation. She began by playing relaxing music. I recognized the music as Loreena McKennett, who sings New Age-ish Celtic music, because I happened to have the CD myself. Sveta asked us to start by breathing deeply and to call up a special image or

teacher. I remember that a blue lotus came to mind for some reason.

Unfortunately, because I was having a difficult time understanding the method and terminology, I don't recall very much about that first meditation. I remember that she spoke with a very soothing voice, and I felt relaxed afterwards, but I also felt rather lost. It was only through multiple readings of their books, attendance at their weekly meetings and the Temple of Peace and trainings and practice with their method that I came to understand their methods. At the end of their presentation, Oleg, a young man who is a member of their organization, took the floor. He spoke about the warm atmosphere he found at Voskhozhdenie and referred to it as his second home. At first I was put off by his saccharine description of his experience with them and the glossy eyed happiness he radiated, but after just a couple of months with them I too began to appreciate the sanctuary and warmth that was to be found in Sveta and David's home, which is the headquarters and heart of the Center Voskhozhdenie.

An Invitation Home

After Sveta and David's presentation at Put' k Sebe, I approached Sveta and started telling her about my research. As luck had it, she has a daughter named Larisa who at the time was a graduate student in the United States. She immediately agreed to help me with the research and invited me to their home that evening for their weekly Temple of Peace meeting. Along the way an interesting event happened in the subway. They were carrying their materials from the presentation, including the large Temple of Peace banner, which at one point became unrolled. As we passed through the walkway to transfer to another

subway, Sveta quickly rolled up the banner again. There were police standing around, and Sveta said they didn't like to see such displays. She seemed genuinely worried that the state might fine her for displaying her multi-religious banner or confiscate it.

Entrance into Sveta and David's home is indeed like entering a separate realm. It's almost indescribable. The first thing you see is the pile of shoes. Everyone removes their shoes upon entrance, and by the time we got there, their apartment was already filled with people. People are constantly coming and going and engaged in a whole range of activities. This night some people were practicing holodynamics processes on each other and others were there just for the Temple of Peace. Like the New Age store we had just left, their apartment is a visual feast. It's a mix of clutter and icons and portraits of gurus, and people and diagrams and maps, but the atmosphere is always warm and a welcome change to some of the harsher realities outside. One thing that jumped out at me that day was the photo of an Indian man with a huge afro, which was on various objects and buttons throughout the house. I would later learn that this was not a character out of Godspell, as it had appeared, but the Indian guru Sai Baba, who plays a major role in the Russian spiritual health sphere.



Fig. 6. My Going away party in Sveta and David's living room. Jesus and Mary are on the back wall on the left, Sai Baba is top center and El Morya is in the blue turban on the right.

This night, several people were gathered in the kitchen having tea and various sweets, and it was there that I met Tamara, who was to become my closest friend in Moscow, as well as other members with whom I developed more casual acquaintanceships. Tamara immediately greeted me when I walked in and offered me tea and started asking all sorts of questions. She's a rather rotund woman in her early forties with a broad smile and long flowing blond hair that's streaked with gray. At the time she lived in her small one room apartment with her teenaged son and husband, Dima, who also is a member of Voskhozhdenie. The several months I happened to be there were a difficult period for Tamara, and she underwent a rather striking transformation emotionally and physically. We will see how she employed holodynamics and other methods to help her through this transition in Chapter Six. Her immediate openness was a reflection of her genuine nurturing nature, which she generously shared with me as I struggled to understand this new world over the course of the next several months.

While in the kitchen I learned that it was the tradition at Sveta and David's to always bring a snack to share with everyone over tea. Often people would bring more substantial fare and there would be communal dinners, usually vegetarian. The kitchen was where everyone hung out between sessions or trainings or meetings and was where we were all able to discuss our experiences with holodynamics and other every day issues. This evening things were running late due to the earlier presentation, and before finishing my tea we were ushered into the main room for the Temple of Peace. This room is filled with books and religious objects and pictures (See Fig. 6). On one wall there hangs an Orthodox icon of Jesus. Above it is a painting of Mary. On another wall there were pictures of men in turbans who I at first thought were also Jesus. I later learned that one was the Indian guru Kalki, whose meditation methods David teaches, and the other was El Morya. Prominently displayed, high above everything else, hangs a large orange clock with a picture of Sai Baba, whose image was also on the bookshelf and on a button hooked on some object by the window.

According to Sveta, the Temple of Peace meets weekly to meditate for world peace and for those members and their family or friends who are suffering from any sort of psychological or physical ailment. That night nine people attended aside from Sveta and David - six women and three men. Again, Sveta started the meditation by putting on some soothing music, which played from one of those old black tape players that used to be found in American public schools. Sveta guided the meditation and we meditated for the sick brother of one of their friends, for the end of fascist movements in Russia, and for a less materialistic

America. As she started to lead the meditation she asked each of us to call up our full potential, or our higher “I”. This higher being could be a spiritual figure or simply an object that represents the qualities we strive to attain. This being would then help guide the transformation process during the meditation. After the meditation we went around the room and people shared their images and how they were transformed. First they described their full potential because this can change from meditation to meditation. For one person it was Kalki, another one saw Sai Baba, and one woman saw St. Sophia. One of the women felt a pain in her left side during the meditation for the brother, and this was interpreted as a problem on the maternal side of his family because the left represents the feminine side according to the principles of yin-yang. During the meditation we were expected to watch out for any such signs that we could pass on to those affected, so that they could better understand their situation. In fact, the meditations were not necessarily relaxing because it was work to trace the images, transform them and then recall important details to share with the group.

Not everyone welcomed me immediately. A couple of women seemed to keep looking at me skeptically, and I was intimidated by what I interpreted as their judgmental views of me as a less spiritually evolved American. The discussion after the meditation turned briefly to the question of why some people are more interested in spirituality than others, and there seemed to be a consensus that certain people were simply less evolved – perhaps because they had lived fewer lifetimes - and this was not the lifetime in which they would find their spiritual path. I couldn’t help but wonder if they included me in this category.

But as I got to know them better I realized that their looks did not reflect judgment but rather their more reserved personalities, although perhaps their hierarchical views could also be interpreted as part of their avant-garde spirit, a possible reflection of their Soviet cultural education.

Nevertheless, despite my less evolved state, most members of Voskhozhdenie were very welcoming. I ended up taking courses at the Institute Cheloveka (Institute of the Person)⁴² with one of the women I had originally found intimidating, and I interviewed her while she conducted a spiritual massage on me. She wouldn't provide a taped interview because she said the best way to get to know her was through one of her sessions, which combined reiki, aroma therapy, and pressure point massage. Another woman did not speak to me at first, but she was very friendly when we rode the subway together later that night. Oddly enough, she was the same person I ended up riding with on my final journey from the last Temple of Peace meeting (in 2002, she emphasized) and the party they had arranged afterwards to send me off.

The following Wednesday was the first Voskhozhdenie meeting I attended. This also happened to be a big day for followers of Sai Baba – the Hindu holiday Sivaratri. On this day Sai Baba gives birth through his mouth to

⁴² The Institute of the Person is run by an Uzbek man who teaches courses on self-improvement and empowerment through a system he has developed that mixes exercises and philosophies from several sources, primarily Sufism and Taoism. The primary principles for good health are: positive attitude, smiling, and mood, and His book *“The experience of the fool: or how to improve your eye sight”* was on the top of the best seller list the whole time I was in Russia. His courses are very popular throughout Russia, and his is method is taught throughout the world, including New York City. Everyone I ran into was talking about his courses, so I eventually took three levels of them. I went originally with Tamara, but she didn't take the course. I studied with two people from Voskhozhdenie there and later learned that several other members had taken the course or were planning to. As a side note, Norbekov's Institute is located in the same building as the musical North-East, which was the site of the tragic high-jacking and subsequent gassing by the Russian Government, which resulted in over 100 deaths. I was no longer in Russia at the time, but I did learn that no one from the Institute was harmed.

sivalingums, or eggs, which represents the mysterious creation of the world. Materializations of other objects as well as holy ash,⁴³ or *vibhuti*, are also attributed to Sai Baba. Many people familiar with Sai Baba, however, attribute his materializations to simple slight of hand magic tricks. Be that as it may, Sveta was very excited to be holding the meeting on this particular day. She said it represented the emergence of new energy into the world, which would open the way for positive transformation.

The Center does not have its own permanent headquarters for public meetings, so they rent out space at the Oceanology Institute, which is located just off the Park Kultury subway stop. In a later interview Sveta noted the coincidence of this location. It was at this same park, then known as Gorky Park, that she began her spiritual health journey with the group Healthy Family back in 1983. The room at the Institute is a small lecture hall with uncomfortable hard green benches, but it is enhanced by the wall-sized windows that look out into the tree-lined courtyard. In the front corner of the room Sveta set up pictures – the same ones I had earlier seen on the walls of her apartment. In front of the pictures she lit a candle.

Oleg, the young man from the presentation, started the meeting by leading us through some Taoist breathing exercises and simple body movements. In addition to studying holodynamics and psychology, Oleg is trained as a sports teacher and studies different forms of martial arts. The exercises were actually quite refreshing and seemed to clear the mind in preparation for the upcoming

⁴³ At one of my many holodynamics processes with Tamara, she offered me some of this ash for my cramps. The pain did go away, but I have a hunch that the ibuprofen may have been responsible for that.

lecture. Each week Voskhozhdenie brings in one of several rotating speakers. This day happened to be the day of the Hari Krishna, Sergei. Other days there was the astrology professor or the Orthodox priest. The topic of the day was how to tell the true truth according to the Veda. He spoke about the ever presence of god and the inanity of scientists and others who try to prove that god does not exist. During the discussion of science, Sveta chimed in sarcastically, “we all came from monkeys,” which elicited laughter all around because that notion was simply absurd within their world view. “What is god?” Sergei continued. “People don’t often think about that question. If man is at the top, then we feel we can do whatever we want with nature. But if there is something higher, then we have a different outlook on the world. In nature everything is perfect. Each seed is able to grow its own. Even believers without a proper philosophical approach will turn to the material.” He went on to speak about the different types of karma, about reincarnation, and about the danger of attempting to be god and to attain perfection. This, he said, was a divergence from god, a comment which drew several dissatisfied looks and some grumbling from the crowd. They agreed with his assessment of scientists, however, who he said study that which is lower than their intellect but not that which is higher. Such understanding requires other methods: “for example, Bakhta yoga allows one to understand the higher world through consciousness. The fog of ignorance can be cleansed with the mantra,” he said. There was a question and answer session after the lecture, but my struggle to follow the ideas from the lecture was made even more difficult by my perplexity at the questions people were asking. It did not seem possible that these

educated adults could be seriously inquiring about the lecture as if they were in a university classroom. It turns out that Sergei indeed is a scholar of Sanskrit and the Upanishads, but my mindset at that point could not accept the events that were transpiring around me.

After the lecture Sveta led the group in meditation. This is an inherently collective activity, where each individual is called on to help others. These others could be in the group, acquaintances or family, or even problems in society as a whole or globally. She asked if anyone in the room had issues or ailments they wanted us to meditate on and then asked us to form a mental circle to help them, along with some friends not present. We also meditated for an orphanage the Center works with that was dealing with an alcoholic director and for fascism to end in Russia. This was a period when there had been several violent altercations between skin heads and people from the Caucasus region, some of which resulted in fatalities. After the meditation, as with the Temple of Peace meditation, everyone talked about what they saw during meditation and offered their interpretations of what lay ahead and what would be the best plan of action for each individual or situation we meditated on. Then Sveta called on us to hug at least five people in the room, which everyone did without a hint of irony or embarrassment on their faces.

After a short break I was able to witness my first real holodynamics process. Generally the time after the meditation is devoted to practicing holodynamics on each other or demonstrating the process to newcomers. This day there was only time for one process. About half the people left and the rest of

us stayed to watch this healing session. Yulia, a young journalist, volunteered for the process. She had had a sore back for several days and hoped a process could help alleviate the pain. Yulia lay down on a table and the rest of us formed a half circle in front of her. Tamara, who was the “guide,” or person who leads the process, asked us all to create a field of love for Yulia throughout the process. Tamara asked her to think about her place of tranquility, a place where she felt completely relaxed and at peace, and to describe this place aloud. She then asked her to call up her full potential, her higher “I” and they began the process. Tamara asked her what she was feeling, where she felt pain, what the pain looked like, and what the images she saw strove to become. Yulia had clearly done this before because she immediately came up with images. At the time I couldn’t understand how her back pain could be visualized in images but later when I learned the technique myself I found that the images did appear quite readily. During this process a certain image Yulia saw was feeling fear. This fear manifested itself in her hand. Then she saw two dots, like yellow eyes, she said. And the dots wanted to become a bird. She described what kind of bird they wanted to become and after some work they became a bird, a big beautiful white bird. Tamara asked Yulia if the bird wanted to help her, and she replied yes. Then at one point a transformation took place and then Yulia herself became the bird. Tamara asked her where the bird wanted to live in her body and she replied that it wanted to live in her entire body. Tamara explained that this transformation meant that Yulia now had a teacher, in the form of the bird, and endless potential which she could call up in times of trouble. This was just the

first step, but apparently this bird was supposed to help her out from then on. The process did not end there, but by this point my mind was too overloaded with new information to comprehend anything more.

My First Holodynamics Seminar

After Yulia's process there was a sign up sheet for people interested in learning the first level of holodynamics. The seminar was held the following weekend at Sveta and David's place, but it was run by Tamara, her husband Dima, and Alyesha. After two nine hour days of intensive holdynamics training, I felt much more confident in my grasp of their practice. Having my own holodynamics processes helped me to see how the images appeared, and I also experienced the emotional attraction of the processes, which left me feeling uplifted and loving, at least momentarily, something not to be scoffed at in the oftentimes harsh Moscow reality.

There were six participants at the seminar, including me, and all were women. Three of them I had seen at the previous meeting on Wednesday. The youngest two were both journalists. One was the Yulia who had volunteered for the process at the previous Wednesday meeting. She is in her early twenties and works at the newspaper *Moskovskaya Pravda*. She eventually stopped going to the Wednesday meetings, and when I later interviewed her she told me she was still looking for her path. I did not get to know the other journalist, also named Yulia, well, but she attended the meetings throughout my stay in Moscow. She appeared to be in her mid thirties and had a child, although I never did see the child. In addition to Voskhozhdenie, Yulia attended the Russian Academy of

Astrology. The third woman who had been at the Wednesday meeting was Vera, an economist in her fifties. I remember she had really started to annoy me at the meeting. She has one of those shrill, piercing voices, and she kept making comments about praying. When Sergei, the hare Krishna, said it wasn't possible to speak directly to god she said she had heard him speak to her many, many times. Sergei warned, however, that it is very, very difficult to know whether it is god's voice one hears or something else.

Vera has been participating in the center for some time and had had several sessions of holodynamics before. In fact, I found out that it was common for people to take the first level holodynamics seminar several times before moving on to the next level. Vera lives with her married daughter and seems to be having some problems with her and her daughter's husband. The change in my attitude towards Vera over the course of this training seminar is a testament to the powers of the holodynamics method, as practiced by Voskhozhdenie. I participated in one of her processes and by the end of the seminar my feelings of annoyance towards her had considerably abated. Another participant was a quiet pregnant woman in her early thirties. She was not often at the Wednesday meetings because of her pregnancy, which was very difficult. There were many meditations at the Center, however, about her and her child. It was widely believed that her pregnancy was difficult because her husband did not want a child. The final participant was Dasha, a school teacher in her late forties who we shall learn more about in later chapters. At this seminar, I was intimidated by

what seemed to be a knowing and somewhat judgmental gaze and did not speak very much with her.

On the first day of the seminar Dima mostly lectured about the theory of holodynamics. He's in his early thirties and by profession is a truck driver, although he has studied a lot about psychology and Eastern philosophy and religion on his own. When I introduced myself he said my name kind of funny and I thought he was making fun of my accent, but then it turned out that he has a stutter. Normally listening to a lecture by someone with a stutter might be painful, especially when it lasts all day, although somehow it was not distracting. We started around ten thirty am and didn't leave until after eight pm, although we had a break for lunch and tea. We gathered in a circle, and Dima sat at a table in the center and drew in graph form some of the theories he was explaining. He started out with the notion of roles.

Everyone has different roles. The human personality is based on the impression a person wants to make on those around him and the inner conception about how a person wants to be seen. This is based on the perception of the past. But there's one law – does it work or not. If it works, then it exists. If not, then it doesn't. Gurdieff said – ‘someone like Rockefeller may have millions, but that fact does nothing for my pocket.’ Each person has a mass of “stamps” from past experiences. How one tries to present himself is determined by his understanding of the world. Each girl wants her prince. Each person has his perception/concept of the ideal. According to Freud the subconscious is negative. Holodynamics follows Jung, who held the opposite position. He said a person is like an iceberg. The ego understands 7-9 percent of the psyche. The subconscious Id and superego are both positive and negative. Then below is the collective unconscious – information about what exists in the universe. Each person, each consciousness has access to any information.

Note the pragmatic approach here – the question is not whether something exists or not but whether the method one is using works. This line of argument holds true for healing methods as well as a person’s mode of thinking and is often used by members of Voskhozhdenie in their explanations. At times it is used to justify a method. If the method works then it is valid. If it doesn’t work then it can be dismissed. Other times it is used to promote the notion that thoughts, beliefs and convictions can be changed. If they don’t work for you, then why keep them, is the attitude. A person can choose. And the possibilities are only limited by the information held within the collective unconscious itself. Here Dima continues, explaining holodynes and how they change.

Holodynes – coined by Vernon Woolf – are thought forms that exist in the subconscious. Each person tries to become their ideal – as they understand that role. But what if this understanding is wrong? The USSR fell, but people continue to live with the same thought forms. For example, one guy at work tried to work the Soviet way. He talked on the phone all the time, wasted time. He didn’t fit into the new circumstances. Any person who’s not satisfied with life wants to change it. First he tries to change the outside world but not his impressions/convictions. Often one doesn’t accept different convictions.

Dima notes the problems that accompany narrow minded or isolated thinking. If people are not exposed to other ideas or ways of living then they can become ossified in their thinking and stuck in old bad habits that no longer work for them.

How does one get to personal subconsciousness? Each thought form manifests itself uniquely, in the inner condition as an inner sensation and brings up certain associations with certain colors and different physical sensations. Art therapists know if you think about color it can change one’s whole attitude. Vernon Wolff talked about vibrations. Matter is made out of atoms. From waves – the compression of vibrations.

Holodynamics uses the language of physics to explain psychology, providing a physiology of the psyche.

The psychological world is also made of vibrations. Where there are vibrations, there are sources. This is the rule of the tuning fork. Each holodyne gives off a particular wave. For example, one's understanding about a lemon. Think about the taste of a lemon. When you do the body automatically reacts. Each idea makes a wave. If two tuning forks make the same sound near by, and one rings, the other rings also. If a husband comes home angry, the wife also reacts. Both get on the same wave length. Both give out waves of dissatisfaction. It's resonance. One starts the wave and the other starts in after. Each idea wants to realize itself. Why? When it's fully realized then a person reaches a point of wholeness, enlightenment.

The theory of resonance put forth by holodynamics places responsibility for a person's life directly in the person's own hands, at least in terms of emotional disposition. People may not be able to change the circumstances of their lives, but they can change their attitudes and the way they react to those circumstances. Such emotional control is thought to bring about a great sense of freedom because it releases a person from the bounds of the outside world. Rather than escapist, however, they view this as the ultimate responsibility because of the incredible influence attributed to thought-forms.

If someone's dissatisfied, the source is the tuning fork within. We need to tune our strings to create harmony. Then with your tuned soul you can live any life. How do you tune the strings of your soul? The universe is the collective consciousness of the original tuning fork given to us by god - Light, harmony, color, will. The ancient Greeks said there were seven - Pythagoras - said there were seven heavenly spheres. Each person can hear them inside himself. When he hears he can tune his own soul to the universal tuning fork and his life will be in harmony. The problem is people have focused on other tuning forks - movies, books, parents, etc. When a person retunes himself then the old ideas appear with greater strength and new vibrations appear suddenly. The secret of

holodynamics is that the world is one – a unity. The original tuning fork is one, but its manifestations are many. How does one change an idea? There are two classes of holodynes: Those that help and those that get in the way. The first are mature and the second are immature. The immature ones are deep in the soul and have deep positive intensions. There is only a difference of degree of maturity. But the means by which it tries to realize itself is not harmonious. How do we make ideas mature? Woolf says we need to look to nature. Fruit matures in the sun. The field of love – everyone has access to their source. The thought ‘If only I loved....’ can save one in a situation of annoyance.

Several important points come up here. One is an inherent tension within their philosophy, which on the one hand sees each person as a unique individual and on the other hand envisions each of us seeking out the universal source. There is a hierarchy of desires, some of which are higher, bringing a person closer to universal harmony and some of which are immature, leading a person astray. But the person can choose which path to take. Making such choices, however, requires knowledge and control over one’s thoughts and behaviors, and holodynamics can help a person acquire these abilities. In some ways this is actually strikingly similar to Orthodox teachings. Free will is an important aspect of Orthodoxy. A person must be free to choose the sinful or righteous path, but only the righteous will lead to rewards in heaven. Again there is an emphasis on learning and education – of cultivating the knowledge necessary for making choices that will bring us more in harmony with the universe. In a sense we can see in their formulation of the individual striving for one with the universe an occult variant of their understanding of the individual as one supported by the collective whole of which it is a part. Since the collective unconscious is made up of our individual thoughts, it is important that the individual strive towards

elevated and cultivated thoughts that will raise the spiritual level of the whole. Another important point here is the emotional element of holodynamics for the members of Voskhozhdenie. The field of love is a key aspect to their method, and they strive to create a warm and loving atmosphere around them. By calling up this emotion, they believe, we can see beyond our differences and learn to empathize with others more readily, to see beyond their failings and detect their true positive deep intentions.

The Holodynamics Method

Next Dima explained how to go about actually performing a holodynamics process. The activity one performs during the process is called tracking, which looks for the source of a person's problems. The source can be from a person's past or past life or a current situation in a person's life. The answers are found in the subconscious, which is said to often manifest itself within the physical self as pain or illness. The subconscious is thought to speak to us in images.

Tracking is the method for looking for the source. The source is in the thoughts and in the body – emotional and physical. For example, each person can remember losing something. Think of a situation – what sensation do you feel, what image do you see? Then interrogate – ask – are you satisfied, how do you want the situation to look? Ask the image what it feels. Ask the image where it feels the sensation. Have a dialogue with the image. The traveler is the person you are helping, taking on a tour of his soul. The guide is the person leading the tour.

In addition to the person leading the process, there are other guides or helpers inside the traveler. The guide asks the traveler to call up these helpers. The process takes place in the form of a dialogue, with the guide asking questions and the traveler answering and describing the processes taking place inside.

Call up the traveler's full potential Self. You need to turn to the inner helper/helpers of a person. Woolf thinks there are seven. Sveta says eight. One helper is the place of tranquility. The journey starts and ends here. The second helper is the full potential self. According to the tree of holodynamics, first comes the field of love, then focus of attention, then the full potential. Every image has its own program. The program is its full potential. What are you striving for? How do you want to look? What do you want to be? Every immature image strives for something positive. You just need to show it how best to get there. Turn to the full potential. Ask it to fill the immature image with vibrations. This is integration in ecstasy. And test to see if the image is mature or not. If you are getting no where then you are probably asking the wrong question and the problem is not what the person thinks it is. Then you need to ask when the person first felt this sensation. There are four sources of immature thought forms - childhood, the family tree, imagination/fantasy, parallel worlds, for example reincarnation, the mental world.

Note that no image is ever considered bad, just as no person or belief is considered inherently evil by the members of Voskhozhdenie. Instead, while some people or beliefs are immature, their potential or true intention is positive. When people act badly and hurt others, it is generally believed to be their ignorance or inadequate training that leads to such behaviors. Deep down their goal is believed to be positive. In fact, during the process one generally finds that most negative behavior is driven by inner insecurities and a desire to be loved, but because of their ignorance they do not know positive ways of attaining this love. The field of love during the process aims overcome insecurities and make the image or person feel deeply loved so that they do not need to act out in negative ways.

Another key question is to ask the image who put it there. If the image doesn't answer then ask its full potential. Each image has its own full potential. You need to fill each image with harmonious vibrations. You can ask your own full potential to fill your body, your heart etc to fill you with love and then you can

have a dialogue with the image. Each dialogue has rules of politeness/rules of safety.

1. No force/violence. If the image wants to be violent and you decide to destroy it, you destroy part of yourself.
2. Don't have 'dead bodies' left over or trash around.

These two rules refer to the transformed images. Images are not to be destroyed because it is believed then that an empty space is left in the subconscious that will be filled by another, possibly worse, image. Instead, images are to be transformed from their immature, negative, states into their positive, mature full potential states. Because many images will be encountered during a process, particularly ones that last hours, it is important to keep track of them and make sure all of them are fully transformed so that no negative images or holes are left behind in the subconscious.

After the theoretical lecture and description of the method, Dima gave us a feel for what the actual process would be like and sent us on our way to practice.

Now it's time to practice.

Ask the traveler – go to the place of tranquility. What does it look like? How do you feel? Call up the full potential. What does it look like? Do you trust it? How does it relate to you? Call up the image of the problem. What do you feel in your body when you see it? Where in the body do you feel it? How does the feeling look? Ask image why it makes you feel the way it does. How does the image feel? Is it happy as it is? How does it want to look? What will help it look like that? How will it feel if it is able to look that way? Ask your full potential to fill you with vibrations of calm, love, and harmony. A corridor, path, road, tunnel, hole, refers to different period of one's life or past life. At the end of the session make sure you end on a positive note. Always bring the traveler back to the place of tranquility.

The main goal of the process is to bring out the deep good intentions of the image. When an image appears, the guide asks the traveler to ask the image what it wants. The process focuses on sensations in the body. When an image

feels good, full, happy, it's time to ask the full potential to fill the image or trouble with vibrations of love and happiness. Travelers are instructed to fill the image with love and light. The guide asks the traveler who could fill them with that. Then the traveler is asked to have it fill her with love. Like the group meditations, the processes taught by Voskhozhdenie are often collective events. In addition to the guide and traveler, others may be present and are called upon to create a field of love around the traveler, thus intensifying and furthering the process along.

My First Process

My first holodynamics process lasted only about five to ten minutes, but I have to say it was quite powerful. I wanted to work on my fear of public speaking. Both Tamara and Oleg worked with me, although Tamara mostly took over. My place of tranquility was a forest, dark, cool and quiet. I was there alone and felt calm and free and happy. My full potential was a deer. At first, however, I saw the universe, a dark and starry sky, but it was indifferent to my existence. I didn't feel warmth from it. For some reason images of a deer kept appearing in my head. The deer had these big warm eyes and was standing peacefully nearby and filling me with love with her eyes. Dima said that amongst Mexican and Native American traditions the deer symbolizes a teacher and guide, so it seems to have been a good choice. At least it was a very comforting image. Then they asked me to think about a problem. For a few seconds I couldn't focus or decide what to work on, but I chose to work on something I have long dreaded. When I started thinking about where on my body this fear of public speaking showed up, I

felt this incredible pressure build up on my forehead. My eye lids were twitching like crazy and flashes of light were shooting out. Tamara asked me to call up the full potential of the rays of light and a metal sword came to mind. It was very sharp and shiny. She then asked me to call up the full potential of the sword and all I could see were these waves of energy, almost like dark electrical cords. She asked me if I trusted the waves and I said no. So we called up the full potential of the waves. I couldn't see anything. Tamara asked me what I felt, and I said emptiness in my chest. And she asked what that looked like. It looked like a box, a cardboard box. She asked what the box wanted, and I said it wanted to be opened. She asked me how it would feel if it was opened and I said free and happy. Then she asked me to ask my full potential if she would help me open the box and she said yes. Once the box was opened Tamara asked what I saw now and I told her I saw a fountain or at least flowing water, like a waterfall. A lot of water and I felt a sense of relief and lightness. Then Tamara brought me back to the waves, the dark waves from the sword and she asked me how they looked now. They had become lighter with some light, light blue rays amongst them, but when she asked if I trusted them now, I still didn't completely trust them. They still bothered me some, although overall they became less scary. The feeling I had wasn't one of overflowing fullness, though. More of a stability, stationary, though the word 'normal' was all I could think of at the time. The emptiness was gone from the box, but it seemed to be replaced more by air, invisible particles of some sort and not some sort of object. But then the exercise came to a close and I didn't have a chance to fully explore the issue any longer. When it was over the

flashing lights and pressure in my head had subsided. There were still lights there, but they were calm and not shooting all over the place as at first.

The next day I got a chance to try out the role of guide. As luck would have it I was paired up with that woman I had found particularly annoying. The members of Voskhozhdenie would argue that this pairing happened for a reason. Because she had done this many times before, she did not need much guiding during the process. Tamara was also there to help me along. Vera quickly found her place of tranquility, a cloud. Her full potential was Sai Baba. She had been having problems with her daughter and son in law who both lived with her. At first she said her problem was a conflict with her daughter. Her daughter doesn't like the tone of voice she uses sometimes, and Vera said she's having a really hard time controlling her tone. Vera felt pain in her chest area and this she visualized as some sort of metal tool. Tamara asked her what the tool wanted and she said it wanted to cause her pain. She then called up its full potential. It was a cat and its full potential was a mouse. It was a dead end. At some point though she saw her daughter and son in law and looked at their full potentials. His was all cloudy and unhappy. In the end the pain was still in her chest but was less severe. Not very much was resolved because the process was cut short for lunch, but by the end of the process, having shared the emotional process with her and having seen how much she wanted to improve her family life, the original annoyance I had felt towards her melted away.

Holodynamics in Everyday Life

Over the next several months I would have many holodynamics processes, generally with Tamara. Most of them lasted around an hour, but we had one that lasted four. Like Sveta's meditations, Tamara would play soothing music in the background during the process. Often she would also dim the lights and light a candle to create a calmer atmosphere, and I would lie down covered with a blanket. During these longer sessions we would call upon other helpers besides the higher self, the place of tranquility and the field of love. One generally calls up helpers for six aspects of the person – physical, personal, inter-personal, social, principles, universal. These can change with each process or may repeat over and over again.

Sometimes during the longer processes a good deal of time was spent establishing these helpers and setting the right atmosphere for the process itself. Often the processes took place at Tamara's apartment. She lives in a one bedroom apartment with her husband and 17 year old son. The bedroom is divided up with curtains. Her son Yura has a bed off to one end that is separated off with a curtain. Then there's a little space with just enough room for an arm chair and a bed with a view out a large window. The back and left side of the bed were also blocked off with curtains. For the process Tamara would draw the flowered curtain to hide the sun, giving the room a cool calmness. Below I describe how one afternoon I experienced the gathering of these helpers for a longer process:

We started out the session with me lying on the bed under a blanket, a candle burning off to the side, and calm, relaxing music with chirping birds was playing in the background. Tamara asked me to go to my place of tranquility and I found myself on a grassy

expanse near a pond. The sun was shining but there was plenty of shade from the large trees along the water and up a bit on a hill. Birds of course were also chirping and my deer was already there before she asked me to call up my full potential. She asked if I felt like the deer was enough or if I felt I needed a higher level of full potential. It seemed like I needed something higher. I felt someone looking down at me, but I couldn't tell who it was. Instead I saw this large eye that seemed to be all knowing. It agreed to help me and the deer agreed to let it help. Then at the level of the body again the swan appeared, but it felt a need for transformation. It was feeling all bent and hunched over. It wanted to feel taller and straighter, and for some reason it wanted to turn into a white giraffe. The giraffe was confident and happy. Then we turned to my personality – a tree with a monkey, and this also was in need of transformation. In place of the tall solid trunk that seemed to hold it too strongly in place, the tree felt a need to branch out. From the bottom of the tree hundreds of new green branches started growing up and out, bringing a certain energy and life to the tree. Then we had the interpersonal relations – again this time there was a little girl with a glowing golden pyramid above her head, providing her with strength and wisdom. Then the social level was Pegasus, but he was feeling a bit on the heavy side and turned into a gazelle. At the level of principles first I saw a twirling energy like a tornado, but this wasn't a mature image. We then called the full potential of the tornado. This was at first light waves and then it turned into sun rays that exuded clarity. Then the universal level was at first the universe connected together with the little pink threads all coming together in a pink glow and turned into a giant pink dove with its wings outspread. She was sending love throughout all time and space. Tamara asked if the dove would share its love now with all of my helpers and for a while we just watched as the dove covered all of them and filled them with pink rays of love. Finally we were ready to start work.

After a process I could never remember every detail, but I would try to write them down as soon as possible. Sometimes a guide actually takes notes - to both aid them in the process of ensuring that all immature images have been transformed and to give to the traveler at the end of the process, so they can better reflect on their journey and the issues they are working on. Sometimes Tamara would give me assignments to work on afterwards, such as meditations or images

to think about. Usually at the end of a session she would ask my full potential to watch over me and to help me in my daily life.

Admittedly, I had a rather conflicted view about the processes. On the one hand, they seemed ridiculous. I could not help thinking about the sad yet ironic scene of the self-help group in *Fight Club* where the cancer patients spoke about how their “power animals” helped them cope with their disease. This film was particularly on my mind because the previous year it had been very popular amongst my more punk and indie-rock Russian friends. I remember writing my friends back home and joking about my new imaginary friends and the inner Carlos Castaneda-like journeys I had been taking. At the same time, however, the processes were truly enjoyable experiences. They left me feeling uplifted and loved and more confident, all things often in short supply during field work. I had occasion to call upon the techniques and my helpers during the long harsh Moscow winter that lasted well into April, and on more than one occasion they helped me out. As much as I love Moscow, which I truly do – the snow covered city can have an especially fairy tale atmosphere about it, and it has a certain pull that has been drawing me back for many years – there are times when daily life there can be extremely difficult and trying (See Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Sidewalk to the trolley

Sometimes this is because of the conditions outside. The winter can seem endless at times. Darkness falls across the city by three in the afternoon in the winter months, and the sidewalks are like obstacle courses, packed down with hardened snow or frozen slush. During the winter, the normally ten minute walk to the subway where I lived on the outskirts of Moscow became a much longer and more arduous act of dexterity and often unwelcome exercise. The spring would leave everyone jumping over puddles and maneuvering through muddy paths that had formed next to the flooded sidewalks. By the time I reached the subway itself my mood was sometimes already challenged.

Once inside the subway system moods rarely are improved, despite some of the exalted architecture of the central stations. The regular crowds in Moscow make rush hour crowds in New York seem sparse. Mix in with that the smell of old leather and animal fur and sweat and you can perhaps fathom a hint of the experience. And then there are the people. Some days I felt like I was invisible.

In the corridors people would constantly plow into me. I even came up with a nickname for such people who were determined to get into the subway car at any cost – human bulldozers. They simply position their bodies squarely ahead and walk forward, regardless of who or what may be standing in their way. I recall one woman who had a look on her face as if she existed simply to plow through people. She didn't seem to understand that people needed to get out of the subway car first. She just gritted her teeth and squeezed her large square body right through the crowd of people around her. And she seemed almost indignant that everyone didn't simply stand aside for her, as if there was any room to do so had they even wanted to. While it is just one example, the subway becomes a constant part of life in Moscow, with commutes from the outskirts lasting an hour or more. At moments like these a place of tranquility was a welcome gift. And the image of my deer could bring a much needed momentary calm.



Fig. 8. Running to the trolley

Sometimes sour moods came from a whole mix of conditions, including strained relations inside the apartment. Living in close quarters can be trying anywhere. I also happened to live with a person who felt compelled to teach me how to live on a daily basis (perhaps yet another example of the Soviet focus on the power of education and need to enlighten others). My own parents had given up trying to do this long before I even reached adulthood, so I was not prepared for the daily lessons by my Russian “mother,” who I am told only had my best intentions in mind. On one particularly bad day I thought I was going to explode. It was my holodynamics process later in the day that saved me. Everything seemed to be going wrong that day. I woke up feeling sicker than the previous day. Instead of just a sinus cold and sore throat and stomach ache and temperature I now also had a throbbing headache. Plus, my Russian “mother” had screamed at me and said that I thought she was my servant because I had left a clean dish in the sink. I was tip toeing around trying to avoid her all morning. Then when I stepped outside, it was raining. When I got to the street to cross over to the trolley, I could see one coming but the traffic was too thick to cross and it arrived and left and the next one did not come for a good ten minutes (See Fig. 8). So I was left standing in the rain when I was already sick. It finally arrived and took me to the subway. I decided to walk through the subway station and pay twice so I could use the ATM inside the other side, but it was out of order. So I had to go back out in the rain anyway. The first ATM I found had no money. The second one had a line, and the two guys getting money seemed like they were just messing around getting their jollies performing all sorts of transactions.

Finally by the time I got my money a half hour had already passed since I left the house. I got down to the subway and a train is there, but the doors are closed and it is just waiting to take off. Fortunately, by the time I got on the subway it was taking me to Sveta and David's where Sveta would give me a process. It truly was miraculous. Afterwards I felt like a completely different person. I went from feeling on the verge of killing someone to a sense of calm and confidence and filled with love, albeit for a limited period of time. Part of this came from simply entering into their home. During tea I told them all about my incident with my Russian "mother" and how it had affected me. David said I should tell her "thank you for the advice, but it doesn't inspire me" or that I should simply try to relish or enjoy her chastising comments – take them lightly as an interesting episode, a chance to observe how certain people react. Something far easier said than done.

Sometimes a mini-process of the people around me helped, as it did with an incident I had at the little church near my apartment in the outskirts of Moscow. Tamara had asked me to check to see if they had a certain icon for sale. When I went into the little store inside the church there were two women working there. One was writing the names of books into a notebook and the other was putting the books on the shelf. No one was behind the counter, but this was a store. They were there to sell the things in the store. Or so I thought. I asked if they had that particular icon and the woman close to the counter said 'no' immediately and that they never had such an icon. Then the other woman said that she knew they had it at some point. I thought that perhaps the first woman would check to see if they did in fact have the icon, so I didn't immediately leave.

But I hadn't stood there even two seconds when the second woman looked at me and said quite nastily, "Don't bother us!!!" I was completely taken aback. Here we were in a church, I'm asking about an icon, and she tells me rudely not to bother her? I was completely discombobulated and frankly quite shaken. I had come to expect rude or indifferent comments from regular sales people, but given the context I had expected a rather different response. Looking back these all seem like a very small incidents, but in the context of the daily stresses of field work sometimes the small incidents have a way of becoming overwhelming. In this particular case, the woman's response took me completely off guard and left me feeling like uttering rather un-polite things to these supposedly religious women. But instead I appealed to my place of tranquility and to my deer and during a small process of the church women the deer explained that the women were deeply unhappy with their lives. They were filled with bitterness and needed love, so the deer sent them love and sent me calmness, and I was able to stop shaking and to go on with my day feeling pretty good. And so while the intellectual side of me still questioned the methods and world views I was encountering in the New Age in Moscow, the emotional appeal was clear, and in the short term, at least, holodynamics had passed Dima's litmus test – it worked.

Chapter Four The Cultivated Individual

While experiencing alternative spiritual health practices helped me to understand the emotional value of the methods and the sense of community practitioners build, my conversations and interactions with practitioners and extensive readings into the practices themselves helped to explain their intellectual attraction. As previously noted, the practitioners I met in Moscow were overwhelmingly from the intelligentsia, and the works they immersed themselves in offered fertile soil for intellectual exploration. The intricate maps and structures of their spiritual world revealed a fascinating history and world view that unites them with other spiritual seekers around the world and yet sets them uniquely apart. With elements interwoven together from widely disparate sources, the methods and ideas have a strong element of mystery about them that keeps one digging deeper and deeper for significant connections and offers hopes even of perhaps finding some enigmatic lost clue to the meaning and magic of life.

Certainly, the members of Voskhozhdenie emphasize the esoteric side of their beliefs, referencing key figures from alchemy, spiritualism and the magic arts. One detects in them a certain pride in the discovery of knowledge not yet attained by all, although they make clear that this knowledge is available to any who seek it out and are eager to teach any who show an interest. Their methods aim at opening up hidden abilities, the keys to which are transmitted by seemingly magical or imaginary means, invisible entities that help one connect with information from a different time or place. At the same time, they are very

pragmatic in their approach, focusing on the practical problems of daily life and the physical evidence of the success of their methods and way of viewing the world. As we shall see, it is not the ultimate truth of the concepts that concerns them most, but the practical outcomes, and the resulting lessons they learn about themselves and about living in the world. Ultimately, the question they are most interested in is ‘Are you happy?’ It is a question that is more complicated than at first appears because, as we shall see, we can be led astray by desires that are not our own or that only bring fleeting happiness. Learning one’s true desires is an essential element of their practices. And this requires on-going self exploration because, as they are a spiritual community, working on spiritual development, they believe that these desires and the factors that bring happiness change and mature as one climbs, or ascends, the spiritual ladder.

I came to see how their maps of the unseen world provided a language for deep self-exploration that keeps them moving up that spiritual ladder, and how the perceived interconnections between people and the universe increases their sense of strength and purpose and personal power and provides tools for accomplishing their goals. As described by practitioners, the unseen world is not simply a hodgepodge or conglomeration of fanciful creatures. It is a structured universe, with laws and order. It is a language that combines spirituality and science to explain the powers of the human mind and the importance of cultivating and spreading positive and elevated thoughts. This convergence of science and spirituality and the power of the mind is characteristic of the New Age more broadly, finding roots in the historical precursors to the global New Age

movement, such as Theosophy, the New Thought Movement, and the Psychical Society, and continuing on today in such practices as holodynamics, the Silva Mind System.

Cultivation is not limited to thoughts, however, but extends to the whole self and to the development of the individual personality – as a cultural, spiritual and ethical being. As such, the individual is involved with raising the level of the society as well. Self-development and social development go hand in hand. As we have seen briefly in Chapter Three and shall discover in more detail here, thoughts are considered very powerful physical entities – that influence mood, health, and general wellbeing. Such tremendous influence comes with the promise of great potential power as well as great responsibility – towards oneself as well as others. People are viewed as potentially miraculous entities capable of great personal influence and are believed to hold the keys to their own happiness and ultimately to the wellbeing of the entire planet. But attainment of these keys requires knowledge, practice and the cultivation of spiritually mature behaviors and beliefs. A person must learn to live consciously.⁴⁴ This entails learning how to control one's inner world and elements of the unseen world outside. Left undeveloped or unschooled, a person risks falling prey to outside influences and can unconsciously have a negative affect on the world outside. Within this system, one detects a certain tone of hierarchical condescension towards the spiritually undeveloped, perhaps a way of differentiating themselves from what they regard as the uneducated or uncouth masses, who are believed to live unthinking lives and thus more susceptible to the influence of others. Cosmic

⁴⁴ Just as communist consciousness must be learned.

laws and the practices built upon them are used by practitioners to avoid such a fate and allow them to instead raise their cultural level and create their own destinies – within the boundaries of these universal laws. And therein lies the tension and dialectical contradiction of their belief system, of which they themselves are acutely aware. They seek to develop their individual self in conformity with the cosmic laws. They search for their own individual destinies, which are set by the Universal source and correspond with these same laws which, they claim, will reward them with harmony – in their own lives and in the world around them.

In many ways this focus on responsibility, the development of the individual and the forging of one's own destiny is reminiscent of the neo-liberal myth of the self-made man and recalls many New Age beliefs in the West. This is not surprising as the two New Age movements share a long and intertwining history. Many of the influences would be familiar to New Age practitioners in the West: Theosophy, Hermetica, Hindu literature, and newer practices such as potentialization and explorations into the subconscious mind. The Russian New Age sphere is not a replica of the West, however (although the people I worked with had an in-depth knowledge of the main New Age writers in the West). In the Russian context, these influences have been filtered through a different lens that has produced a particular focus of interests. Furthermore, emerging out of the Soviet period, the importance of responsibility and individual development within the New Age community of today could also be a reflection of Soviet ethical

teachings and the promotion of strong communist personalities and consciousness.

Many practices that on the surface seem similar to those in the West are interpreted differently by practitioners in Russia, as we saw with Sveta and David's holodynamics in Chapter Three. While the Russians I worked with read Hindu texts such as the *Upanishads*⁴⁵ and Theosophical texts such as *The Secret Doctrine*, they were also strongly influenced by such Russian mystical thinkers as Elena and Nikolai Rerikh⁴⁶, Daniil Andreev, Kora Antarova, and Avessalom Podvodnyi, who wrote on similar topics but are less known in the West. Russian culture more generally has been strongly influenced by the philosophical notion of theosophy, or wisdom of god, and the accompanying Gnostic idealization of the eternal feminine.⁴⁷ And the social realm remains a central part of philosophical and spiritual discussions. The earthly needs of the people are joined with their spiritual aspirations.

In Russia today practitioners place a tremendous focus on cultural development and the responsibility people have not only to themselves but to society as a whole and even to the universe about them. In some ways this can be seen as indicative of their intellectual class, which values education and the elevated cultural ethics that are seen to accompany it. This is also true of their relationship to religion more generally, including Orthodox Christianity, which

⁴⁵ The *Upanishads* are considered by many to be the first works to mention chakras. However, according to Anodea Judith, an American chakra healer and teacher, notions similar to chakras appear in the earliest Vedic texts (around 2000 bce).

⁴⁶ Nikolai Rerikh wrote an essay in 1935 titled "Voskhozhdenie" and he also developed an international banner of peace, which has been incorporated into the banner for David and Sveta's Temple of Peace.

⁴⁷ The Soviet period also left its distinctive markings on the contemporary New Age scene, but I address this point in detail in chapter Five.

many turned to for its culturally elevating elements rather than its dogmas. Russian New Age practitioners often discuss their spiritual evolution and show pride in their Russian spiritual roots. The cliché “Russian soul” is for many a spiritual reality that sets them apart and above other spiritual searchers. For many Russian New Age women this spiritual birthright is believed to be enhanced by intuition and other powers attributed to their gender, particularly the ability to give birth itself. For many the personal and national converge in a vision of global spiritual transformation that places Russia solidly in the center. This is epitomized by Voskhozhdenie’s Temple of Peace project.

What emerges in this chapter is a conceptual understanding of the cultured New Age practitioner in Russia. Focusing on the concepts and practices that form their world view, a picture develops that helps us understand the intellectual and cultural appeal of the New Age. We follow the mystery of the practice that lead them on the path to self discovery and spiritual cultivation that sets them apart – from other Russians and other New Age practitioners. We learn the important role of learning itself and the limitless possibilities that lie within the human mind, both notions that were encouraged and researched during the Soviet period and are not simply new innovations inherited from the West. And we discover the great responsibility – towards oneself and the wider community – that comes with powers of the mind. We explore the complex structural plan of the unseen world (at least to the unevolved) and discover how some of these concepts are incorporated into people’s daily interactions, helping them realize their own inner abilities, take control of their destinies and evolve to a higher spiritual level.

Tracing the roots of the concepts that have become a part of their daily lives, this chapter reveals the historical particularities that have colored the beliefs and practices of the Russian New Age of today.

My First Encounter with Occult Knowledge

At the first couple of meetings I attended at Voskhozhdenie I kept hearing about a person I thought was named Gregor, which I figured was a form of the Russian name Grigorii. I had never heard of this person and kept trying to catch someone saying his last name so I could read up about him. Soon however I realized that this Gregor fellow was in possession of some rather large entities, such as the Church or Russia or the Soviet Union. I heard people speak about the importance of Gregor, how he had a great influence on people, especially the Gregor of the Church, and it became clear that Gregor was not a person but an essence of some sort. Not wanting to sound completely ignorant, I tried finding the word in the Russian-English dictionary and the Russian encyclopedic dictionary to no avail. Finally I gave up and during the discussion time at one of the regular Wednesday meetings asked David what a gregor was, explaining that I had searched in every dictionary I could find. Upon hearing this, David and the few people within hearing range burst out laughing. “You’ll never find that word in a dictionary,” David said. He explained that the word was egregore and was an occult term and said I should read about it in their books as well as in the book *Vozvrashchennyi okkul’tizm: Tonkaya Semerka (The Returned Occultism: The Subtle Seven)* by Avessalom Podvodnyi, whose ideas significantly influenced the teachings at Voskhozhdenie. I found that this was often the reply to my

questions about the activities at Voskhozhdenie. “Haven’t you read the book,” people would ask. “It’s all explained in the book,” they would tell me, or they would give me yet another book to read.

The world of Voskhozhdenie was very much entrenched in an intellectual way of life. There was always more to learn, new books to read and lectures to attend. And the readings were always obscured in a vocabulary that presumed prior knowledge with the basic precepts and structures of a hidden world. This was the first time that I had encountered the “subtle” world and the hierarchical system that is said to govern both the cosmos and our individual fates, and the books were a tremendous challenge - to both my intellect and belief system. Still, each time I was chastised for not finishing them, I would return to the books, and bit by bit I began to develop a picture of this esoteric universe and slowly came to understand more fully some of the conversations occurring around me and the significance of these subtle entities to the Russian New Age world view. I had thought that knowledge of Russian alone would be enough. I wasn’t prepared for discussions of subtle bodies or chakras or egregores. But these formed the basis of their methodologies and world views and as such saturated their every day language of communication. The excerpt from Sveta and David’s first book below offers a taste of this mysterious language:

It is generally agreed upon that independent essences or beings [*sushchestvo*] of the Subtle World that influence the activities of a group of people (of large collectives: an ancestral family, a tribe, a nation, a religious confession, students, large parties, states) are called the egregore of that group. An egregore is formed by the thoughts, feelings and ideas of the members of the group. This is the commonality of the monad (immortal compilers) of all people and higher beings that have ever participated with the group.

This one small definition assumes an understanding of the subtle world and monads, neither of which I had previously come across. And the definition they provided in parentheses for monads left me equally lost. I had never heard of the subtle world much less egregores. And yet, these *egregores* seemed to be of great importance. I was intrigued by the implications of such entities and wanted to know more about how thoughts could form into massive independent beings. How do they form and how do they influence such large groups of people? And why had I never heard of them before? This curiosity sent me on a quest that led me from the books of Voskhozhdenie all the way to the Book of Enoch, tracing historical connections along the way that link contemporary New Age practitioners in Russia in a way that distinguishes them from the West, where *egregores* are much less common but the subtle world and Cosmic Laws are just as ubiquitous as in Russia. The term egregore is in fact in use in the West, but it is generally limited to secret societies, such as the Rosicrucians or Masons, while in Russia it has expanded outwards into the spiritual health community more broadly where it intermingles with discussions of subtle bodies and chakras. Aside from the Voskhozhdenie books, I found two contemporary Russian New Age books devoted exclusively to egregores, and I found the concept discussed in numerous other books and publications.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See Anopova, E. 2002. *Tretii Luch - Put' k novoi Ere: Dukhovnaia missiia Rossii* (Third Ray – Path to a new era: The Spiritual Mission of Russia); Anatolii Nekrasov, 2002. *Egregor*; Avessalom Podvodnyi. 1998. *Vozvrashchennyi okkul'tizm: tonkaya semerka* (*The Returned Occultism: the subtle Seven*); Alexander Sviash. 2002. *Kak formirovat' sobytia svoei zhizni s pomoshch'yu sila smysil* (*How to formulate the events of your life with the strength of your thoughts*); Tonenkova, M.M. 2001. *Sotsiologii dukhovnoi zhizni budushchei Rossii: Novyi sotsiologicheskii vector* (*Sociology of spiritual life of future Russia: New sociological vectors*); and the popular Bulgarian

It turns out that the connection between egregores and magic is not incidental, as the popularization of the term seems to originate in that sphere. While I never learned the original source of the word, I did find variations of the word in the Greek version of the Book of Enoch⁴⁹ which translates it as “watchers.”⁵⁰ Some translate it as guardian angel, a concept that is highly popular in the contemporary New Age scene, with many books published on the theme. The notion that “egregores” or angels possess hidden knowledge is likely the source of interest within the sphere of magic today, as has been the case for some years. In fact, I discovered the word egregore in Madam Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* in a footnote with a definition by magician and Kabbalist Eliphas Levi⁵¹ from his work *The History of Magic*: “. . . the chiefs of the souls who are spirits of energy and action” (Blavatsky 1888: 259). Levi applies egregore here to explain who directs the Astral Light, the force within which dreams, second sight, and “extra-natural” visions take place (Blavatsky 1888: 259).

Certainly the Theosophical connection could explain in part the popularity of the term in Russia. Theosophical works are popular in the contemporary New Age scene and, as we shall see later in this chapter, strongly influence the works

mystic Omraam Mikael’ Aivankhov. 2001. *Egregor Golubya, ili tsarstvo mira (The Egregore of the Dove or the Reign of Peace)*.

⁴⁹ I found the word egregore in an English-Greek version of the Book of Enoch.

⁵⁰ These were angels who were punished for eternity by God for fornicating with human women and imparting to them the secrets of the heavens. Enoch tried to gain God’s mercy for them, but he refused.

⁵¹ Levi was a French priest who was excommunicated and became a mystic, interested in the Kabbalah - thus the Hebrew name (a translation of his first and last names). He is considered the father of modern day magick, inspired Aleister Crowley, the founder of the Golden Dawn, who was born the year Levi died and believed himself the reincarnation of Levi (<http://www.controversial.com/Eliphas%20Levi.htm>).

Levi and Egregores are both referenced in the 1907 edition of the Russian work *Okkult’izm I Magia (Occultism and Magic)* by C. Tukholka.

of Sveta and David, who even considered calling their second book *An Introduction to the Open Doctrine*, as an ironic allusion to Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. But egregores play a minor part in Blavatsky's work, mentioned only in that one footnote.⁵² The Russian popularity of the term seems much more influenced by another Russian figure, the mystic Daniil Andreev (1906-1959). Andreev does not specify where he came upon the word egregore, but he states that he vaguely recalls hearing of such a concept in Jewish mysticism, of which he professes to have a "less than superficial knowledge" (Andreev Section 3.3). For this reason he warns his readers that his application of the term may have little correspondence with its use in Jewish mystical practices. It is possible that Andreev would have been familiar with the definition of egregore from *The History of Magic, The Secret Doctrine* or its translation in the Book of Enoch⁵³ – His Rose of the World project aims to unite the religions of Light. He came from a family who associated with members of the Theosophical Society, and the title of his life's work shares the name of a poem⁵⁴ by W. B. Yeats, who was briefly a

⁵² All of Blavatsky's works are available on line and I searched them all, including a stanza by stanza search of the two-volume *Secret Doctrine: A synthesis of science, religion and philosophy*.

⁵³ This is an apocryphal book of the Old Testament that according to George Schodde's 1882 translation was found in Abyssinia by English traveler James Bruce in 1773 and first translated in 1821, at which time it became hugely popular amongst such groups as Masons, Rosicrucians and Theosophists. Blavatsky devotes many pages to this work. In certain magick circles Enoch is considered the equivalent of the Egyptian god Thoth, who in turn is the Greek god Hermes Trismegistus (actually many authors who took on one name), to whom is attributed the Hermetic code "As above, so below" that undergirds the occult notion of astral planes and bodies, and to which Sveta and David refer in their work. One passage attributed to him is The Virgin of the World, the story of Isis explaining the universe to her son Horus.

⁵⁴ Rose of the World –

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
 For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
 Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
 Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
 And Usna's children died.

member of the Theosophical Society and later of the Golden Dawn.

The influence of Andreev seems to be one of the most significant ways that sets the Russian New Age scene apart. Little known in the West, Russian literary scholar Mikhail Epstein calls Andreev the most important Russian mystic of the Soviet period (Epstein 1997: 327). In his chapter “Daniil Andreev and the Mysticism of Femininity” Epstein points out several qualities of Andreev’s mysticism: the combination of Christian and pagan beliefs; a mix of national distinctiveness and universalism; focus on the cosmic level; the concern for social justice; and the worship of the feminine (*ibid.*: 326). All of these characteristics are reflected in the broader Russian New Age scene.

Andreev’s influence is acknowledged by many New Age authors and practitioners. In his book, Podvodnyi (1998) explains that his understanding of egregores comes directly from Andreev’s work *Roza Mira (Rose of the World)*, in which Andreev describes his vision of the subtle structure of the universe and future utopian global government. Andreev defines egregores as follows: “variomaterial formations that take shape over large collectives from certain emanations of the human psyche.... Every state, even Luxembourg, has its own

We and the labouring world are passing by:
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:
Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;
He made the world to be a grassy road
Before her wandering feet.

egregore” (Andreev n.d.). And in fact, it is possible that the very collective nature of egregores themselves may explain some of their popularity in Russia.

During the course of my research several people involved with Voskhozhdenie mentioned Andreev in passing, and Sveta and David quote him in both of their works. Anatolii Nekrasov,⁵⁵ author of the book *Egregores*, also attributes the contemporary use of the word egregore to Andreev, although he uses more contemporary language, defining it as an energy-information field, thus linking it to the sphere of bio-energy work that is very popular in the New Age in Russia today (Nekrasov 2002: 15). In essence, according to Nekrasov, egregores are the atmosphere, the general feeling that characterizes a particular group, be it a family, work collective or nation. Following Andreev, Nekrasov explains that each individual is capable of creating the atmosphere of the group. The leader is not necessarily the determining factor. Many incorporate egregores into their methods as a way of demonstrating this distinctive role of the individual in order to help inspire individual cultivation and responsibility, and thereby raise the level of the entire group or society. Aleksandr Sviyash (2002), whose books on self-realization are very popular in Moscow today, links the notion of egregores back to the idea of guardian angel, emphasizing the relationship of exchange that takes place between a person and his or her personal egregore. He calls on people to befriend their egregores in order to develop a mutually beneficial relationship. Unlike the other theorizers of egregores, Sviyash’s methods focus solely on the individual, who is believed to have a multitude of egregores – each vying for

⁵⁵ It’s interesting to note that one chapter of Nekrasov’s book is devoted to a dialogue he claims to have had with El Morya through the help of a spiritualist.

influence and each offering help or guidance. Because the egregores feed off a person's thoughts and emotions, the more one thinks about them, the larger and stronger they become, and thus the more information and help they can provide. On a practical level, this creates a space for more introspection and self-exploration (Sviyash 2002: 33). While focused on the individual, it is interesting to note that again, even with Sviyash, individual development is being aided by a collective being (egregore), and even a collective of collective beings.

Podvodnyi's method goes beyond the individual level. He uses egregores for seeking one's own cosmic destiny, and he views them as part of the overall transformation of humanity, which only starts at the individual level. His goal is not simply to help people find their mission in life. He hopes to raise the cultural level of humanity and promotes a particular ethic of behavior which, in his view, corresponds with Cosmic Laws and preferences harmony, compassion, selflessness, and order. When people live unconsciously, he writes, they are unable to raise their cultural level in accordance with these Laws. They are ruled by lower egregores that develop unconsciously out of habits and social norms and their lives become degraded and miserable, and eventually the societies in which they live begin to decline as well.

But because not just the individual but each group formation has an egregore, egregores do not play a universally positive role. Each egregore is competing for an individual and group's attention and obedience, and not all have benevolent intentions. Some consist of low energy and can lead a person into a degraded and debauched state. Podvodnyi blames this on the low cultural and

ethical level of both society and individuals, which is particularly true, he notes, with regard to our cultural and ethical knowledge of our inner selves. People live unreflectively, controlled by their subconscious and by the society about them. If people would become more aware of their inner selves then they could take steps to transform the egregores and subtle figures and learn to live in conscious awareness (Podvodny 1998: 36). Podvodny's describes an intricate system and hierarchy of egregores and other subtle figures,⁵⁶ and he provides a methodology for controlling this exchange. The problem is people are generally not conscious of their egregores. The flow of energy-information from the egregores reaches a person at the subconscious level, and generally the energy is not received directly, but through other subtle bodies that may have their own agendas. They may lead a person astray and block their channels (chakras) with lower forms of energy, in which case the person may never be able to receive the necessary energy to discover their true task. A person must learn how to bring this information up to the conscious level in order to actively seek out one's true destiny and to move up the spiritual ladder, which is what Sveta and David's method called Spiritual Portrait and their version of holodynamics aim to do.

In other words, when a person focuses (consciously or unconsciously) on a particular egregore and acts within the rules of this egregore, then the egregore receives information and energy from the person. Connection with an egregore can be heightened through repeated thoughts, behaviors, mantras, meditations, and rituals, which is why the egregores of religion are considered particularly

⁵⁶ These differ from subtle bodies and seem to originate with Andreev's *Roza Mira*. According to Podvodnyi (1998) the figures are "black teachers" that cause blockages in one's chakras and prevent spiritual development. Each figure sends negative energy to a particular chakra.

strong (and why the egregores of dictatorships are also very strong). In return a person is filled with energy and resources from the egregore and is able to excel at the task provided over by the egregore. For example, if one is receiving energy from an academic egregore, thoughts will be filled with academic issues and the person will be engaged in activities typical of the academic world, such as lectures, writing papers, reading articles, etc. The exchange of energy-information with the egregore can help a person focus and succeed within the academy. The problem is, it is possible for a person to become consumed by this one egregore at the expense of other areas in his or her life. The person may not pay enough attention to the egregore of family or the social world, and these aspects of the person's life may atrophy. Or conversely, a person may be tempted by some of the lower egregores and neglect the higher one that was calling him or her towards a career. Lower egregores, called black teachers by Podvodnyi, can serve a positive role, however, because if a person becomes conscious of his or her misery, this involvement with the black teacher can lead almost dialectically to the realization that it is necessary to work on oneself and change.

This is a key part of many New Age beliefs. As part of their methodology Sveta and David explain that a person should not think in terms of good and evil because one never knows what the end result will be. What at first seems to be a good deed may lead to more misery, and a painful event could have a positive outcome. In fact, they explain that every negative experience is a lesson and an opportunity to grow. One must simply learn how to discover the positive lesson and why it was given at that moment, just as one looks for the

positive intension of the holodyne during a holdynamics process (Prival'skaya 2001a: 3).

Another problem people face when dealing with egregores is that all of the egregores are signaling that they are a person's true calling. Because of the exchange of energy with an egregore, a person may even *feel* it is their calling. A person may feel inside that it is his or her calling to become a professor, and that person may rise to prominence within the academy. But this egregore may not be conveying the person's karmic task, in which case there will be a disharmony in some area of their life. In short, a person needs to be fully in tune with their subtle-self in order to tap into his or her own inner magic and discover one's true path in life. Many of the practices with the New Age aim at sorting through this tangle of desires and callings and finding one's true path to happiness.

In the concept of egregores we see a fascinating convergence of ideas that link the conceptualizations of the Russian New Age sphere together and a guide for the practical realization of these ideas. In egregores we see a meeting of the individual, the social, and the universal. Egregores, we learn, are formed from energy. One source of this energy is human thoughts and emotions. The other is the Universe. In egregores we see the power of thoughts and the subtle world – the power of the individual to develop innate abilities and the power of the outside world to influence the individual. The thinking individual is called upon to cultivate themselves, to become conscious of the competing egregores and to learn how to control their consciousness through the control of their thoughts. This is a personal struggle to develop oneself and a social struggle to raise the

cultural and spiritual level of society. We see in egregores the power of the collective, be it the family, the society, the nation or the globe. The individual is called upon to cultivate positive, “correct thoughts”⁵⁷ and emotions that will reflect positively back upon the group and is instructed on how to steer clear of negative influences of the group.

Practically speaking, it is a call to reject habitualized mechanistic behaviors that are more suited to robots and to live conscious lives worthy of human beings. Ultimately, this is a struggle to find one’s Cosmic Destiny and to live in harmony with the Cosmic laws.

The Rose of the World

Uniting the Individual and the Social

While Andreev’s definitions and ideas about egregores dominate the New Age literature, not all contemporary authors cite his name, even when the definitions they provide replicate almost exactly the one in *Rosa Mira*. This omission may be due to Andreev’s controversial reputation. In researching *The Rose of the World*, I learned that many consider his book the work of a madman suffering from hallucinations.⁵⁸ Indeed, I found the core of the book incomprehensible, even with the aid of a glossary and an English translation. Each definition contained new words that in turn needed further explication. This is due to the way Andreev came upon his understanding of the spiritual realm. Speaking of the guides (many of whom were Russian literary and

⁵⁷ This is reminiscent of the “correct thought” promoted by Valeologia, as discussed in chapter 2 and is also a key element of Buddhism.

⁵⁸ In his book *Ezotericheskii mir: semantika sakral’nogo teksta (The esoteric world: Semantics of the sacral text)*, V.M. Rozin tells of a colleague’s reaction to the work: “Rose of the world? I looked at the text and decided it was schizophrenia. Isn’t that the case?” (Podvodnyi: 117)

philosophical figures from the past) who led him through the cosmic world during his sleep, Andreev explains how he came upon the language of *The Rose of the*

World:

Did I actually see them during those meetings? No, I didn't. Did they speak with me? Yes, they did. Did I hear their words? Both yes and no. I heard them, but not with my physical sense of hearing. It was as if they spoke from somewhere in the depths of my heart. I repeated many of their words back to them, especially unfamiliar names of various planes and spiritual hierarchies in Shadanakar⁵⁹, trying as closely as possible to convey their sounds through physical speech, and then asking, "Is that right?" I was forced to repeat some names and words several times; there were also some that I was unable to reproduce accurately with the sounds of the Russian language. Many of the strange words pronounced by the great brothers were accompanied by light effects—not physical light, although one could compare them in some cases to flashes of lightning, in others, to a distant glow, and in still others, to moonlight. Sometimes they were not at all like words in the sense to which we are accustomed, but entire chords, as it were, of phonetic consonances and meanings. Translating such words into our language was out of the question, and all I could do was select one meaning and one syllable from all the meanings and all the harmoniously sounding syllables. But our talks consisted not of single words, but of questions and answers, of entire sentences expressing very complex ideas. Entire sentences undivided into words seemed to flash and imprint themselves on the silver paper of my consciousness, illuminating with an unusual light the gaps and ambiguities that my questions addressed. In truth, they were more like pure thoughts than sentences, thoughts that were transmitted to me directly, without words. (Andreev, n.d.)

The cosmology Andreev describes with this language comes across at times as science fiction and is difficult to follow. The introduction to his work, although peppered with these unfamiliar terms, is written in a simpler style and is

⁵⁹ According to Andreev's glossary, shadanakar is "The proper name of the bramfatura of our planet. It comprises a huge (more than 240) number of variomaterial planes of varying dimensions and time streams." He defines bramfatura as follows: "Almost every heavenly body possesses a number of variomaterial planes that together form a closely integrated system. These systems, united by the commonality of processes taking place on their planes, are called bramfaturas. In the majority of bramfaturas in our Galaxy the chief process uniting the planes of each is the struggle between the Providential and the demonic forces. There are, however, bramfaturas that have completely fallen under the sway of the demonic and those that have freed themselves entirely of it."

an elegant and poignant appeal to the world to learn from the mistakes of history and to work against the evils of tyranny. Andreev wrote the *Rose of the World* while serving a 25-year sentence in Stalin's labor camps, which perhaps explains his view that a global dictatorship "is the deadliest of all threats hanging over humanity" (and maybe Voskhozhdenie's frequent meditations against fascism). The introduction is both a scathing global social critique of dictatorship, war and greed as well as an overview of his philosophical, social and spiritual vision. In Section I of the book – "The Rose of the World and its Place in History" - Andreev discusses the perilous state of the earth, its greatest threats, and his plan for its redemption in the utopian global society, known as the Rose of the World. Many of the ideas elaborated in this work resonate with those of the contemporary New Age scene in Moscow and particularly influenced the generation of Russian alternative spiritual health practitioners who found their first taste of the occult and mysticism in the 1970s and 1980s.

While *The Rose of the World* was not published in full until 1991, Andreev's wife, Alla Andreeva circulated *samizdat*⁶⁰ copies of the work starting in the 1970s.⁶¹ Already in the early 1960s a nascent spiritual and creative revival was taking root in Russia. Esoteric circles, poetry clubs, "unofficial" art, and rock music began to emerge. The spiritual teacher and scholar V.M. Rozin writes that in the late 1960s esoteric groups started to appear where people practiced yoga, naturopathy, Chinese and folk medicine, and bio-field healing. He found himself

⁶⁰ Self-published.

⁶¹ According to the Rose of the World website, excerpts of the book were published in the journal *Novy Mir* in 1989 and when the book was published in 1991 the first run of 100,000 copies quickly sold out (roseofworld.org).

involved with several. At that time, according to Rozin, an interest in religion began to awaken amongst the intelligentsia, and literature from abroad and pre-revolutionary Russian literature began to appear (Rozin 2002: 15). Socialist realism was losing its hold, and literature that more realistically portrayed people's lives and beliefs began to appear, although at first mostly in *samizdat* form (Lowe 1987). Writers and artists began exploring the problems of everyday life, including spiritual questions and experiences.⁶² Andreev's work was widely read and discussed in spiritual circles. Rozin gave a series of lectures on Andreev and other forbidden figures⁶³ in 1981 and 1982, and at the time he estimates that some 20 copies of these lectures were circulating in Moscow (Rozin 2002: 7).

Andreev's work is a mystical blend of Christian, theosophical (although he distinguished himself from Theosophy), Buddhist and Hindu ideas. It is a vision of a new world with a new global state and new synthesis of religions that will unite all that is positive in humanity. This vision calls for a plan for religious and political transformation that will take place over time through education, individual spiritual development and enlightenment and the cooperation of political and spiritual leaders. The main ideas he sets forth in the introduction to his work are echoed in beliefs, practices and stories of people involved with the New Age today. We see here the value of learning as a way of opening up the limitless possibilities that are thought to reside in each of us:

The thirst for knowledge, which at one time drove explorers to embark on voyages through uncharted waters and to range over

⁶² These include Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Boris Pasternak, Yuri Trifonov, Valentin Rasputin; the Lianozovo art group, and experimental artists in the Artists' Union, such as Ernt Neizvestny and Ilya Kabakov.

⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, Rudolph Steiner, Krishnamurti, Carlos Castaneda.

unopened continents, will send them first (perhaps even before the rise of the Rose of the World) into outer space. But the other planets are inhospitable. After several exploratory missions the launches will halt, and the thirst for knowledge itself will begin to shift in focus. Methods will be devised to activate and develop the dormant organs possessed by every human being: organs of spiritual sight, spiritual hearing, deep memory, and the ability to separate at will one's inner, variomaterial bodies from the physical body. Voyages around variomaterial worlds, around the unfolding planes of Shadanakar, will commence. It will be the age of cosmic Magellans and Columbuses of the spirit. (Andreev, Section 1.2)

Self-development is the primary method for developing these innate abilities. We also see here the familiar skepticism of science that is found in the New Age. While science is admired and incorporated into methodologies, it is also seen as inadequate to deal with entities of the subtle world.

Gained through learning - the foundations for a mode of inquiry and a method to know the material world were laid long ago. The study of that method is inextricably linked to people's work on their spiritual selves and the enlightenment of their moral selves. There is even the possibility that it will become to a certain degree the dominant method in the future. I have in mind not so much magic or occultism, which have been discredited by a number of misunderstandings, but rather the concept of spiritual work. Various systems and schools of that type can be found in all religions with long spiritual traditions. Having in the course of centuries developed practical techniques for bringing the will to bear on the human organism and on external matter, and guiding a person to that level only after protracted moral preparation and manifold tests, they have elevated, and elevate now, hundreds, perhaps thousands, to what is in layman's terms called miracle working. That arduous method, which has aroused the intense hatred of modern-day philistines, is distinguished by one principle foreign to science: work on and transformation of one's own being, as a result of which the physical and ether coatings of one's self become more pliable, elastic, and obedient to one's will than is normally possible. That path leads to such allegedly legendary phenomena as passing bodily through three-dimensional objects, levitation, walking on water, teleportation, the healing of incurable diseases and of blindness and—that highest and rarest attainment—the resurrection of the dead (*ibid.*).

Within Andreev's world view the individual is valued not only for the innate abilities within, but as social beings with basic human rights. In his world view, social justice and individual liberty are not mutually exclusive rights:

The Rose of the World will teach the absolute value of individuals and their divine birthrights: the right to be free from the yoke of poverty and the oppression of power-hungry groups, the right to well-being, the right to all forms of free creative work and the public unveiling of the fruits of that work, the right to religious searchings, and the right to beauty. The right of people to a secure existence and to the enjoyment of the benefits of civilization is an inborn right that in itself does not necessitate a renunciation of freedom or spirituality. It would be leading people astray to assert that we are faced with a crucial dilemma here, that in order to attain what are only the natural and self-evident blessings of life we must sacrifice our spiritual and social freedom. (*ibid.*)

With rights and abilities also come responsibilities:

The Rose of the World will also teach the obligations of individuals: to consistently expand the area encompassed by their love and to foster, multiply, and enlighten what is born of their work. Thus, creative work is both a right and an obligation. Even now I am unable to comprehend how it was that that truly divine gift to humans did not receive due notice in any of the older religions, except for certain forms of polytheism, especially that of ancient Greece (*ibid.*).

Social responsibilities lie in the hands of individuals and states. Such a sense of responsibility, according to Andreev, is best fostered through a cosmic view of the world which sees all united as one:

Nations will even have to learn to make sacrifices—not of their blood, not, of course, of the lives of their sons and daughters, but of dollars. For the more affluent nations will be faced with the necessity of sharing their resources with the peoples of the East and South, and disinterestedly at that, without an eye to turning such aid into big business. In short, all those in the leadership of the Rose of the World must be able to feel themselves as, above all, members of the entire cosmos, then as members of humanity, and only then as members of a nation. (*ibid.*)

Andreev's task unites the social and the individual, and proclaims the importance of individual liberties and fundamental social rights:

And the foremost task of our age consists in establishing everywhere, without excluding a single human being, a standard of living worthy of humans, simple day-to-day well-being, and fundamentally decent moral relations between people. The idea that every person without exception should be assured of worthwhile work, rest, leisure, a comfortable old age, decent shelter, access to all democratic freedoms, and satisfaction of their basic material and spiritual needs will begin to be actualized more and more in everyday life. (*ibid.*)

The primary capacity needed to accomplish these goals is love, which as we saw in Chapter Three plays a central role in the philosophy, method and practices of Voskhozhdenie. Here Andreev discusses the importance of love for the future development of his utopian world:

What systematic views on the individual's value, rights, obligations, and growth will help to create a new psychological climate and hasten the dawn of the golden age? The absolute value of individuals lies in the fact that they share with God an innate capacity for creative work and love. The relative value of individuals depends on the level they have reached in their spiritual ascent, on the sum of efforts—both their own and Providence's—spent on the attainment of that level, and on the degree to which they manifest in their lives those gifts for divine creative work and love.... In any case, creative work, like love, is not an exclusive gift bestowed on only a chosen few. A few now possess sanctity and moral vision, heroism and wisdom, genius and talent. But all that is merely activation of the potential dormant within every soul. A sea of love, an inexhaustible wellspring of creativity, bubbles behind the consciousness of each one of us (*ibid.*)

And who holds the key to this vital emotional ability? Women. And men should learn to cultivate this feminine attribute within them:

To this day there are cries that women as well as men should be manly. If by manliness we mean courage and determination in the face of life's struggle, then one would of course have to agree. But if by womanliness we do not mean a mode of manners and

behavior, not affectation and sentimentality, but rather a mixture of emotional warmth, inner delicacy, tenderness, and the ability to sacrifice oneself daily for those one loves, then men as well as women should be womanly. How long must humanity wait for the dawn of an age when a false understanding of what it is to be a man does not transform men into savage conquerors, into thugs flaunting their own crudity, into beings part peacock and part tiger? How long until men are no longer brought up to be ashamed of their own deep-down tenderness, which they themselves trample on and suppress? It will be difficult to surmount that age-old complex of conventions, preconceptions, emotional disfigurement, and atavistic instincts, but surmounted it must be. At all costs. (*ibid.*)

Yet while it is vital, that men develop their “womanly” sides, Andreev envisions the future savior in the form of a female – a female with a perfect balance between what he sees as the positive masculine traits and positive feminine traits. Andreev explains in his glossary that Zventa-Sventana is Eternal Femininity⁶⁴:

The approximate meaning of the name "Zventa-Sventana" is "The Brightest of the Bright and the Holiest of the Holy." The name has a Slavic root, since the zatomis⁶⁵ where her birth will take place is connected with peoples predominantly Slavic in origin) birth in one of the zatomis will be mirrored not only by the Rose of the World. Feminine power and its role in contemporary life is increasing everywhere. It is that circumstance above all that is giving rise to worldwide peace movements, an abhorrence of bloodshed, disillusion over coercive methods of change, an increase in women's role in society proper, an ever-growing tenderness and concern for children, and a burning hunger for beauty and love. We are entering an age when the female soul will become ever purer and broader, when an ever greater number of women will become profound inspirers, sensitive mothers, wise counselors and far-sighted leaders. It will be an age when the

⁶⁴ The notion that the future era will be guided by feminine qualities and energy is not original to Andreev. Russian philosophy has long revered the Devine Sophia, the Eternal Feminine. We see echoes of this in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* in the prostitute Sophia in whose presence Raskolnikov finds redemption and the resolve to confess his sins. Later the Rerikhs proclaimed the coming era the Epoch of the Woman.

⁶⁵ Zatomis is defined in Andreev's glossary as the highest planes of human meta-cultures.

feminine in humanity will manifest itself with unprecedented strength, striking a perfect balance with masculine impulses. See, you who have eyes (*ibid.*).

While the language of the main section of Andreev's work is particularly obscure and his plan is for a utopia far in the future, we see in it a very earthly concern for humanity. Many contemporary practitioners in Russia have adopted his ideas and adapted his methods for practical every day use in the immediate world. Practitioners like Sveta and David have in a sense "opened" his esoteric vision to the contemporary world and transformed it into a practical form for today while maintaining the same spirit and focus on: the blending of religions, ethical cultivation, and transformation of the self and society. As we shall see in more detail later in the chapter, the members of Voskhozhdenie have also taken up his call for global transformation and are working towards a similar vision on a smaller scale with hopes of accomplishing change today – with a central role for Russia. It is a vision that imagines a society based on individual freedom and responsibility for oneself – tempered by a non-materialistic view that values social justice and holds society accountable as well.

Cultural Ethics

Cosmic Laws of the Subtle World

The tasks set forward by Andreev and promoted by contemporary New Age practitioners in Russia are at once grandiose and mundane, grappling with family squabbles and Cosmic transformation in one fell swoop. How does one begin such a journey? It helps to start with a basic understanding of the subtle structure of the world and the laws that guide its movement. The members of

Voskhozhdenie generally follow the cosmological schematics of the early Theosophists. Several key members, including David and Sveta, read Theosophical works during the Soviet period while participating in underground occult study groups. While Theosophy has influenced New Age practices around the world, its influence has been particularly strong in Russia. Founded in New York City in 1875, Theosophy was started by Helena Blavatskaya, a Russian medium. Perhaps due to this Russian connection as well as the theosophical roots in Russian thought, discussed below, the Society held sway over the Russian cultural scene of the time and has served as a continuing source of inspiration for those interested in occult issues in Russia, particularly women.

The Theosophical Society aimed at uniting religion, science and philosophy in the search for divine wisdom and truth. Interest in it quickly spread, and Theosophical Lodges soon opened in India, Europe and across the United States. Due to political restrictions a Theosophical Lodge did not officially open in Russia until 1908, but informal Theosophical circles met regularly starting in the 1890s, a period of intense creative innovation in Russia known as the Silver Age. The leading intellectuals and artists of the day were familiar with Theosophical texts, which were available in French, German, and English editions as well as in Russian *samizdat* format. Such prominent cultural figures as Andrei Belyi, Alexander Scriabin, Vassily Kandinsky, and Nikolai Rerikh were actively involved in Theosophical circles and incorporated Theosophical ideas into their works (Carlson 2000: 143).⁶⁶ By 1910 the Theosophical Society in Russia had an estimated 1000 members, most of whom

⁶⁶ Scriabin was a good friend of the adoptive family of Daniil Andreev (Epstein 1997).

were women. In addition to their religious and philosophical explorations, Theosophical groups around the world were active in women's rights movements and social causes (*ibid.*:141).

The notion of theosophy, or wisdom of god, has a long history in Russia. James Billington regards the gnostic writings of Jacob Boehme, who valued the wisdom of god above the love of wisdom (philosophy), as “the most important single influence on Russian philosophy...” (Billington 1970: 310). Boehme envisioned God as a transcendent and omnipresent force which created humanity out of his own substance. Our emotions and instincts all are expressions of our desire to return to our original state of union with God. This longing for return is an expression of God's own desire to reunite with Sophia, “the auspicious eternal virgin of Divine Wisdom” (Billington 1970: 311). Berdiaev, one of Russia's great philosophers, is quoted as declaring that “for the religion of soul the fundamental category is motherhood” (Epstein 1997: 332). Worship of Sophia is a common link between many Russian writers, philosophers and religious thinkers and today is an integral part of many spiritual health circles in Russia.

Becoming one with god or the universe, according to New Age thought, requires living in conformity with the Cosmic Laws. The English Theosophist Charles Leadbeater set forth several key Cosmic Laws in his *Textbook of Theosophy*, which was originally published in 1912, but remains popular in New Age circles today. Influenced by evolutionary notions of his time, which ranked and classified societies and races into strict hierarchies, this work describes the evolutionary workings of the universe and the spiritual “constitution” and

evolution of human beings. Some of these evolutionary notions can still be detected in the beliefs and practices of New Age practitioners in Russia today. Leadbeater summarizes the three absolute truths as follows: 1) “The soul of man is immortal, and its future is the future of a thing whose growth and splendor has no limit.” 2) “The principle which gives life dwells in us and without us, is undying and eternally beneficent, is not heard or seen or smelt, but is perceived by the man who desires perception.” 3) “Each man is his own absolute lawgiver; the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself; the decreer of his life, his reward, his punishment” (Leadbeater 1946: 8). Inherent in these truths are what are known as the two great laws in Theosophy: the law of evolution (reincarnation until we reach our highest potential) and the law of karma, or cause and effect. These two laws also form the foundation for the beliefs of Voskhozhdenie.

Reincarnation

As we saw in Chapter Three, at my first holodynamics training course, Dima explained that reincarnation is one of the four sources of immature thought forms, or holodynes, which are the building blocks of holodynamics. In their first book, Sveta and David discuss extensively the importance of reincarnation. They explain that the theory of reincarnation supports Jung’s notion of archetypes and the collective unconscious. It is this repetition of lives that allows certain disparate and undefined thoughts and images to develop into archetypes. When repeated over time in a particular geographical area, archetypes characteristic of that particular culture or society can form. These archetypes in turn form part of the egregore of that particular culture. Here Valentina, a university professor,

touches on this point as she explains why she felt she needed to be baptized in the Orthodox Church. Note the importance she places on collective identity:

I think that for me I need to be baptized in Orthodoxy for example. I shouldn't be a Buddhist or Krishna because Russia is Orthodox. All of her roots are Orthodox. Her whole egregore is Orthodox. And when you go into a church it's a current that comes from everyone and this strengthens everything. If you'll be a Buddhist by yourself or in a group of three, it's not here. It's there. It is in Taiwan, China and other countries. Vietnam, Laos. If I lived there I would be a Buddhist.

According to Voskhozhdenie, reincarnation is what allows spiritual development to take place. The lessons a human must learn are too many for one human life span, and the human spirit filled with too many earthly fears. In their first book, Sveta and David write, "The authors view the theory of reincarnation as useful because it allows one to overcome the fear of death and fills one's heart with inspiration in the face of future tasks and offers hope that in the next life one will accomplish the things one was unable to do in this" (Prival'skaya 2001a: 109). Note again the practical air – belief in reincarnation is recommended because it is useful not because it is the absolute truth. We should not despair or feel inadequate at not reaching enlightenment the first time around because, as Theosophy teaches us, those who have reached the level of guru or mahatma have lived multiple lives on earth:

A MAHATMA is a personage, who, by special training and education, has evolved those higher faculties and has attained that spiritual knowledge, which ordinary humanity will acquire after passing through numberless series of reincarnations during the process of cosmic evolution, provided, of course, that they do not go, in the meanwhile, against the purposes of Nature and thus bring on their own annihilation. This process of the self-evolution of the MAHATMA extends over a number of "incarnations," although, comparatively speaking, they are very

few (Blavatsky 1884).

Often referred to as “ascended masters” because they had begun their path here on earth, the mahatmas form what Blavatsky called the Great White Brotherhood⁶⁷ and reside in a place above the Himalayas known as the Shambala. She asserts that *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* are collections of secret wisdom revealed to her by such mahatmas, the most predominant of which were El Morya⁶⁸ and St. Germaine, who also play important roles in Voskhozhdenie. As you may recall, their portraits hang on the walls of Sveta and David’s apartment and are placed in the front room of Voskhozhdenie’s Wednesday meetings to help with the meditation and holodynamics work. And while Sveta has also added new teachers to her repertoire, she told me that since she started studying Hatha yoga in 1988, she carries a mental image of El Morya with her wherever she goes. These mahatmas and teachers offer guidance and inspiration for those climbing the spiritual ladder.

According to Theosophical traditions, the mahatmas had withheld their secret knowledge from humanity until they deemed humans highly enough evolved to understand and make proper use of it. By the second half of the 19th century humanity apparently was ready, and the knowledge was revealed to Madam Blavatsky. This secret knowledge included the subtle structure of the

⁶⁷ Blavatsky’s name for the ascended masters she worked with was the inspiration for the infamous Ukrainian cult “White Brotherhood”. The use of the name in such scandalous circumstances has created tension for contemporary believers of the Great White Brotherhood who have no connection with the former cult. The notion of ascended masters is also inspiration for the main group I worked with in Russia – Voskhozhdenie, or Ascension.

⁶⁸ In the 1920s and 1930s El Morya is also believed to have channeled to Russian mystics Nikolai and Elena Rerikh the beliefs set forth in their organization Agni Yoga Society – a “living ethic” and synthesis of religion. As noted, Nekrasov, author of a book on egregores, wrote of his experiences speaking with El Morya through a channeler (Nekrasov 2002).

universe, the corresponding subtle structure of the human body, and such Cosmic Laws as reincarnation.

According to members of Voskhozhdenie, reincarnation also helps explain the existence of seemingly unjust problems and illnesses or causeless issues. For example, take a child born with a disability. The child has not lived long enough to create bad Karma in this life. But perhaps it is dealing with a lesson from a past life. Also, two people who feel an immediate attraction or aversion to one another may have met before in a previous life. The method “relive” in holodynamics allows a person to reach back into their past life to find the root of problems in their present life. The person can then not only learn from this past lesson or mistake, but can transform the past so that it no longer hinders him or her in the present. Here Zhenya discusses how these issues come to the fore through particular technique of holodynamics known as “relive”:

“Relive” is done when a certain pain appears, let’s say in your foot. We look to see what kind of image is there and if it’s made out of a certain material, metal or something then it means that you need to look into your past. Which past is known to your nastavniki (spiritual guides) and the thing itself that is in your foot, let’s say a metal ball. So you look into where it came from. It’s not “the truth” because a person also has access to the subconscious so I can’t say 100 percent that I was Ivan the Terrible, but when I go back to that time I feel like I am Ivan the Terrible. In general for such things people are put into the psych ward. But here it helps because while I was there and felt that I was Ivan the Terrible I transformed some sort of aggression that was part of him. What’s important is that I worked through that on myself. And it’s not important whether I was Ivan the Terrible or not. But Jung believes that if I wasn’t Ivan the Terrible, but went back to that time to work on certain things such as cruelty or tyranny then it means that perhaps I had actually participated in that in some way. That is, it confirms the theory of multiple lives. I believe that and our teachers also fully agree with that. I don’t think there’s any doubt about that because there is a thing known as karmic

recognition. That when say I see a person and I for some reason feel aggression towards them. I feel that less now of course. We work on that in a process because it's not normal to feel aggression towards another person. And so you work on that. There's also good karma, when I see a person and I know that I know that person from somewhere, but it turns out that we haven't met anywhere in this life. It just couldn't have happened. But I love the person like she's family, like a mother. For example, Sveta. I know that she's a relative. And it turns out that indeed there was something like that. Either we were friends or even relatives. We tracked some sort of karmic connection.

Zhenya's discussion illustrates how the reincarnation model aids in psychological work such as holodynamics which works with archetypes and images, helping to identify negative emotions within the subconscious. Although a person is metaphorically reliving past lives, it is the archetypes and the meanings they hold within the subconscious that are more important than the veracity of the actual past-life itself. According to David and Sveta, "The reincarnation model is useful because it helps one work with piled up archetypes in the subconscious. A carpenter who sees himself as a king during meditation or in a holodynamics process should understand that from the point of view of a psychologist this vision might indicate a repressed striving for grandeur, that is the image of a ruler is just the archetype of the archetype of power, which by the way is a very widespread holodyne" (Prival'skaya 2001a: 55).

The Law of Karma

We are Responsible for our Own Lives

Karmic laws are a key part of Voskhozhdenie's teachings. In their book *How to Live in Happiness*, David and Sveta differentiate five such laws and call them laws of ethics because they provide methods for solving problems and

transforming conditions and they teach the art of living. These laws make up the core of their holodynamics methodology: 1) The law of projection (Jung's notion of shadow). When we feel dissatisfaction with someone else it is a reflection of something we are dissatisfied within ourselves. According to Sveta and David all the other laws are a consequence of this law. 2) The law of the boomerang – if you are aggressive towards someone or have bad thoughts about them and they have similar aggression within themselves then this aggression will resonate, grow, and return to you with even greater force. 3) Third law of Newton – the strength of an action is equal to the strength of its counter-reaction. 4) The law of reflection – if the objects of our thoughts or emotions do not contain within themselves those same thoughts or emotions then our emanations will reflect off of those persons and return to us in multiplied form. This is true of both negative and positive sentiments. David and Sveta explain that this is the law of Karma, or cause and effect. 5) The law of interdependence – “When I am dissatisfied with the behavior or particularity of someone else, I make him dependent on me since I want him to behave in such and such a manner. I make him my slave but at the same time I also become his slave because my state is dependent on his behavior” (Prival'skaya 2001a: 46-51).

The main conclusion Sveta and David want us to take from these laws is that we are each responsible for our own lives, for our own problems and for our own fates. They reiterate this point often in their daily lives as well as in their books. In fact, to assure that no one misses this point, on the very first page of their very first book they write in all capital letters: A PERSON IS 100

PERCENT RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS LIFE. In case the reader has forgotten this point by the middle of the book, they restate it, again in all caps, after their discussion of the five karmic laws of resonance:

So, we have become acquainted with different sides of life in happiness and with a few methods for identifying the causes that could be preventing such a life. But all of these methods are based on the assumption that the person using them becomes conscious of the presence of these causes within himself. That is, when answering the question “who is guilty”, the person will clearly and precisely (now, knowing the Cosmic Law and four of its consequences, we speak about this not shyly but with confidence!): I MYSELF. A PERSON IS 100 PERCENT RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS PROBLEMS. This is the first fundamental position of holodynamics. (*ibid.*: 22.)

The Subtle World

“Well, you at least understand that we each have seven bodies, right?” (Maria, holodynamics practitioner)

Cosmic laws are understood to be designed by a creative force, and there is believed to be a mutually influential interaction between the energy forces of humans on earth and the energy forces of the universe or creator, and that these interactions are facilitated and carried out by a hierarchical system of unseen essences known as subtle planes and subtle bodies, which meet at energy channels in the human body known as chakras. As we have seen above, egregores form an integral part of the contemporary conceptualization of the subtle world, but this concept was not part of the Theosophical world view.

According to Sveta and David, one of the most important aspects of the structure of the universe is the notion of unity, or the hermetic principle “as above, so below.” This is translated to mean that the structure of earth and humanity is the same as that of the heavens or Universe. Both are made up of subtle energy and both consist of a hierarchy of seven types of energy, each with

its own task and frequency level. Following the teachings of Theosophy, Sveta and David refer to these energies as subtle planes and subtle bodies. Andreev and Podvodnyi developed a more complex view that included subtle figures, but Sveta and David quote Theosophical sources in their own definitions. According to these sources there are seven subtle planes at the level of the universe, and each human being has seven bodies, six of which are subtle and the seventh being the physical body we all can see. According to Sveta and David, this seven-fold structure of the human being dates back to the ancient Greek thinker Plotinus (*ibid.*: 18).

Each body plays a specific role in a person's life and can potentially connect the person with the corresponding subtle plane in the universe. They are hierarchically arranged from the lowest, densest energy to the highest most subtle energy: physical, ethereal, astral, mental, love, reason and will. The top three bodies are believed to be immortal and represent a person's soul while the bottom four are mortal. According to Sveta and David, the development of a person is equal to the development of their subtle bodies, and a person's life is largely determined by which bodies are more developed (*ibid.*: 19).

Each human subtle body has a corresponding subtle plane with which it interconnects. The top two planes of the universe, the divine world and the monadic⁶⁹ world, are said to be not perceptible to humans at this stage of our evolution, and little is known about them. The spiritual (or atmic) plane comes

⁶⁹ According to the Glossary in *The Key to Theosophy*, a monad "is the Unity, the ONE; but in occultism it often means the unified duad, Atma-Buddhi, -- or that immortal part of man which incarnating in the lower kingdoms and gradually progressing through them to Man, finds thence way to the final goal – Nirvana" (Blavatsky 1889).

next and is responsible for the highest levels of human spirituality. The intuitional (sometimes called buddhic) plane is the source of our highest intuitions, the mental plane is the building block of the mind, and the astral plane is the source of higher human emotions. Most humans, however, remain fully aware only of the seventh plane, the physical, which is the world we perceive around us with our five senses (Leadbeater 1946: 23).

Together the three higher bodies constitute what Theosophists call the ego and they represent the Absolute, the Spiritual Soul, and the Higher Mind. The four lower bodies make up the personality. This is what people unschooled in the Cosmic laws consider the ego or the self. These four lower bodies, according to Theosophy, are simply mortal vehicles for the immortal and spiritually elevated ego. The mental body is the vehicle of concrete and baser thoughts. It is divided into many compartments that correspond with the physical brain, but because it is so poorly developed in most people, many of the compartments are dormant. This explains, for example, why certain people seem to have a brain for math while others are more artistically inclined (*ibid.*: 48). The type of matter and shape of the mental body are determined by the type of thoughts a person produces. Positive thoughts produce subtler matter and tend to float upwards, while baser thoughts are denser and float downwards, creating the pear-shaped mental body characteristic of the average human (*ibid.*: 49).

The astral body is the vehicle for passions, emotions and selfish thought. Its color scheme is significantly darker because the lower, less positive emotions tend to be represented here. The colors that predominate in the astral body

indicate the general mood or character of the person. This is because thoughts and feelings repeated over time will leave a permanent impression in the astral body (*ibid.*: 56).

The ethereal body is sometimes called the body double because it replicates the shape of the physical body exactly. It is part of the physical body but built out of much finer matter that vibrates at a speed most human eyes are unable to perceive. The ethereal body plays an important role because it is the vehicle for the vital energy (sometimes called prana or chi) that keeps the body alive. According to Leadbeater, the ethereal body is also the entrance way to the seven main chakras (*ibid.*: 58-59).

While awake on earth most humans are only aware of the physical body. Although this body is essentially a disposable garment, it too is important in the overall evolution of the monad because it allows the ego to learn new lessons through experiences that are only possible with a physical body (*ibid.*: 43). In Chapter Six, Sonya, a member of Voskhozhdenie, explains more fully the importance of this stage of learning for the soul. Furthermore, one of the weaknesses of the physical body, fatigue, allows developed humans a glimpse of the subtle bodies that surround the body. According to Leadbeater, most people can travel into the astral body when sleeping. While the “primitive savage” can only travel a few miles, an “educated man” can generally travel wherever he wills, although even most educated people have little recollection of their travels upon waking. Humans do, however, have the potential ability to maintain full conscious awareness of the astral plane even in waking life (*ibid.*: 61-62). Again,

the evolutionary and intellectual biases show through in the work of the Theosophists, and continue to color the ideas found in the New Age in Russia today.

Happiness is a State of Mind

While most are unconscious of their subtle bodies and their egregores and thus live simple lives as automatons, if properly schooled, the mind can be trained to work miracles, and the secrets hidden in the subconscious and subtle world can be revealed and controlled. One of the key methods Theosophy promotes for such spiritual evolution is the development and control of thought-forms. A thought-form corresponds with Voskhozhdenie's notion of a holodyne, which contains the root of a person's problems, but which also can help one overcome them through its transformation. They also are the seeds of future egregores. Interest in thought-forms was widely promoted with the publication in 1901 of a small book by Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater called *Thought-Forms*. Its elaborate and colorful illustrations of thoughts and sound created quite a stir in Russia, particularly amongst Silver Age artists and writers (Carlson 1997). The thought-forms discussed and depicted in this and later Theosophical works are a byproduct of the mental and astral bodies. According to Theosophical teachings, thought-forms play a significant role in human development, interrelationships, psychology, and ultimate evolution. Despite their crucial role in our lives, like egregores and subtle bodies, most people are unconscious of thought-forms and, therefore, unable to control them. This ignorance can lead to detrimental health and negative relations within this life and can create negative karma for our next

incarnation. The proper understanding and use of thought-forms is believed to significantly improve a person's life. We are responsible for creating our own thought-forms, and with proper training we can learn how to use thought-forms to change our attitudes toward life and ultimately to take control of our own destinies. These ideas are fundamental to Voskhozhdenie's notion of resonance, which David explained during that first demonstration at Put' k Sebe:

All illnesses are from nerves. Where are nerves from? From worries, from thoughts and feelings. From energy and resonance. Energy comes to us and comes out of us. How can we use energy to solve our problems? Let's turn to dissatisfaction. When we feel dissatisfaction, that feeling dissatisfaction is part of that thing that dissatisfies us inside of us. Dissatisfaction with boorishness is dissatisfaction with part of the boorishness in us.

Thought-forms are central to Sveta and David's method for living in joy. The section of their book called "How to begin your 'ascension' into happiness?" they start with a quote from *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*: "Your whole body, from wingtip to wingtip," Jonathan would say at other times, "is nothing more but your thought itself, in a form you can see. Break the chains of your thought and you break the chains of your body, too..." (Bach 2001: 116). The reference to Richard Bach is significant because of his focus on learning and his constant encouragement to reach for what seems impossible to the conventional mind. He emphasizes the need to understand and practice in order to move forward, and he inspires us never to be held back by the ignorance of the flock.

In this section of their book Sveta and David explain that people, as the created thoughts of the Universe, are themselves thought forms. And as we were made in the image of the Creator, we too have the power to create and "give

birth” to our own thought forms. Some of these forms may help us and others may get in the way. But they are our own creation. We can create negative thoughts of helplessness and aggression and these will then make us helpless and aggressive. Or we can choose positive thoughts that will help us break through the barriers of the physical world. It is a very pragmatic approach. At one of the Wednesday meetings of Voskhozhdenie, David reiterated this point to a young man who had come to the center for the first time. After the lecture people broke off into smaller groups to practice holodynamics on each other and David did a small process with the newcomer and explained some of the principles of Voskhozhdenie.

David: To look for truth in such things, astral sphere, mental, etc. is not possible. No one can know, but you can create models and see which ones work. Your physical body is not isolated from the physical world. Your astral body isn't isolated. You are responsible for how you feel and how your condition influences others. Your world view is an instrument. It's not a matter of truth or not. At times one view is more useful, and at others another is. For example, if I did something to mess things up, then I tell myself there's no free will. Things had to be that way, and I feel calm. But if I have to get up early, if I tell myself, there's no will I'll just sleep in, so I tell myself that I have free will and make myself get up. I'm not tied down by strict principles. I have a sense of freedom.

David starts the holodynamics process:

Relax. Feel how the energy goes up through you, bringing warmth to your whole body, bringing love and calm and in that state pick a place where you feel calm, where you'd like to be.

Newcomer: I see a wooden chair, lamp and books.

David: Let's invite there an image that embodies all the best in you or who you would like to be like, who could answer all your questions and help you - your full potential, an image that inspires you.

Newcomer: I see Krishna.

David: What would you like to work on?

Newcomer: I'm on the edge of illness.

David: How do you feel about that?

Newcomer: Tension.

David: How does that feel, what does it look like?

Newcomer: Dark.

David: Let's look at that dark thing. What does it feel? What does it want?

Newcomer: It wants warmth.

David: What else does it want?

Newcomer: It wants to live off of me.

David: What does it feel when eating your energy.

Newcomer: Warm.

David: Emotionally how does it feel?

Newcomer: Calm, reliable, passionate.

David: Let's ask Krishna to fill this black thing with warmth, calm, confidence in the future. Ask Krishna to fill it with love.

Newcomer: There's a yellow color. Its color changes. It's like little pieces.

David: Does it feel warmth in this new color? Imagine that you are this image. What would you feel? Let's ask Krishna when these pieces first speak in your life? Say what kind of images appear.

The session ended early because the man was having trouble coming up with images and became flustered, but we see here how David was trying to help him reach into his subconscious for images. When he asks Krishna when the image first appeared in the man's life, he is trying to find when the image that is

causing his current illness first developed. Eventually, with a complete process a person would hope to identify the image and find its positive intention in order to be able to transform it into a positive influence. By locating the positive intention and the higher potential within the human psyche, the members of Voskhozhdenie are highlighting the inner spiritual freedom. The seeds of spiritual freedom, freedom of thought and control over thought forms are all within.

Thought forms are physical entities that intermingle with a person's subtle bodies. According to Theosophy, whenever a person has a concrete thought, an image of that thought forms in the matter of the mental body. The image will have a specific color and vibration rate that is determined by the quality of the thought and is considered a living entity. The thought-form, however, can be controlled by a person with a strong will (Besant and Leadbeater 1969: 8). The image generally floats in front of the person's face for the duration of the thought (Leadbeater 1946: 50). If the thought does not concern the thinker personally and is not directed towards someone else then it will simply hang in the air and eventually dissipate unless it is accidentally picked up by another person passing through. If the thought is of a personal nature then the thought-form will hover around the thinker even when the thinker has turned to other thoughts. The thought-form is simply biding its time and waiting for an opportunity to reenter the thinker's mind. This is easiest to accomplish when the thinker is resting and not preoccupied with other thoughts or activities whose vibrations are strong (Besant and Leadbeater 1969: 16).

“We don’t have to live like Robots”

Conceptualizing the world in terms of cosmic laws and subtle worlds creates a shift in understanding that opens the way for a whole series of new possibilities and an alternate way of viewing the world and positioning oneself within the universe. The interconnection envisioned between people and the universe sets forth a certain sense of personal responsibility in the creation of one’s own destiny, and the access to universal energy means that limitless opportunities await those who come to understand and control this connection.

Sveta explains:

When you start to go along the spiritual path, all of that predetermination about the soul goes away. You already are responsible for your fate in many ways. If you want to continue being a robot or zombie, then be that, but I think that most people will make a different choice and will want to become conscious. And that’s more dangerous because you already begin to see when something isn’t right – you’re given a signal, in the form of an illness or something else. And you are able to somehow control or have influence on your fate. And despite all of the prophecies that often turn out to be true - catastrophes, natural disasters, human victimization from technology – despite all of that and the huge number of wars, which is the most horrific, we see that human thoughts have a strong influence over what is happening. There is proof, but of course it’s indirect. You could say that it’s purely chance or coincidence, but there are many coincidences then.

Human thoughts have consequences. Our ideas and lives can influence others – even those far away – and therefore, it is of utmost importance that we learn to cultivate an elevated spiritual ethic. Part of this process is learning to understand the signals given by the Universe. Anya, who discusses her spiritual journey more fully in chapter five, was driven by a strong desire to control her circumstances and believed that after years of study she was coming closer to this

goal: “Well, I’m a witch. What’s wrong with that? The thing is that those people who can very subtly feel the world of nature and the laws of space, their lives and their bodies start to function differently.”

At another point Anya discusses the workings of folk medicine, and attributes the power of such healers to their understanding of the cosmic laws:

It’s like a znakhr⁷⁰. It’s a non-traditional purely Russian medicine, who people trust, who are in every culture. In principle, knowledge of the laws of nature, you can discuss what spiritual life is, it’s how a person sees the world, how he understands the world, how he relates to the world. How much he is open to the world? How much does he understand the laws of the cosmos, truth, god, how much he understands and believes in people, in god in people.

Many of the methodologies offered by Voskhozhdenie and similar groups help people attain a heightened level of consciousness so that they can better control their own lives. But how does one actually go about living a more conscious life? As we saw in Chapter Three, one way of going about this is through a holodynamics process. Understanding the cause of one’s problems or behavior is often the first step towards gaining such control. Holodynamics helps uncover such hidden causes. Below, Sveta discusses how she first came upon this method and discovered how it could not only help identify the karmic causes of current problems but could also help transform the past in order to change one’s current fate:

And so in 1992 we had the first seminar on holodynamics and we really liked that method and we understood that with its help it was possible to really transform one’s immature emotions – resentment, fear, aggression, etc. – and really it’s possible to in reality, without manipulation of oneself or others, to overcome the most difficult problems and with health and inter-relationships, etc. The first seminar was in May and in August Woolf came and he

⁷⁰ Traditional healer.

led the second level. We learned how to see the deep causes of our illnesses, going back to our childhood or the prenatal period and birth process, and the deep causes that come from ancestors who we had never seen or heard of. But during these processes people receive certain information and see different images that help them to reach those ancestors. And there are of course karmic reasons. This is all a lot easier to see and feel and transform through holodynamics.

Living consciously, exploring one's inner depths and the root causes of behavior allows one to step out of the habitualization that keeps people trapped in the cycle of negative karma. Whether these habits were formed in this life, echoing the patterns of one's parents, or in past lives, conscious self-study can help move one beyond these trappings and allow positive transformation and growth to take place. This idea was echoed during a course I attended at the Norbekov Institute. This institute is not directly connected with Voskhozhdenie, but I was brought there by members of the Center, and many members have taken courses there. Here Alexei, a teacher at the Institute, explains how Norbekov's method helped him develop his intuition and take control over his own life:

Take for example the image of a cone – each person is in one. Ninety percent of children live their lives like their parents. The ten percent left over are the very few who get out. A person's cone pulls them towards a particular future. Through various methods a person can move from one cone to another. Norbekov's method is one way to do this. How do we go about it here? In the health course we do it through images. Why do we create images? It sends us in that direction. Norbekov's system creates the possibility for colossal changes. Changes start, different people appear in your life, different books appear. I got bored of my job and for six months was without a job. I didn't know what to do. I was a university teacher. I realized I was going to work in the system as a trainer working with people. Three days later I got a notice about a course for opening up the third eye. I didn't find my place there. Then I went to the Norbekov course in St. Petersburg. The most important thing that I found at Norbekov's course was how to make it happen more often than you know for sure

something is going to happen and to improve the quality of such feeling and the results. You learn how to live consciously. Before you do something present it to yourself first. There is constant analysis. Imagine your day when you get up. Write it down. Imagine in your mind how you complete everything successfully. It's about building intuition. Women have intuition developed 100%. Men only have 20 percent of intuition. All great things are done with intuition. So, to say that women don't have brains is a complement. Homework – work with the cards. Write down the results. Pay attention to the feeling, visuals, write down things you've foreseen.

We see here the importance of simply taking the time to really reflect on one's life and goals. In this course we were asked to write daily journals where we set goals for ourselves – daily goals as well as goals projected far into the future and practical goals as well as goals that seemed at the time unfathomable. Again also we hear reiterated the special intuitive powers allegedly held by women.

The subtle bodies and subtle planes that we have learned about in this chapter connect with one another through another subtle entity we have already mentioned, chakras. Chakras are another avenue members of Voskhozhdenie and similar groups use for controlling subtle energy and gaining a better understanding of their lives, particularly their evolutionary level. Chakras are considered one of the primary ways subtle energy moves through the body and are important elements in the development of inner abilities and raising one's spiritual level. At Voskhozhdenie the word chakra is a staple of every day conversations and was even mentioned at the demonstration where I first met

Sveta and David, who noted that *perestroika* brought about significant changes in Russia, moving the country from the second to the third chakra.⁷¹

The word chakra is from the Sanskrit (*cakra*) and is translated variously as “wheel,” “spinning wheel” and “circle.” According to some interpretations it is symbolic of the sun, or the wheel of time. Chakra teachings originated within early Hindu esoteric traditions, but have been greatly transformed since reaching the West in the early 20th century. Most modern works describe chakras as energy vortices, or receptors and transmitters of energy. These energy wheels are located on various points in or around the body. In essence chakras are the vital organs of human spirit, psyche and consciousness, which are accessed through the physical realm of the body. They are the pathways between the spiritual body and the physical and are therefore considered key to understanding and healing disorders of both a physical and psychological nature. Experts on chakras note the prevalence of such energy centers in a wide range of spiritual and healing traditions, including Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Sufi and Native American. Most often the chakras are compared with the meridians and chi energy of traditional Chinese medicine. Many contemporary Western and Russian alternative healing practitioners work with both chakras and meridians and combine aspects of Taoist, Sufi and yogic traditions in their treatments and exercises.

The roots of the world view and cosmology promoted by Theosophy and contemporary groups such as Voskhozhdenie can be clearly seen in the Hindu

⁷¹ This application of chakra to the spiritual development of countries is not conventional. Traditionally chakras are energy systems within a human body.

tradition that has most influenced the understanding of chakras in New Age circles across the globe. Hindu Tantric tradition, or Shaktism, views the human body as a microcosm of the wider universe, a notion that we have seen is a foundational view of New Age thought. Chakras are an integral part of Shaktism. One of the earliest and most influential books about chakras in the West was John Woodroffe's *The Serpent Power*, published in 1919⁷². This work is a translation of two Bengali Shakti texts⁷³ and is considered the basic reference text for Western developments of chakra theory (Kazlev 1999). Carl Jung based his psychological interpretations of chakras on Woodroffe's work, and most New Age interpretations of chakras retain Woodroffe's basic outline and terminology.⁷⁴

According to Woodroffe, the Shakti texts illuminate the secrets of Tantric and Kundalini yoga,⁷⁵ and chakras play an essential role in this (Woodroffe 1919).⁷⁶ Contemplation on a chakra is said to bring particular qualities or abilities

⁷² See Kazlev (1999).

⁷³ *Sat-Cakra-Nirupana* - "Descriptions of the Six Centres, or Cakras" (16th century) and *Padaka-Pancaka* - "The Fivefold Footstool" (10th century) along with Woodroffe's own commentaries.

⁷⁴ Many New Age and alternative health practitioners, including members of Voskhozhdenie, however, are also influenced by Theosophical interpretations of chakras, particularly as described by C.W. Leadbeater in his 1927 book *Chakras*, which has purportedly sold more copies than any other Theosophical book (Kazlev 1999).

⁷⁵ Kundalini means coiled, and the Goddess is depicted as a sleeping coiled serpent who resides in the lowest chakra, the *Muladhara*.

⁷⁶ The physiology of the chakras is very complex. The Shakti texts describe numerous *nadi*, or subtle channels of energy within the human body, the most important of which are the *Sushumna*, *Ida*, and *Pingala*. The *nadi* are said to contain *prana*, or vital-force, which in the *Ida* is descending and in the *pingala* is ascending. These three channels extend upwards from the first chakra, the *muladhara* - "root support", which according to Woodroffe is located at the perineum and takes the form of a red four-petaled lotus. The channels continue to spiral up through the *Svadhastana*, *Manipura* and *Vishuddha* (pelvic, solar plexus and throat) chakras, and then meet at the sixth chakra, the *Ajna* - "Guru's Command", which is a two-petaled lotus located between the eyebrows. From the *Ajna* chakra the three channels begin to flow separately towards the *Sahasrara* chakra - the 1000 petaled lotus of all colors where Shiva is located. Each chakra is envisioned as a lotus with a determined number of petals and color, and that responds to a particular mantra, yogic and hand position, and is home to distinct qualities or inclinations. For

to the practitioner. These qualities depend on the chakra or group of chakras upon which one meditates. Ultimately, the goal of this work with chakras is to transform lower into higher states of consciousness until one becomes one with Higher Consciousness, and ceases to be reborn (*ibid.*: 18). This is accomplished by awakening the Goddess Kundalini with the help of the yogic positions, mantras and visualizations and encouraging her to move upwards through each chakra (transforming the states or inclinations) until she unites with Shiva in the *Sahasrara*, the crown chakra, at which point the Shakta (practitioner of Shakti Hinduism) becomes one with the Absolute (Woodroffe 1913; Kazlev 1999).

David leads a group at Voskhozhdenie that studies chakras as part of the teachings of the Indian guru Kalki.⁷⁷ In this group they learn particular chants and hand movements to use during meditation to cleanse or activate certain chakras. I attended one of these meetings after a woman at the Center pulled me aside one day and said I needed to work on my lower chakras. David burned incense and played music at the beginning of the lesson, in which he briefly described the Kalki movement. Work with chakras is merely a tool to the main goal of the movement which is enlightenment. The course teaches physical exercises, breathing exercises, mantras, pranayama (hand positions), and the

example, the *Svadhistana* chakra is a six petaled lotus edged in red with a pool of water in its center. Each petal has a separate mantra (bang, bhang, mang, yang, rang, lang) and inclination (credulity, suspicion, disdain, delusion, false knowledge, pitilessness) (Woodroffe 1913).

⁷⁷ According to the Kalki website, “Kalki, or Sri Kalki Bhagavan, the founder of the Golden Age Foundation in India, is considered to be the living Avatar capable of giving enlightenment. Not only to a few individuals, but to the whole mankind. ...According to Kalki, Earth will start entering the Golden Age, the age of enlightenment, in June 2004 during the Venus Transit. This process will come to a conclusion at the next venus transit in 2012. The time in front of us, says Kalki, will be filled with unprecedented changes, challenges and turmoil. It is not much mankind can do about it. But those who have worked on setting all their relationships right will have a much easier ride than others” <http://www.experiencefestival.com/kalki/>

colors that correspond to each chakra. These are all used in the process of cleansing chakras. A side effect, according to David, is that one's health improves, but the main goal of such cleansing is enlightenment.

Members of Voskhozhdenie also speak of chakras in conjunction with Reiki, a Japanese healing art that most of them know. While generally seen as a supplemental method, members will occasionally use it in combination with holodynamics or for simple ailments such as headaches. During the Reiki I course I took in Moscow, my teacher Ira taught us a quick exercise we could do for self-harmonization of the chakras. This consisted of placing hands on the first and seventh chakras, then on second and sixth, then third and fifth and finally ending on the heart. She said we can also put one hand on one chakra and then with the other hand work on each of the remaining chakras separately.

According to the *Teaching of Ascension*, each chakra corresponds to a particular phase of a person's evolutionary development. Each chakra has two sides: light and shadow. For example, if a person is at the lowest chakra, the *muladhara* stage of spiritual development, the main focus of life is on survival and work. The light side of this chakra brings a person work that ensures life and security. But the shadow side could turn a person into a workaholic or alternatively could make a person apathetic and despondent (Prival'skaya 2001 b: 66). If a person has evolved to the next chakra, the *svadhistana* level, then the focus of life becomes prosperity, pleasure and consumption. Those guided by the light side of this chakra see their possibilities in life wide open. They strive for

comfort and seek to fill their lives with beauty. The shadow leads people to become obsessed with sex, money and comfort (*ibid.*: 69).

The shadow side of the chakra is not necessarily a negative, however. It is in essence one of Daniil Andreev and Avessalom Podvodny's "black teachers". When we come across it and feel its effects, it can be a good stimulus for us to change, to transform, and strive for the next stage of development. If it were not for these black teachers, we might not be encouraged to even start upon a spiritual journey or reflect upon our inner lives. If someone is happy living in luxury, they note, why would they possibly want to move on to a new stage of life? It is the shadow qualities that make one question one's happiness with money. Or other obstacles may be placed in our way. We can learn from these difficulties placed in front of us by the black teachers, and they can incite us to strive to advance from one step of the path of "Ascension" to the next (*ibid.*: 74).

The Spiritual Portrait

One method for tuning in to one's spiritual self is the spiritual portrait, which was developed by David and Sveta. All of the cosmic laws and structures come together in this method. Here we see the interaction of subtle planes and chakras, and how an inquiry into their state can help a person discover themselves, live a more conscious life, solve personal issues, and move up the spiritual ladder. Towards the end of my stay in Russia I set up an appointment to have my spiritual portrait done with David, who is the primary designer of the method. First he wrote out a chart on a large piece of paper. Along the left side he wrote the seven subtle bodies. Across the top there are three sections: background; inner I; and outer I. This creates a grid with large boxes to write answers to the questions David poses about a person's life. The answers to the

questions help him negotiate with clients in order to discover the spiritual level of each aspect of their life. This helps a person understand what is happening in his or her life and what needs to be worked on.

During my formal interview with Zhenya, who I met on my first day at the Temple of Peace, she described the spiritual portrait to me and explained how it helped her move forward, improve her life and gain some control over her destiny.

I've gone through the spiritual portrait with David. I had an individual consultation with him. And I went through a seminar. It's a remarkable practice. It gives understanding of a person, that is, an evaluation of the level of spiritual development that a person is at that moment. This practice shows that a person never stands in one place. There are seven bodies. Aside from the physical body there are six subtle bodies. For example, I'm located on the seventh – there's no higher, but according to the law, I will definitely fall now to the level one. And there will be a step backwards. You come back to the ground, but without that you can't live. You can't be on the top all the time. You keep going through a new circle. But just like with holodynamics, when there's a step backwards, you're not at the same state as before – now it's easier. You're conscious of your stresses. You understand why it's that way. And you start to look at the problem from a broader perspective.

The spiritual portrait looks at the spiritual level of each body. A person may have a very developed physical body and very weak mental body or conversely, a person may devote so much time to their higher body that their physical body is neglected. David then offers exercises or diet advice to help build up that body. In essence David does a spiritual questionnaire for each body that determines the chakra level of the body at the given moment.

And the portrait helps you to determine at which point you're located and if you have at the given moment a problem with your health, the portrait tells you what is happening with you at that moment and why it's happening. You see the reason. You see

what sort of consequences there might be. The portrait gives you a view from above on everything that is happening at that very moment in your life. And you can even estimate when the problem will end and how it will turn out. And if there are negative reasons for the problem then you can do holodynamics processes to work out the problem and David gives remarkable advice, or example, about how to overcome depression. He says, well, if you're now located on the seventh chakra – ideals – then what can help you? Dream, usually simply to dream. Dream when you're feeling bad and you'll feel better. That's a good technique. There are others as well. For example, it depends on which chakra you're located at the given moment. If you're showing physical difficulties – then some physical exercises can help you. He tests to find out what chakra you're on. For each body he asks a question. About each body there's a conversation. Ten or fifteen minutes for each body. He brings out the result through psychological questions so that a person knows as precisely as possible what is happening with each subtle body, with each chakra. He starts with the first and then it goes higher and higher up to the seventh. And then he looks. And then for example, in the mental body – you're now at level one, which means you need to think about physical work. If you're on the vishuda – the body of principles – say you're located on the manipura chakra, then you need to organize your principles and discipline them. So that's the kind of practical advice that he could give.

The spiritual portrait is an intensive exploration of one's own psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual state. But the exploration does not end with the session. David offers advice and the person must then return to the world with this new knowledge. Of course, there is always a choice to follow the advice and work on the specific weak areas that are discovered in the process or to remain at their current level. For those immersed in a spiritual health community they are generally moved to keep working and exploring. And for members of Voskhozhdenie this can mean multiple trips to David for spiritual portraits.

Such a portrait takes about three hours. It's serious work, individual. That kind of portrait costs \$10. It's a remarkable

practice. It's unique. You really understand what is happening with you. Whenever I start complaining that this isn't working out and that isn't working out, Sveta always says, go to David and get your spiritual portrait done and you'll understand everything. It's true. It's something accessible. The technique is accessible, and it lets you determine where you are along the path. For example, if I don't know what direction to go, what I should be doing or where I should work, or for example if I didn't have a job, I'd do the spiritual portrait and we also have the seminar "Find your Path". The title speaks for itself – to find yourself, where you should go on the spiritual level, the physical level, in terms of work. There's a special meditation on the place of planning. There it's considered that everything is located in a person's subconscious. From the subconscious we retrieve that which is stored is us, that which god wants from us. If a person combines all of these – spiritual portrait, holodynamics, find your path – then a person will find himself on his path. That is, if he doesn't resist. Sometimes a person never fully realizes that it is that thing in particular that is best for him to do. But that's pretty rare.

Finding one's Destiny

Through self-exploration and methods that help attune oneself to one's body, thoughts, and intuition, New Age practitioners believe they can discover their destiny, or god-given path. By becoming conscious of the many competing subtle forms and working to raise one's own spiritual level, a person can learn to sort through this complicated realm. This understanding comes with training and intense investigation of the unconscious mind. Sveta discusses how a spiritually developed person learns to understand God's intentions:

For example, I had a dream of having my own home in the countryside. Where you could get milk fresh from cows, earth, nature. I wanted to be owner of a house in the countryside. And God didn't give that to me. I used to get really upset about that. I tried to get it with help of potentialization. But then I already knew how to hear the voice of my inner teacher, the voice of my full potential, as we say in holodynamics, and in 1992 I was already told, look into your future and you'll see that there's no place for a home in the country, that your home in the country is called the planet earth. But back then, back in the '70s when I

really wanted it I didn't do any kind of spiritual practices. I just wanted to have my own house in the country. I infected my whole institute of 1500 people with that idea, that dream. And of 1500, 500 bought homes in the country. In just that area, Tverskoi oblasti, where I was looking for some reason. I looked there, but I didn't find what I wanted. But they all bought them. And they're all happy with their homes. But God didn't give me that. Now I understand that I wouldn't even have time to ever spend time there, not to mention actually live there. We are constantly traveling around to seminars - in the Far East, in America, and Germany and to big and small cities all over Russia - so I have very little time for a home in the country. But Vernon Woolf's potentialization method teaches such things. And on that topic, Carl Gustav Jung, my favorite teacher you could say, psychologist, wrote don't force upon your unconsciousness the immature desires of your consciousness. That is our conscious I that is striving for such dreams. Maybe they are good, but the unconsciousness should tell us that. How without the unconsciousness or creator, which we call god - it lies somewhere deep in our unconsciousness - how can he tell us whether we need something or not? With the help of circumstances. If it doesn't work out - then you know. I don't find what I want or I find it but don't have enough money at the moment, at that particular moment. And he doesn't give it. Thank you God, I say, thank you my spiritual teacher, my full potential. I understand the hint. The hint is saying you don't need that home.

Although she did not understand at the time, her spiritual training taught Sveta that her desire for a house in the country had been an immature impulse that did not fit into God's cosmic plan for her. Instead of getting angry at God for not providing what she wanted, this perspective allows her to seek the positive intension within what at first glance seems like a negative. It is this perspective that helps her maintain a positive outlook and continue striving even when faced with seemingly daunting obstacles.

Staying in tune with the signs also allowed her to understand that it was her destiny to become involved with the Temple of Peace. Sveta had long been involved in works that aimed to help others and bring happiness into their lives.

Her involvement with Healthy Family, her psychology work, the Center Voskhozhdenie and holodynamics all entailed efforts to reach out to a broader public. And the weekly meditations at the Center send positive thoughts and vibrations throughout the world. But despite her busy schedule, Sveta began to realize she had yet another task before her. Her years of self-exploration and spiritual training taught her that the voices and sensations she was feeling were pointing her to her true destiny; she needed to create the Temple of Peace:

And finally sometime around 1996 suddenly the idea that I needed to build a Temple of Peace flashed in my mind. I waved the thought away because I didn't understand what sort of thought this was. It was strange and clearly not mine because I'm involved with ordinary things and suddenly it was as if someone told me, a voice, 'you need to build the temple of peace.' And I say, what is the temple of peace? 'You should build a temple of peace', the voice repeated, 'in Russia.' I didn't understand and said what is this? 'a temple of all religions'. In Russia. And again I wave the thought away. Why me, I asked. I already had my teacher and was in contact with him. In difficult moments I called up his image. And I ask, 'Why a temple of peace. I'm a good teacher, a good healer. I don't belong to any religion, thank God. Why should I build a temple of peace?' It's a good idea. I liked it right away, it's just I don't want to do it.' And then after this happens a couple of times, my knees start to ache. I begin to track it with holodynamic methods. The pain wants something. Maybe I did something wrong, maybe I'm going in the wrong direction. And I ask, what did I do? And hear – 'you're not going where you need to go' and I ask where I need to go and hear the answer – you need to build a temple of peace. Again the temple of peace. And I think God, why me. Well, in short, I agree to this task, say that I'll try. And many years go by. It all started very slowly. Six years have gone by. At first at all our seminars I was told that I hadn't dreamed the idea. The heavens told me that I hadn't dreamed it, and that I really needed to do it. How did this happen. For example, suddenly some book would fall into my hands, in which it says that the 21st century will be the century of peace making between religions. That's a signal, right? And then other books appear and I begin to draw up a plan. I see confirmation in other books about my model. The model consists of the notion that

every civilization, every culture has its own mission before humanity.

The coming Age of Aquarius has long been discussed in New Age and alternative spiritual circles around the world. Sveta and David often discuss the ongoing work that is taking place to bring this about. They refer to the collective global work taking place as the Egregore of the Society of Light. Aside from their individual efforts and group meditations, the Temple of Peace is their primary contribution to this transformative Society, which they see as made up of thousands of centers, schools and academies throughout the globe teaching diverse methods, values and beliefs, but united in their respect for diversity and the unity of the world (Prival'skaya 2001b: 210). Sveta and David, along with many within the New Age in Russia, envision a special role for Russia within this spiritual transformation. In fact, Sveta and David have done a spiritual chart of the world that places Russia directly in the spiritual heart – the heart chakra of the world (See Fig. 9).

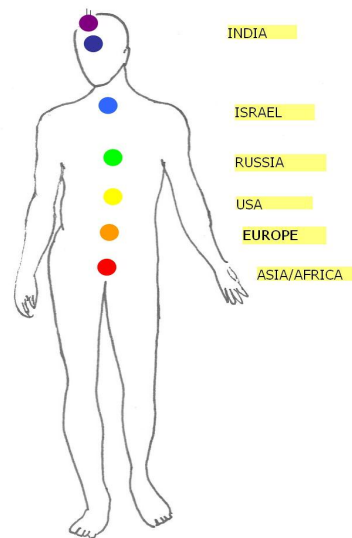


Fig. 9. This is a rendition of Voskhozhdenie’s chart called “the Role of Countries in the Development of Humanity.” With the first chakra (counting from the bottom) signifying the lowest, they list the regions as: 1)Asia and Africa (Red); 2) Western Europe (Orange); 3) USA (Yellow); 4 (heart chakra) Russia (Green); 5) Israel (Royal Blue); 6 and 7 India (Dark Blue and Violet).

Below Sveta explains this idea to me:

And for example, American culture has already played its role. A very good role. It taught people how to live well and taught them how to organize. If we speak about the Hindu model and the system of seven chakras, then the essence, the name of which is humanity, also has seven energy centers. The three lower energy centers were developed by the West – the ability to survive. The settlers came to America with nothing and they simply survived, they taught their country, they taught the whole world. They set an example. Not everyone learned unfortunately, but they gave an example of the fact that it’s possible to live well, and not just well but also happily. The third chakra, which is especially needed now in Russia, is what America knows how to do – organization and order, the ability to express one’s will. Each energy center has pluses and minuses of course. But in any case it set an example. The west is an example of the development of the lower three

chakras. The top three energy centers were developed superbly by the East. The ancient East long ago showed us the path to unity with god, the path of the unification of various sciences and religions, etc. and the path of service. And the essence humanity, the living essence called humanity, remains with only one unopened chakra. This is called *anahata* in Hindi. It is the spiritual heart of humanity. And it is this particular role that stands before Russia. Despite all of its poverty, despite of all the unprincipledness, unfortunately, and many many other shortcomings, there is something in the people who inhabit Russia that allows them to hope, that nourishes the belief that Russia can truly be the anahata of humanity. Of course now people who simply live in the material world, who see what is happening with the political and economic situation in Russia, don't believe this. But I know that it will happen. And I have sources for this optimism.

Her sources of optimism lie in the Cosmic Laws of her world view and the scientific discoveries that have been used to bolster the credibility of these spiritual laws, even if the science itself is not validated within the wider scientific community. Here Sveta discusses how just one person can lift the spiritual level of millions:

It's long been known that all positive sensations, emotions, and thoughts look like high frequency vibrations. All negative, such as base feelings are of low frequency. And if we fill the space around us with these high vibrations, then according to the law of resonance, which directs life in the universe, we call up the same purity in other people. It is what Seraphim Sarovsky⁷⁸ at one time

⁷⁸ In his book *The Rose of the World* Daniil Andreev tells of the significance of Sarafim Sarovsky (Here translated as Sarafim of Sarov) in his own mystical conversion and the subsequent development of his work: "In November of 1933 I chanced to stop by a small church on Vlasevsky Lane. There, an acathistus to St. Serafim of Sarov was in progress. Hardly had I opened the door when a warm wave of choral music descended on me and surged straight to my heart. I was overcome by a state that is very difficult for me to write about, let alone describe without tears. Although I had previously disdained to engage in genuflection—my emotional immaturity having led me to suspect something servile in the custom—an irresistible impulse caused me to kneel. But even that was not enough. And when I prostrated myself on the rug, which was faded and worn by thousands of feet, some secret door in my soul swung open, and tears of blissful rapture, comparable to nothing else I had ever known, gushed forth uncontrollably. In truth, I do not really care how experts of various kinds of ecstasies label what then followed, and into what categories they place it. During those minutes I was raised to Heavenly Russia and presented before its Synclite of the enlightened. I felt the unearthly warmth of spiritual rays pouring from the center of the land, which is accurately and fittingly called the Heavenly Kremlin. The great spirit

said – save yourself, that is, become pure and radiant yourself and around you a thousand people will be saved. He didn't know the science of this, but now scientists know and we know that if we give off good emotions that they through resonance call up in the souls of other people their good emotions and joyous thoughts and in that way the field of love, the field of light, purity, joy and of a happy life increases amongst people. So even just one person can have a strong influence over the lives of people and all of humanity.

Sveta refers to the karmic law of resonance to explain how a particular emotion emanating from one person multiplies when it resonates with others with similar beliefs or sentiments. Sveta sees real changes happening around the globe and in Russia and is optimistic about the future:

Something is really changing. But at the same time many people say, 'well fine, so things are changing. Instead of 1000 people who are living pure and spiritual lives, maybe now there are 3000. There are 9 million in Moscow, so that's still too few people. And here science helps us. From Rupert Sheldrake. He's a Nobel Prize Laureate⁷⁹, a biologist. I don't even know what country he lives in or if he's died, in which case it was very recently. He received the Nobel Prize sometime around 1980. I don't recall exactly, but I think that's right. He won it for the discovery of a general morpho-genetic field. That is, the structure of a forming field that unites individuals of one species. So a structure of a forming field

who had at one time lived on Earth in the person of Serafim of Sarov, and who is now one of the brightest lights on the Russian Synclite, approached and bent down to me, wrapping me, as if with a vestment, in streaming rays of light and gentle warmth. For almost a whole year, until the church was closed down, I went every Monday to the acathistus of St. Serafim and, incredibly, experienced that same state every time, again and again, with undiminished strength" (Andreev n.d.).

⁷⁹ Sveta appears to have confused him with someone else. I have found no evidence that Sheldrake received the Nobel Prize. He is a controversial figure, regarded by some as a crackpot and others as a genius. He holds a PhD in biology from Cambridge University and according to a Salon.com article, developed his theory of morphic resonance after reading about three biologists who independently suggested that morphogenesis was organized in fields and after spending some time in India (Bowman 1999). Two of Sheldrake's most recent books theorize on the role of morphic genesis on such phenomena as the sensation that someone is watching and the sixth sense of animals: *The Sense of Being Stared At: And Other Unexplained Powers of the Human Mind* (2003) and *Dogs That Know When Their Owners Are Coming Home and Other Unexplained Powers of Animals: And Investigation* (1999).

that in our case unites all humanity, all Homo sapiens. There were observations that a group of monkeys on an island were behaving very strangely. First, a few monkeys started to, I don't remember exactly, either they started to either wash their bananas or the peels. That is, unusual behavior. And on this island of course all of the monkeys started to ape one another and did the same thing. But a few days passed and suddenly on islands where monkeys live they began to behave the same way, sporadically an avalanche-like process began. It's known, well maybe scientists don't know, but not in one case of the observed transferences of information from a distance was at work here. They couldn't have seen or heard or received any signals from other monkeys. This was the work of the general field – pure subtle-material. It worked and there was an avalanche-like process. Sheldrake confirms this. Of course, conclusive proof is impossible to obtain, but still, it's been tested already besides monkeys, in a colony in corals I think it was rats. That is, research was done. - they don't just give the Nobel Prize for nothing - that showed that in reality, as surprising as it seems, there needs to amass a critical mass so that there is such an avalanche-like process, and that mass is very small. That is, only the square root of one percent is needed in order for the population of earth to begin to think differently and live differently, to live like they think and feel, that is, to be whole. The square root of one percent of the population is all that is needed. So that means in Moscow just 300 people should start to live differently. And in Moscow there are 10,000 if not more who are involved with these various practices. Out of those people 300 are needed. Because it's one thing to participate and quite another to reach a level where there is truly wholeness. Well, if you don't practice then it's almost certain that you won't reach that. There are, of course, individual cases, people who are just born, a new race is being born. But as a rule, people are moving towards wholeness. And in all of this huge Moscow only 300 people are needed for an avalanche-like process to take place. I believe in that, like our Father, and I believe it absolutely.

Again, uniting the world of science with the world of spirituality,

Sveta explains the physics of spreading the vibrations of higher love:

But there is another law that scientists have discovered. It's called the law synergy – the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. So if we gather 20 people and all of us pray together or meditate on peace on the whole earth – if there were the law of synergy then it would be possible to say that the strength of our prayers is 20 times stronger than that of one person. But when 20 people pray or

meditate together on one theme, for example we fill the image of earth with love, the strength is not 20 times stronger, but maybe 20,000 times stronger or even more because our high frequency vibrations resonate with one another.

And what is resonance? From Physics courses we know that it is an increase to infinity of the amplitude of that frequency. The vibrations of love grow to infinity. And gradually if regularly, and it's been happening for a long time – in our center Voskhozhdenie and all of those retreats and conferences we participate in. And I know that in many countries of the world, on the subtle plane, I know that there's a strong group in Canada and there's a strong group in America, and it seems that I saw, but that's another story, I saw the person who leads the group in America. And the group is in a small town. And of course in India this is happening all the time and in various religious confessions it's happening, when people pray for peace in the whole world, for the happiness of people. My favorite Sai Baba, my favorite avatar, all of his trips and times spent with people, and here in Moscow as well, every one of his seminars ends with the phrase, in a singing cadence, let all people on earth be happy. And so, all that is left is our project the Temple of Peace. The project is called Our House – the Planet Earth. And so that Russia becomes the anahata⁸⁰ of humanity and so that all of humanity finally becomes an endless unity, and that all of those wars ended, etc. we propose – first in Russia and then later maybe in other places on the planet – a center of integrated thought and peace making that we call the Temple of Peace.

The Temple of Peace is part of a movement that is leading to a new level of consciousness and human transformation, through the unification of like-minded people who “include in their collection of principles and life-values respect for people with different beliefs and an integrated vision of the world.” Once the earth reaches a critical mass of such people, they say, all of humanity will make an evolutionary jump to the next level. Sveta described her vision to me one afternoon and discussed the international conference she was organizing to help spread the word:

⁸⁰ Heart chakra

And so, all that is left is our project the Temple of Peace. The project is called Our House – the Planet Earth. And so that Russia becomes the anahata of humanity and so that all of humanity finally becomes an endless unity, and that all of those wars would end, etc. we propose – first in Russia and then later maybe in other places on the planet – a center of integrated thought and peace making that we call the Temple of Peace. According to our idea there should be three main elements. The first is a popular/folk/peoples (narodnyi) university. Why popular/folk? Because it's not a higher educational institution where after receiving a diploma a person goes and works in that profession. It's more of a university of supplemental education. Even children and adolescents could go to this university. Or housewives or unemployed people could go there. Or conversely scientists who have stopped feeling satisfied with their life. Anyone can study in that popular university.

And there will be three main departments there- the first is a psychologically oriented one. There will be new thinking, in life, in daily life, it's conscious parenthood, a youth movement, water birthing, the psychology of the ethics of communication. It's quite broad. The second department is integrating thinking in every profession. That is, there will be a base – psychological and philosophical – and there will be concrete methods that will allow one to make every profession completely different. There already is such a method in Russia – Kitaigorodskaya. Our Tamara studied with her. For example, her methods for teaching foreign language are completely different. And in every profession there are many methods that allow one to understand the profession differently. The third department of the university is a unified world. There students will study the teaching methods of various countries in order to find something in common, they will study different languages and the cultures of the world, etc. The second element of the Temple of Peace is in essence community. It's a center of psychological relief, it's cooperation in common deeds. It's a children's center and cultural dialogue. And the third element which we started in 1996 is our own temple of peace making. For now it's a symbolic temple where every religion could find a dialogue, they could gather together and organize a common prayer for peace. I had the pleasure of participating in such an event on January 24th of this year. At the same time in India, Italy, and Moscow, including Catholicism, and at the same time lamas from all over the world gathered in the Himalayas to pray for peace all at the same time. I was incredibly happy. And in that third element of the peace making temple there is already a bulletin being published on religious dialogue in a Moscow newspaper, a

Russian-wide newspaper that's published in Moscow there will be a column on religious dialogue where we will provide information each month about how we're preparing for the congress, the upcoming congress. This will be like a rehearsal for the Temple of Peace – in November of this year, in Moscow – this will be an annual conference on education, but we included a section on religion and we invited all representatives to participate. And the Temple of Peace conference will take place in the spring of next year. We've already started sending out invitations.

Through the work of such conferences and the people they will touch through their university and regular meditations, Voskhozhdenie hopes to promote transformation through spiritual enlightenment and ethical behavior that will lead eventually to an egregore of the community of light, a new egregore which would be integral to the formation of Andreev's future utopia. It is a collective movement working towards a pluralistic vision of peace and tolerance, working through the active cultivation, education, and elevation of individual forms of consciousness across the globe. But until such time when the Temple of Peace is actualized, they are fully engaged in bringing warmth and happiness to the individuals who cross their paths.

Conclusion

Culminating in the Temple of Peace, and perhaps not coincidentally, the university attached to this project, this chapter has explored the world of the Russian New Age practitioner, an intellectual world that stresses the importance of learning and the cultivation of individuality in concert with an elevated ethical code that is based on Cosmic laws and yet concerned with the social realities of the more immediate world. Influenced by Hindu, Western and Russian thinkers and focusing on the power of the mind, the Russian New Age is in many ways

similar to the New Age movement more generally, with its glorification of the individual, its calls to seek happiness within and entreaties to strive beyond the limitations of society and the crowd. As we have seen in this chapter, however, the Russian New Age has taken on a particular tone that sets it apart. Influenced by a particular Russian strain of mystical thought, it is deeply connected to the social good, the collective experience, and is particularly reverent of the divine feminine within each of us. And while each of us is responsible for our own life, that responsibility is believed to carry over to the world about us, which we can raise spiritually and culturally through the cultivation of positive and uplifted thoughts and love. As we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, even during the Soviet period, individual responsibility, development and expression were encouraged and inner abilities explored. The West does not hold a monopoly on such notions.

In the following three chapters we will see the concepts and beliefs set forth here come to life. In these chapters I follow the lives of women involved with the New Age sphere in Moscow as they work their ways through different stages of their own spiritual paths. Their stories reveal how they became involved with alternative spirituality and the ways their involvement has helped them transform and empower their lives. We will learn how many became involved with such practices during Soviet times, even before the onset of *perestroika*, how they have found sources of power in their supposed innate feminine abilities, and how they have forged lives of creative individuality even as they connect with the broader society and world about them. Many of the concept and practices that we

explored in this chapter will come through more vividly in their own words as they discuss their spiritual health journeys, the lessons they have learned along the way and the tremendous difficulty and suffering that is often a part of finding one's true path and happiness.

Chapter Five

Spiritual-Health Journeys Begin: The Late Soviet Period

After the fall of the Soviet Union there was much talk about a spiritual revival taking place in Russia. Missionaries of all kinds poured into the country, hoping to tap into what they perceived as untouched territory and millions of souls waiting for salvation. Certainly, there was a tremendous growth in interest in all things spiritual, including alternative spiritual health practices. Emboldened by the enactment of Gorbachev's Law on Freedom of Conscience in 1990, spiritual groups began to enter the public sphere, and by the time I first arrived in Moscow in 1991, they had already created a striking visual presence in the city. During the early 1990s the media in Russia and the West was abuzz with stories of spiritual revival as the Orthodox Church began reclaiming lost property and building new churches throughout the country. Small churches began appearing even in the drabber outskirts of the city and the center saw the magnificent reconstruction of the towering Cathedral of Christ the Savior which had been destroyed by Stalin in 1933 and was later replaced by a public swimming pool (See Fig. 10). Signs of religion could be seen everywhere, and I remember wondering at the time how people could have converted so quickly from their atheist backgrounds. It was this question and the ubiquitous presence of missionaries on the streets and subways of Moscow that led to my earlier research on religion and the anti-cult movement. It was then that I learned how much further back into history the interest in spiritual matters reached. While some of my friends derided those who wore crosses for simply following the latest trend,

believers told stories of hiding their crosses under their shirts for years. The outward expression simply revealed what had long been hidden under the surface. The same can be said for the spiritual practices more closely associated with the New Age movement of today. Although I learned at times some Orthodox and non-traditional practices were openly practiced during Soviet times, even in the center of Moscow.



Fig. 10. Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

In fact, far from being a spiritual wasteland, late Soviet Moscow was permeated with groups studying esoteric ideas and Indian and other alternative spiritual health practices, and Soviet science was engaged in innovative approaches to health, the development of ‘hidden reserves’ and theorizations about the make-up of the unseen world around us. The imprint of these Soviet endeavors can be seen in many of the contemporary New Age groups and

accounts to a large extent for the particular configuration of Russian New Age practices, which, however similar to western ones, still retains a distinct accent.

Weaving through individual stories and published accounts from the time, this chapter explores some of the early practices of the women of Voskhozhdenie and similar groups. Their stories point to an emerging pluralism of activities and beliefs amongst the population in the late 1970s and early 1980s that pre-date the political and economic changes that were to be instituted later during *perestroika*. In these accounts we see that even before structural changes were set in place, people were involved with activities that promoted notions of individualism more generally associated with western forms of neo-liberal society. We find notions such as self-improvement, personal responsibility and free will being promoted by individual searchers as well as by scientists and doctors in the official sphere. In fact, it has been argued that such notions were an integral part of the Soviet system and the cultivation of communist consciousness.⁸¹ Many of the activities that flourish in the current New Age movement were already taking place during Soviet times, including occult study groups, large health clubs that taught vegetarianism, ice-water therapy⁸² and clairvoyant healing, and a wide-spread interest in yoga and alternative teaching and psychological methods. Not all of these activities were underground. Some were studied and promoted within

⁸¹ While Kharkhordin (1999) interprets the Soviet state's promotion of such activities as aimed ultimately at the submission of the individual will to the will of the collective, my own interpretation fits closer with Yurchak (2006). The state may not have intended such, but the promotion of such activities and the provision of space for their exploration, helped create an atmosphere where individual creativity was actively expressed and developed.

⁸² There is a long history of such practices in Russian culture. Snow and ice water were part of the banya (steam bath) culture practiced in Russian villages and in the country side. Such practices – alternating hot and cold - were brought into the city banya's and continue to be practiced today (Ryan 1999).

official Soviet spheres, perhaps encouraged by early communist doctrine that called for new educational methods that could break down habitualized modes of thinking.⁸³ An exploration of the alternative spiritual practices of the time reveals that the focus on the power and responsibility of the individual was tempered by a firm belief in certain socialist principles, creating a very different configuration of beliefs than in the West.

Viewed from this perspective, *perestroika* can then be seen as a dialectic creation and an example of socialist pluralism. Developed through the interaction of individual expression and political-economic reform, *perestroika* became a socialist space that saw the development of freedoms that were characteristic of both of Isaiah Berlin's notions of liberty – negative as well as positive. During *perestroika* changes were made in the economic sphere, political sphere and the area of civil liberties. Laws were changed to allow certain limited forms of private ownership and commerce, restrictions were lifted on freedom of association and assembly, censorship was eased, informal organizations were allowed and opposition parties were legalized (Colton 1995). At the same time, social guarantees in the spheres of education, health, and housing (albeit not in

⁸³ In a diary entry published in *Pravda* on January 4, 1923, V.I Lenin discusses the progress of such methods and new ways of thinking: "Quite a lot is being done to get the old teachers out of their rut, to attract them to the new problems, to rouse their interest in new methods of education, and in such problems as religion." Of course, the problems of religion he speaks of here are not the same issues being discussed in occult circles during the late-Soviet period.

ideal form) remained in place during this period. It was, arguably, a period of socialist democratic pluralism in action.

Soviet society, particularly starting in the mid-1980s, had legal community-based social networks and movements that indicate the existence of democratic values among the populous. Beginning in 1986, “informal organizations” were made legal in the Soviet Union, and by 1988 1,500 such organizations had registered in Moscow alone (Colton 1995: 589). Most of these groups were cultural or sports organizations, but many were political and activist in nature. With the ban on assembly lifted, many political groups began meeting openly at Pushkin Square. Some of these groups, such as the Perestroika Club and the Club of Social Initiative eventually formed into full-fledged opposition parties (*ibid.*: 591). ‘Environmental clubs’ were given limited autonomy from the government as early as the 1960s, and by the late 1980s the Moscow Greens were well-established enough to halt to 200 city constructions (*ibid.*: 592). The existence of such values and networks calls into question much of the stereotypes and alarmist fears that abound concerning the post-socialist period, and point out the inherent ethnocentrism of such notions as “ideological void,” “chaos,” or the assumption that post-socialist societies are just one step away from reverting to their “natural” proclivity for totalitarianism, whether in the form of communism, nationalism, or monarchism.

But the notion of individual development and responsibility were not results of the reforms of *perestroika*. They were an integral part of the late-Soviet system, encouraged through the state’s promotion of educational

achievement and scientific exploration. As Yurchak (2006) notes, the state, through the establishment of cultural centers and activities and the promotion of personal development, produced a reality that allowed for the formation of social groups with a wide range of interests and activities that reached beyond the scope envisioned by the state. Having been granted spaces for development and encouraged to seek optimal development, people with creative and strong personalities were brought together in spaces where their creativity and strivings took them ultimately to unforeseen realms. It is here, in this dialectical interaction between the state and creative people that we see the engines of *perestroika* starting to emerge, much like Creed's Bulgarian agrarian workers whose strategizing attempts to optimize the socialist system for their own interests led to changes in practice and reforms to the system (Creed 1998). I would argue that it is here, in these ambiguous spaces Yurchak calls deterritorializing milieus, that the nascent New Age movement in Russia was nourished and began to flourish, and where they developed their own particular understandings of such concepts as individualism and collectivism, one that closely intertwines notions of individual rights and social rights.

The picture that develops out of the stories of women involved with new age practices and from news accounts from that period contradicts western-centric literature and reveals some of the blind-spots such biases can produce. We learn that life on the ground does not always follow the dictates of those in power. The stories of this chapter illustrate some of the ways people were able to create a space for themselves and in turn help shape the very society around them. It is

through such stories that we are able to see how little reality conforms to the ideals of state ideology. Reality is always messier than ideological tracts or political structures. Again, anthropology reveals that top-down policies, just like top-down analyses, often miss the people at the ground level, who have a way of molding space into something of their own. An atheist state does not equate with an atheist populace, although certainly a majority declared themselves atheist in Soviet opinion polls.⁸⁴ A history of Orthodox rule does not necessarily translate into purely Orthodox religious sentiments. And so we see that a nationalized medical system within an officially atheist state did not always translate into a purely medical approach to health. People found ways to carve out Soviet space into an environment for spiritual and personal experimentation and created for themselves an active and nurturing alternative spiritual health movement that even in Soviet times resembled aspects of the New Age in the West. Several key factors worked in conjunction to create this space where religion and notions of alternative health could be explored and even encouraged during the Soviet period. These women's stories and some of the mainstream publications of the time help bring these factors to light.

One of the most important points in this regard is the simple fact that, contrary to western perceptions, the Soviet period was not an information vacuum. While the thousands of books currently available on the whole spectrum

⁸⁴ According to Alexander Shchipkov (1998), a 1937 poll indicates that 50 % of the population considered themselves religious believers. By 1988 sociological polls indicated that only 18.6 % of the population identified as believers.

of New Age ideas and practices were not available, books, newspaper articles, and journals were published on such themes. In fact, education and enlightenment were integral parts of the Soviet ideology. And while many official articles on New Age themes were often highly critical, they did offer information about alternative viewpoints. Those interested could glean practical tips and ideas even from the most critical of articles that I found. At the same time, many topics that would be considered New Age or alternative – and thus marginalized or rejected within the scientific community in the West – were openly researched and discussed in Soviet Russia. A review of some of this literature points to three further important factors, all of which are interrelated: the importance of health; Soviet research into “hidden human reserves”; and the importance of India.

First of all, health was always an important part of Soviet ideology.⁸⁵ A healthy population made for a healthy and productive workforce, and much socialist realist propaganda artwork is devoted to posters promoting good hygiene and healthy living (Bernstein 1998; Waters 1991). The years of war leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 left the country in a state of economic turmoil and in a serious health crisis. A series of epidemics had hit the population, including typhus, cholera, scurvy, smallpox, venereal disease and malaria, and in 1918 the People’s Commissariat of Public Health (*Narkomzdrav*) was established to combat them (Bernstein 1998: 191). Lenin viewed this health crisis as a political emergency, and early on he emphasized the importance of health in the development of socialist society, declaring in 1919 at the Seventh

⁸⁵ See particularly Rivkin-Fish 1999; Bernstein 1998; Barr 1996 ; Waters 1991.

Congress of Soviets: “Either the louse defeats socialism or socialism defeats the louse” (Barr 1996: 307). The Narkomzdrav began a campaign of “sanitary enlightenment” to educate the population about health and hygiene, as it was believed that politically “conscious” socialists must also be health “conscious”; all responsible citizens must take care of their health (Bernstein 1998: 192).

Many women involved with spiritual-health began their paths within the health sphere. While questions of spirituality and religion were discouraged and certain activities could lead to negative repercussions in the workplace or even persecution at certain points in Soviet history, the State’s focus on health allowed many spiritual ideas to develop under the cover of the healthy living moniker. In fact, a data base⁸⁶ of the state political newspaper *Izvestia* indicates that there were 2996 articles that discussed health between 1980 and 1984. That is more than the number of articles that mention communism – 2412 – and over half of the number that discussed socialism - 5123.

Secondly, the Soviet Union was the source of many innovative methodologies in the realm of health, art and pedagogy. In addition to new methods, many methods from abroad that today would be considered alternative were incorporated into the official health sphere. Many of the same ideas we will see in this chapter ascribed to the groups Healthy Family and Cosmos can be found in articles in the mainstream Soviet press. Many activities that from a western perspective seem unusual or odd for this period turn out to be quite common place. They were discussed by the mainstream newspapers, written about in books, and practiced by people throughout the Soviet Union. These

⁸⁶ <http://dlib.eastview.com.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu>

articles and books reveal that Soviet scientists were researching hidden potentials and healthy lifestyles and were encouraging the exploration of supernatural phenomena, traits common to the activities and beliefs of New Age practitioners.

Finally, and related to the previous two factors, is the importance of India. As we have seen in earlier chapters, India and Indian spiritual beliefs play a significant role in the New Age in Russia and throughout the world. While access to Indian spiritual literature may have significantly declined during the early Soviet period, interest was renewed and literature again became more readily available with the strengthening of ties between the two governments in later years. Increased interest in all things Indian allowed for greater access to Indian practices, particularly under the guise of health promotion. Given the interest within the Soviet scientific community in “hidden potentials,” it is not difficult to understand how such practices as yoga and meditation could have been readily incorporated into Soviet health practices more generally. Those interested in issues beyond the physical sphere could further their understanding with “cultural” articles in the press or *samizdat* articles passed along between friends.

This chapter begins with an exploration of these three factors, interweaving the stories of Russian women and Soviet publications. We then move on to the spiritual journeys of five women, where we learn how they became involved in the New Age during the Soviet period, what led them in the direction of spiritual health matters, and how they found their way to the contemporary New Age scene.

Spiritual-Health Paths: Indian Roots

Without a doubt, crossing paths with Sveta Prival'skaya, the general director of Voskhozhdenie, was the most significant event in my own journey towards understanding the New Age in Russia. Her daily life is a model of the Russian spiritual searcher, and her stories provide a personal account of a spiritual journey that started in the time of Brezhnev. She was a leading member of Healthy Family, a branch of Cosmos, one of the largest spiritual-health movements in Russia in the 1980s, and she continues to play a leading role in the contemporary New Age scene, with activities that take her throughout Russia and beyond. The starting point of Sveta's journey, however, begins earlier, with health problems and a failing marriage. But even at this early juncture we see the convergence of spirituality and health as well as the first indications of the important role India and Indian thought would come to play:

In 1976-77 I studied Hatha yoga for the first time. That was before Healthy Family, it was during my first marriage. That was a very difficult marriage. And I had continuous headaches. That was in addition to gynecological problems. The headaches were very bad. At that time the first groups of Hatha yoga appeared in the Soviet Union and I ended up in one of them. I studied for two years and the headaches completely disappeared. And I couldn't feel any of the gynecological problems and so I stopped doing it. Because everything was good, so why keep working on it? But everything returned – in 1984 before my divorce – it all happened around the same time. But when I was studying Hatha yoga of course I also read literature about it because I was interested in various aspects of it. At that time I read the Bhagavad Gita for the first time.

Although this initial introduction to alternative methods and Indian spirituality did not lead immediately to active involvement with a movement, we see that already in the 1970s, practices traditionally associated with the New Age were developing in Russia. It's not surprising that these first practices would be

of Indian origin, partly due to the significance of such practices to the New Age movement as a whole, but also because of the influences of Indian thought on significant Russian cultural figures⁸⁷, the strong Indian thread within Theosophy, which has been discussed at length in earlier chapters, and the close ties between the Soviet Union and India.

In 1971 India and the Soviet Union signed a 20-year treaty of friendship, which aimed at economic, scientific and technological cooperation. One result of this cooperative relationship was the discussion of Indian philosophies in the mainstream Soviet press. While its scope is limited, the internet database Eastview contains full-text versions of Russian and Soviet newspapers and journals and provides searchable articles dated between 1980 and 1984 from *Izvestia*,⁸⁸ one of the main Soviet papers. A search of this database brings forth some interesting findings on this topic. During this period *Izvestia* published 2700 articles that discuss India. While the number of articles specifically devoted to Indian healing or spirituality is indeed miniscule, the period did include articles about yoga (17), ayurvedic medicine (1), karma (3), the Shambala (1), and chakras⁸⁹ (2) and unlike the articles I found on occultism, magic and clairvoyance,

⁸⁷ Particularly on Tolstoy and the Rerikhs. According to Burba (2000) Lev Tolstoy showed a great interest in the Swami Vivekananda after receiving a copy of his book *The Philosophy of Yoga*. What is particularly interesting about the work *Tolstoy and India* are the tremendous number of references the author finds in Tolstoy's literary works that echo ideas from both the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita, including references to reincarnation. Although this is a question for research at a later date, I would surmise that the ideas expressed in Tolstoy's works could have been an inspiration for astute readers in Soviet Russia during the period when literature on religion and the occult were scarce.

⁸⁸ Certainly there were many other newspapers and journals in Soviet Russia that discussed health and philosophical issues. These, however, are not accessible in an internet database as far as I know.

⁸⁹ The articles are not actually about chakras, however. But the reference is interesting nonetheless: On April 4, 1984 the first Indian astronaut, Rakesh Sharma, went into space on a Soviet ship with two Soviet cosmonauts. One of the experiments he performed was on yoga

these articles on India were overwhelmingly positive. Many discuss the friendly relations between India and the Soviet Union, covering various treaties, meetings between political leaders and cultural exchanges between the two countries.

In 1980 Alexandr Ter-Grigorian became a permanent correspondent in Delhi for *Izvestia*. His first report is in part a reiteration of the long history of Soviet-Indian friendship:

Soviet-Indian friendship was not born today or yesterday. From my first steps in Delhi I felt that I was in a friendly country. Not long ago in Delhi and other cities there were festive celebrations of the 25th anniversary of Soviet-Indian economic relations which began with the signing of the agreement to build a metallurgical factory in Bhilai. The ties between the two countries cover many economic spheres (Ter-Grigorian 1980: 5).

Ter-Grigorian also touches upon art and the importance of cultural exchanges between the two countries:

Turning down a quiet empty street I found myself at the famous Rabindrabhabana – the Palace of Art. In the social life of India, art, of course, plays an enormous role. Indeed, freedom and independence is not just a matter of a million tons of steel, technical progress and profitable export. It's also the blooming of national art, without which the emancipation of human souls is meaningless. A few steps further I notice deep in the garden through the open gates a small sculpture made in the modern style which I recognize as the Indian Goddess Sarasvati, the patroness of enlightenment and art who is usually represented with a lute in her hands (*ibid.*).

Note the importance he attributes to enlightenment and art. This is the entrance to the National school of drama, Ter-Grigorian explains, where many of India's famous television and movie actors had their start, many of whom were well-known in the USSR, and where there had

exercises. Upon their return the three astronauts were decorated with the order of "Ashoka Chakra" and "Kirti Chakra" by the Indian government.

recently been a successful showing of Chekov's *Uncle Vanya*, which is just one example of the on-going exchange between the two cultures. While Ter-Grigorian is critical of religion in another part of the article, he does offer here a small visual account for those interested in Indian spirituality.

Another article in the database that is of particular relevance to the New Age sphere is one written by a doctor in 1980 titled "Conversations on health: help yourself with happiness" (Dembo 1980). As mentioned in earlier chapters, one of the books published by the directors of Voskhozhdenie is called *How to Live in Happiness*. Positive thinking is a key element in Sveta and David's work as well as the New Age more generally, but here we see it promoted by a Soviet doctor, who looks to India for inspiration. In the *Izvestia* article, A. Dembo, a Ukrainian medical doctor, discusses several new methods for alleviating stress and regaining health and places a strong emphasis on the importance of individual attitude and will:

When a patient comes in and complains about pain in the heart, shortness of breath, or nightmare-filled sleepless nights, first of all you need to attend to the difficult situation. A doctor's arsenal will have many methods for healing neuroses. There is medication, well-known and very new, hypnosis, auto-training, the gymnastics of yogis, and self-hypnosis. But no form of healing can replace the will of the patient and his belief that he will be healed (Dembo 1980: 3).

While technically Dembo does not use the term yoga, he clearly intends this and also offers a positive assessment of it and other methods which today would be considered "alternative". Furthermore, he highlights the important role of the self, the individual will in the healing process, which is a repeated theme

amongst Russian New Age practitioners. This also contradicts most western accounts of Soviet medicine as encouraging passive approaches to health, focusing more on illness than healthy living.

Yoga is again discussed in connection with will and self-control in an article from 1984 about the latest research endeavors of the Pavlov Institute of Physiology. Aside from this early reference to yoga, this article also points to several other key characteristics of the Russian New Age movement: positive thoughts, the power of the self, and holism, all of which were encouraged by Pavlov over a century ago and continued to be investigated by Soviet scientists.⁹⁰ According to the article, fifty years earlier Pavlov had stated that “It is the duty of the physiologist not only to teach people how to correctly, that is, usefully and pleasantly, work, rest and eat, etc. But also how to correctly think, feel and desire...” (Manucharova and Nevel’skii 1984: 3) And the accomplishment of such feats requires the development of self-control, not just of the will and thoughts, but also control over the actual physical organism – the heartbeat, blood pressure, and even the electrical activity of the brain, all of which, according to Soviet physiologist V.A. Govyrinym, is possible, as evidenced, he notes, by the practice of Indian yogis (*ibid.*).

For many of the women I spoke with, Hatha yoga was the first step into the spiritual world. Although the focus in state sanctioned groups was purely on the health aspects of the exercises, many became interested in the philosophy behind them and began exploring it more deeply. In fact, most of the women I

⁹⁰ Alexei Yurchak (personal correspondence) suggests that perhaps it was Pavlov’s focus on the physiological origins and aspects of such phenomenon that led to their scientific investigation during the Soviet period.

interviewed who began their spiritual-health path during the Soviet period were involved in some way or another with yoga and they all read works from Indian philosophy and religion. Several later made pilgrimages to India once restrictions were lifted after 1991. Valentina, an elegant woman in her fifties, was actually led to yoga by her husband. She was also one of the very few women I interviewed who was still married to her first husband. Valentina was good friends with Tamara from Voskhozhdenie who worked closely with me during my research. While not a member of Voskhozhdenie, Valentina would occasionally attend trainings there, although the one time she planned to participate in a rebirthing breathing training while I was there, she changed her mind at the last minute because her spiritual advisor advised against it. I met her when I started going with Tamara to a course on NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) that was held at a women and children's center. The two of them would often exchange prayers they found particularly useful. In the mid 1980s, however, Valentina was not baptized and had only started to become involved with alternative spiritual health activities. Here she's discussing a period shortly before graduate school:

My husband studied in courses for clairvoyants. It was around 1984 or 1985. They were private secret courses. Simply it was an acquaintance of an acquaintance – she discovered it in herself and she started to teach it. And before that I studied yoga with my husband. He studied yoga before we got married, and then when I moved here and we got married, he showed me some of the yoga exercises and we started regularly doing yoga. He had gone to a class in some sort of house of culture. There was a circle or society. It was out in the open. That is, yoga began to spread under the guise of physical education. That is, there are special exercises, gymnastics, and gymnastics of yoga. It was purely physical yoga, just Hatha yoga, but still there were already books that were typed out and not just Hatha yoga, but also Raja and

already some sort of interest in such things already existed in my husband's family. And then he went to the clairvoyance classes.

We see here an example of the dialectical relationship between alternative practitioners and the state. Houses of culture were state run spaces offering opportunities for individuals to develop themselves and meet others. It was through her husband's interaction with such a place that Valentina became familiar with the practice of yoga. It was at this time that we can see the beginning of her interest in healing and the hidden powers of the body. This was to develop much more strongly with her later involvement in a variety of alternative teaching methods, particularly during her time at the language teaching center established by Kitaigorodskaya, a student of the Bulgarian psychologist Georgii Lozanov, who founded a method known as suggestopedia. We will learn more about this method later in the chapter.

If Hatha yoga was often the entrée into alternative health practices, such practices in turn led to a more spiritual exploration of Indian philosophy. Here Sveta continues her discussion of the early years of her involvement with occult circles and the Healthy Family group. She explains the appeal of Indian philosophy and some of the important lessons she struggles with to this day:

In 1977 I read the Bhagavad Gita for the first time and Hatha yoga and somehow for many years it stayed with me because I felt that here there was a lot of food for the soul and the intellect, which I don't find in the Bible. For the soul there is something, but there's practically nothing for the intellect. But that is something unitary – [*edinnyi*] – for me – emotions, feelings, principles and intellect. This sense is very strong in the Bhagavad Gita and in Indian thought more generally just like they have much more for the mind, and no less love for the soul, and much deeper. So India already got into my soul. And in 1984 with the Healthy Family, the first spiritual book I read was *Agni Yoga*, by the Rerikhs. And

I read it like a song, like something that long has been inside of me. As if everything is obvious, of course it's like that, of course it's mine, no question. And then almost immediately after that I read, already now at a much higher level, the books of Krishnamurti. That is a remarkable teacher of course who said that all those teachers and gurus are all like mold, that is, this is absolutely the son of Shiva, and I consider myself a daughter of Shiva. That is a teacher that destroys all authorities, that destroys all fossilized principles, which is very important now because we're on the threshold of a completely different life, new thinking. Well, that was all mine, no question, although even today there are a few of Krishnamurti's ideas that, well I understand them with my mind, but I haven't matured enough for them.

I know that it's necessary to become unattached – this is very strong in Hinduism, especially strong with Krishnamurti, although his work is not completely Hindu, but this is what all of our illnesses teach us – don't become attached – first of all to your stereotypes – stereotypes of what we should be like. I want to become thin. But I'm not able to. I eternally weigh more than I want to weigh. Sometimes I'm able to quickly lose weight but then I gain it all back. It doesn't work. So why am I attached to such a stereotype? I mean, if it doesn't bother me a lot? Maybe it's for the best, who knows. Also, don't become attached to people close to you. This is really difficult. It's the most difficult task that God has given us because of course all people are attached to their loved ones, their children, etc, even to our pets. But as for attachments to things, to material I don't have a problem. But of course the attachment of the soul to people is hard.

In this discussion we see the back and forth between the spiritual and the physical as Sveta weaves between discussions of the philosophy and depth of Indian spiritual thought and the practical application of such thoughts to her physical shape and interactions with those she loves. We see here the intellectual appeal that Indian philosophy offered her as well as the anti-authoritarian views that drew her closer to such thought. The Bhagavad Gita, Shiva, and yoga are all direct Hindu influences, but Sveta also was strongly influenced by the Rerikhs and their work *Agni Yoga* as well as Krishnamurti, who was groomed from

childhood as a Theosophical prophet, although as an adult he later rejected his Theosophical upbringing. These particular influences are no coincidence. In fact, a 1984 *Izvestia* article about a cultural exchange between India and Russia calls Nikolai Rerikh “a spiritual bridge between our country and India” and notes that Rerikh referred to India as the “natural sister of Rus”⁹¹ (Kuznetzov 1984: 5).

Of even greater import, in 1984 *Izvestia* Delhi correspondent, Ter-Grigorian met with Nikolai and Elena Rerikh’s son, Svyatoslav, in Bangalore and wrote a lengthy tribute to the father and son whose artwork was to be displayed together at the Museum of the Peoples of the East in Moscow. While the Rerikhs were generally lauded during the Soviet period only for their artistic talents and their spiritual contributions were largely ignored, Ter-Grigorian relays to *Izvestia* readers his candid interview that touched on a wide range of themes from the Rerikhs’ work and lives in India. Agreeing with the earlier article by Kuznetzov, Ter-Grigorian credits the Rerikhs with bringing together Russian and Indian culture: “These remarkable artists, father and son, played a huge role in bringing together two cultures, and their work still today honorably fulfills the noble mission of intertwining the Russian and Indian artistic traditions” (Ter-Grigorian 1984: 6). And yet, while he begins by discussing their artistic contributions, the work Ter-Grigorian chooses to mention first in his article is Nikolai Rerikh’s piece called “Shambala,” that mysterious abode of Madame Blavatsky’s mahatmas, including El Morya, who is said to have also dictated the Rerikhs’

⁹¹ The name for early Kievan Russia.

work *Agni Yoga*⁹² and whose portrait is prominently displayed at current meetings of Voskhozhdenie. Before elaborating on the spiritual significance of the work, however, Ter-Grigorian takes a detour and allows Sviataslav to speak. His first words serve to unite a Russian and Indian philosophical perspective:

Beauty will save the world....My whole life I have repeatedly been convinced of the truth of these words by Dostoevsky, if you take them in their broadest meaning. Beauty is purity of thoughts. Why do I love portraits? Because when I love a person I try to feel the harmony between his outer beauty and inner beauty. A portrait is, if you like, a way to reveal what we do not know yet with the help of what we know and see. It's a way to find that which is splendid and elevated... An artist should seek authentic beauty, towards which even a person inexperienced in art is also instinctively pulled. Here's a parable: Buddha's favorite student, Ananda, asked him, is it true that half our spiritual life consists of striving for beauty and contemplating it? Don't speak thus, Ananda, answered Buddha. Beauty is our whole life. (S. Rerikh in Ter-Grigorian 1984: 6)

With this small quote we enter a whole new world beyond the materiality of art and see hints of ideas that have come to characterize the Russian New Age scene - the harmony of the inner and outer person, seeking something beyond, unseen, uplifting. We see a reverence for pure thoughts and the importance of thoughts themselves. And we find a respect for authentic inner intuition that is a part of each person and able to lift each person to a higher level. The apex of this idea is captured in the notion of the Shambala:

My father, who was my teacher and friend, wrote a book about the Shambala. He said you can't find the Shambala on a geographical map. It's not a country. It's a symbol. It's a symbol of the

⁹² As we have seen in earlier chapters, the Rerikhs' teachings play an important role in the contemporary New Age scene in Russia. Popular during the Silver Age, they joined other creative spirits of the time in welcoming the coming revolution. Although they later proclaimed that the revolution went off course, their works declare both Marx and Lenin as spiritual guides or mahatmas. Although unsubstantiated, some even accused the Rerikhs of being Soviet spies during their travels through Central Asia in the late 1920s (Lunkin and Filatov 2000).

limitlessness of the human consciousness. Everyone searches for his own Shambala...My father's book is pages of this search. In it in concentrated form are gathered the thoughts of the best people of the East (S. Rerikh in Ter-Grigorian 1984:6).

And so in 1984 Soviet readers are introduced to some of the fundamentals of Indian and New Age thought. We see here the notion of the limitlessness of human potential and learn about the Shambala and some of the key figures who continue to influence New Age thinking in Russia. Some of these same notions are discussed in the more scientifically oriented articles published in *Izvestia*, to which we now turn our attention. We also see here an example of the Soviet encouragement of artistic expression and enlightenment.

Alternative Methods and Practices Popularized through State Channels

As the stories later in the chapter will illustrate, much of the alternative spiritual activity taking place during this Soviet period was done in secret and at great risk to the participants and those who hosted them. What also emerges is the complexity of this situation. Certain practices that would be considered “alternative” were allowed and even taught by state sponsored organizations. We have seen that yoga classes were available. Chinese massage was also taught in state medical institutes, and state sponsored research was being conducted on hypnosis. As we will see, Anya's story reveals that she worked at a state health group for several years and became well acquainted with Lazarev, a well known hypnotist who developed a prenatal pedagogy that utilizes music to raise the developmental levels and potentials of children in the womb. Although, according to Anya, Lazarev was unable to publish his works in Russia at the time,

he conducted his work at the state center for Bronchial Pathology, where she took her son to treat his allergies. Furthermore, hypnosis and the development of hidden potentials were topics of discussion in the state newspaper, and scientists in state universities were conducting studies during the pre-perestroika era of the Soviet Union. Such studies came to be closely associated with parapsychology and therefore were heavily followed by the psi research community in the United States.⁹³

In fact, by some accounts there has been considerable collaboration between the two communities, much of which is documented at the Esalen Center for Theory and Research in California. I first read about this exchange several years ago in a book I bought at a Goodwill store merely for its sheer comic value. Certainly, I would normally hesitate to base any scholarly claims on a book called *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (Ostrander and Schroeder 1970), and I have no verification of the authenticity of the authors' claims. Furthermore, such sensationalistic books seemed to feed into the western world's mystification of Russia and fascination with such oddities as the Tsar's relationship with Rasputin or Brezhnev's personal psychic, Djuna. My conversations with alternative health practitioners and research into Soviet newspapers and books on skepticism, however, made me take a second look at the book. What emerges from these sources is a patchwork of ideas, activities and tales that have nudged the Russian New Age scene in a particular direction, one that emphasizes energy, inner potential, the power of the individual and the belief that anything is

⁹³ See for example the Esalen Institute archive of research (<http://www.esalenctr.org/index.cfm>); Jeffery Mishlove (1997); and Willaim Tiller (1997).

possible. We also see the intricate negotiations needed within a world filled with “alternative” methods, some of which were sanctioned by the State and others that were driven underground.

One particularly striking example is an article from 1984 in *Izvestia* which describes in some detail the activities of a group in the southern Russian Samarovskii region that is quite similar to those of the club Healthy Family, which Sveta had joined that same year. While the author, Eduard Kondratov, writes with a skeptical and at times condescending attitude towards the group, he did conduct anthropological-like research for the piece, and he provides an overview of the practices taking place in the country. According to the article, he traveled extensively around the Soviet Union and “met people who did such things as share recipes for receiving living or dead water,⁹⁴ who were experts of Tibetan medicine, those who ate raw food, clairvoyants, and even one alien” (Kondratov 1984: 3). He participated for an undisclosed amount of time with the Samorovskii group which he found practicing in a large ravine: “They ran barefoot along the wet forest paths, intensely creating a bio-field around themselves, standing on their heads. They would say ‘om’ and focus attention on one organ of the body and then another” (*ibid.*) He also attended a lecture put on by the group titled “Mental Hygiene,” which, he writes, was about the fluid, astral, and mental bodies of a person. Kondratov was rather taken by the activities of this group until, he said, he became self-conscious and noticed “a wave of kindness giving birth to a bio-field...”, which made him feel

⁹⁴ Dead and living water play a significant role in Russian folk tales, bringing back to life fallen heroes.

uncomfortable and silly. During his research he interviewed an engineer from the group he called Nina: “Is it interesting? Of course. Otherwise I wouldn’t go. I don’t have any aches, but I want to be stronger – physically and psychologically, especially in regards to my will. The abilities of our organism, it turns out, are limitless. If, of course, your spirit has a body” (*ibid.*) Discussing whether she likes the people in the group, she continues: “Very much. There are people to talk to. And not about jeans or strawberries at the dacha. Here there are very nice intelligent people. They’re interested in eastern philosophy and live spiritual lives. I have also become familiar with their readings. It’s very interesting, although not everything is understandable. There’s a lot that’s foggy. But they tell me that it comes a bit at a time.” According to Kondratov, many of the readings she spoke of were copied by hand or typed copies. (*ibid.*)

The similarities with the beliefs and activities of Voskhozhdenie, particularly as expressed at the annual summer retreat, are striking. Subtle bodies, uplifting emotions, yoga and searchings for the inner reaches of human potential are all central ideas for Voskhozhdenie, as we saw in the previous chapter. Nina’s focus on the social and intellectual elements of the group also unite her with the members of Voskhozhdenie, as we shall see more clearly in Zoya’s spiritual journey later in this chapter.

While Kondratov understands the attraction to such groups and the social interaction they provide, he sees them as based on illusions. One group he particularly disdains is the Folk University of Complex Self-programming which he came upon in the city Kuibyshev (the city has now returned to its historical

name, Samara). The credentials of the organizers of this university perplex him almost as much as the subjects it offers (much as the educational backgrounds of those in the New Age in Russia had perplexed me at the beginning of my research). They all had higher degrees and worked in National Academies and universities. Yet, they conducted serious research into the bio-field, parapsychology, telepathy, hidden abilities, Hatha yoga and auto-genic training. Kondratov notes that they eventually began studying mystical-religious literature, but replaced the word religion with science, which he says is characteristic of the occult. The lectures he found curious include: “worlds from the other side”; “electric technology in the service of the search for god”; and “concrete methods of acting on the personality in world religions”. While he designates the organizers of this university “mystical fanatics”, he does not have benign feelings for the Samarovskii group either, although they are not so harsh as those felt toward these researchers. And this despite the conclusions made by nearly all of the doctors, professors, historians and philosophers he spoke with on the topic. Kondratov notes that “almost all of them believe that one should not categorically reject the usefulness of Hatha yoga, a purely vegetarian diet, and the study of the method of auto-training. But all in the right doses” (*ibid.*). He fears that such groups attract people with psychological problems and illnesses, making them susceptible and easy targets for charlatans. This argument is reminiscent of those put forward by activists in the anti-cult movement in Russia and the West today. All in all, however, Kondratov sees the interest he found across the country in yoga, raw food and miracles as simply part of a passing fad. In some ways he

blames science for this, because it is constantly offering the world new miracles and ideas previously considered impossible or unattainable. But he is comforted by the belief that the new fashion will soon pass and people will become aware of how ridiculous it is. An Indian yogi, he writes, would be “horrified if he saw the silly self-activities on the green clearing,” (*ibid.*). And we can imagine that Kondratov hoped the participants themselves would also soon reach the same self-realizations that he did.

Research into such notions as bio-fields and hidden abilities was not new to Russia in 1984. It had been taking place for many years in Soviet Russia and continues today. An *Izvestia* article from 1982 discusses experiments on the bio-field that were performed at the Institute of Evolutionary Morphology and Ecology of Animals in the name of A. N. Severtsov in Moscow. Unlike the folk university, this is an established state institution. The research involved the unique sensory ability of a rare fish known as the Little Nile Elephant. Thinking this article may have been a parody, I looked it up and discovered that such a fish does indeed exist. Apparently, the fish has an electrical organ that enables it to detect and determine the level of intensity of electrical and magnetic fields. The scientists involved in studying it, including a respected professor of biology, an engineer-physicist, a doctor of biological science, and a doctor of geological-mineralogical sciences, saw their research as an opportunity to capture the human bio-field. They brought in what they considered to be the type of people who would emit the strongest bio-fields – clairvoyants. While four of the participants registered no bio-field activity with the fish, in two cases the impulses of the

electrical organ changed significantly (Myshkin 1982). The author of the article does not offer this as conclusive evidence of the existence of a bio-field or clairvoyant abilities, but at the same time, his matter of fact presentation adds a certain credibility to these possibilities.

A similarly uncritical tone is found in another article from 1982 about a new scientific field, yuvenology, which promotes healthy life styles and underscores the limitless hidden potentials of the human body. According to this article, the Social Institute of Yuvenology opened in Moscow in 1977 and brought together specialists from many fields: Geneticists studied the liquidation of illnesses, psychologists and cyberneticists studied the improvement of the intellect. The goal of this science is to “teach a person to use his physical, moral and intellectual gifts – hidden reserves – in order to preserve the parameters of youth for the whole extent of his long and fruitful life” (Nat and Shabel’skii 1982). Key to this science is emotional stability, rational eating habits, motor activity and toughening.⁹⁵ Through lectures, the institute promoted such activities as, “Self-regulation – the path to health and long life,” “New Aerobics,” and “Effective trivialities that improve health and longevity.” They also organized healthy walks and runs in the woods. According to the article, the head Yuvenologist in Russia, L.M. Sukharebskii, was 83 years old at the time but did not even look 55. Sukharebskii explains in his own words how he maintains his youthful vibrancy:

Until I was 55 I was a normal person with many bad habits that regularly ruined my life. And then I thought about how to change

⁹⁵ This was a key aspect of the ice water activities done by the Healthy Family group. The healthy living textbook described in chapter Two also devotes a large section to this idea.

my style of life. I stopped smoking, started to diet, taking into consideration the particularities of my own organism. I built a home stadium in my apartment – very simple one. I go to bed at the same time and I get up at 5 am. Morning exercises, contrasting shower, for breakfast I have a glass of warm water⁹⁶ with strawberries. My diet consists of bread, vegetables, juice, and I eat meat once a week. I should say that rational eating plays an important role in the formula of health. It's been established, for example, that the rational limitation of the amount of food consumed lengthens life by 30 to 40 percent. And also it's important not to forget about such effective means against stressful situations that await the contemporary person every day, such as mini-auto-training (Sucharebskii in Nat and Shabel'skii 1982: 6). 06-17-1982; IZV-No.168).

We see here the basic elements of Healthy Family – exercise, toughening, and a healthy, primarily vegetarian, diet. And while spiritual questions do not arise in the article and perhaps at the Institute as well, the experiments into hidden reserves and potentials segue smoothly into the New Age strivings toward higher selves and self-perfection.

During the 1980s one avenue actively researched into such potentials was hypnosis. And while some were unable to publish their work in the USSR, other researchers of hypnosis were lauded in the mainstream press. In 1983 *Izvestia* published an article about Vladimir Raikov's work that included first hand accounts of the results of his hypnotic treatments. According to the article, Raikov is a doctor-psycho-therapist and professional artist who had been researching hypnosis for twenty years. Indeed, the authors of *Psychic Discoveries*, first published in 1970, discuss at some length Raikov's work and demonstrations they allegedly witnessed. These demonstrations concerned Raikov's method of transforming average people into great painters. According

⁹⁶ Warm water in the morning came up time and again during my research in Moscow.

to Ostrander and Schroeder, his method consisted of artificial reincarnation through the assistance of hypnosis. The *Izvestia* article does not mention reincarnation, but enthusiastically describes how Raikov was able to use hypnosis to bring out artistic abilities in people who had previously never even touched a paintbrush.

According to the article, Raikov worked at a regional medical clinic in Moscow and used hypnosis to cure such mundane problems as hyper tension, ulcers, heart disease and alcoholism. His claim to fame, however, is his artistic work. Raikov believes that the creation of art gives people a feeling of freedom, liberation and confidence, all of which help them tap into their inner potentials and improve their quality of life. According to Raikov, hypnosis helps people mobilize their strengths and overcome fear. And while new found artistic ability is what brought him fame, he explained that hypnosis can help a person realize his full potential in any activity. In the article, Oleg, a medical student who learned to paint through hypnosis, describes the overall effect of the treatment: “The séance was a few days ago. I feel energetic and my thoughts are clear. My memory has improved and I’m able to work longer. I’m learning my school material quicker. And I’ve also become calmer and balanced.” It is this overall improvement that Raikov aimed for. According to the article, the goal of hypnosis is ultimately to “help a person find himself” and “to give a person the possibility of attaining his own individuality, and to mobilize his intellect and undiscovered strengths for solving important problems” (Aleksandrova and Tutorskaia 1983: 5).

The *Izvestia* article provides a positive assessment of Raikov's methods and further notes that he has been published in the *Psikhologicheskii zhurnal* of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and that his research is well-known in scientific circles in the USSR and abroad. My interviews with women who participated in alternative practices in the 1980s and a review of this mainstream newspaper indicated that the eighties was a period of flourishing ideas and experimentation in the Soviet Union. But did this interest suddenly appear with the transition from the stable if stagnant political reign of Brezhnev to the uncertainty of several short-lived unknown leaders? *Psychic Discoveries* seemed to point to a longer history of research into the hidden reserves of the human organism. The authors discuss research conducted in State laboratories on parapsychology, hypnosis and extra-sensory abilities dating back to the 1930s. We learn that a professor Leonid Vasiliev had been conducting experiments on the effect of telepathy on body movement since that period (Ostrander and Schroeder 1970: 38). In the 1940s Semyon Kirlian, an electrician present by chance at a demonstration of a high frequency instrument used for electrotherapy, used his intuition and technical knowledge to develop a method of photographing the energy emitting from living beings and plants. This technology, called Kirlian photography, eventually led to aura photography which is used today by many New Age practitioners in Russia as a diagnostic tool (*ibid.*: 202). The bulk of the book is devoted to Ostrander and Schroeder's experiences researching experiments in parapsychology in Moscow during the 1960s. They describe numerous séances, demonstrations and interactions with Soviet scientists involved

with such research. The nature of the topic and the sensationalistic quality of the book cover prevented me from taking their information at face value. As we have seen there are certain discrepancies between their depictions and Soviet ones.

I did find, however, a book that seems to provide a more reliable view into the activities of that period. This is the book *Reniksa* by Aleksandr Kitaigorodskii,⁹⁷ a physicist-mathematician and skeptic. His work, published in 1967, is an in-depth look at pseudo-science and a handbook for arming oneself against charlatans. He was moved to write such a book due to what he perceived as a growing gullibility amongst the population, the popularization of pseudo-scientific ideas, and the inadequate level of scientific education in the populace at large. As with Kondratov's *Izvestia* article, Kitaigorodskii blames to some extent the scientific community for the spread of such beliefs, but he places much of the blame on the media, which he accuses of devoting far too much time to such nonsense as telekinesis and stories about miracles. Articles that declare the limitless possibilities of science only encourage belief in inexplicable phenomena by those uneducated in the complex science at hand. In fact, they undermine science as a whole, he says. Science was wrong before, they argue, and soon this new idea will be heralded as the latest scientific breakthrough. The field of science itself is to blame for much of the rise in pseudo-science and gullibility in the society. The official ideology-based pseudo-chemistry and pseudo-biology that held sway in the academy during the late 1940s and 1950s created a serious distrust of the scientific community. This ideological turn in the sciences is best

⁹⁷ I do not know if he is related to Kitaigorodskaya who developed the alternative teaching methods we shall read about later in the chapter.

exemplified by the biologist T. Lysenko who in a speech in 1948 denied the truthfulness of basic genetics: “Materialist theory of the development of living nature is senseless without accepting the necessity of the inheritance of acquired individual differences by an organism in particular conditions of his life, it’s senseless without the recognition of the inheritability of learned abilities.” Also, according to Lysenko, one species could transform itself into another by sheer will (Kitaigorodskii 1967: 122).

As harmful as this ideologically based science was, it was the activities of his own time that pressed Kitaigorodskii to write his anti-pseudo-science book. He was particularly incredulous at the growth of the publication of newspaper articles and books devoted to such phenomena as parapsychology and supernatural events. The upsurge started, he writes, with the publication in 1962 of a book by Leonid Vasil’ev called *The Mysterious Phenomena of the Human Psyche*. By 1964 the book was on its third printing with 130,000 copies available. Commenting about the book he writes, “Never in my memory had one of our publishers printed such open propaganda for the supernatural. Reading the essays I didn’t believe my eyes.” The book according to Kitaigorodskii is “propaganda for contemporary magic and parapsychology.” It discusses Vasil’ev’s own scientific experiments with dreams, hypnosis, involuntary movement, telepathy, clairvoyance and telekinesis, some of which are described in the book *Psychic Discoveries* (*Ibid.*: 201). Vasil’ev’s book was quickly followed by the publication of 100,000 copies of *The Biological Radio-Connection* in 1963, another book that uses science to try to prove the existence of supernatural phenomena. According

to Kitaigorodskii, the publication of these books “signaled a blossoming of activity by our lovers of parapsychology” (*ibid.*: 202). More articles appeared, and a group of scientists formed an academic section “with the trendy name” the Section of Bio-information.

After reading yet another of the seemingly endless flow of articles on parapsychology, Kitaigorodskii entered into a public debate on the topic. The article, from the March 7, 1965 edition of the newspaper *Moscovskaya Pravda*, discussed a case of “skin vision” in the Urals. Scientists had gathered there to examine the subject, who could allegedly see with his hands. Kitaigorodskii wrote a counter article for the newspaper and was then invited by the editors of a popular science journal to observe a telepathic séance. When the séance did not run as smoothly as planned, Kitaigorodskii explained that the organizers used one of the favorite techniques of pseudo-scientists: they declared that the presence of skeptical thoughts in the room clouded the energy and prevented the accurate transmission of information (*ibid.*).

Aside from the glimpse into the range of scientific experiments on the outer reaches of human potential that were taking place during this period, Kitaigorodskii’s book is relevant for yet another reason: he discusses at length and at times in great detail some of the basic tenets of Theosophy. In a chapter he calls “The Theory of All Kinds of Miracles,” he gives a brief historical overview of some of the early experimentations with psychic phenomena. And while he discounts their explanations of such events, he does offer detailed explanations of such Theosophical ideas as thought forms and astral bodies, quoting directly from

works by the Theosophists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater. One excerpt from Besant's *Ancient Wisdom* explains:

The astral sphere is the region of the universe that is closest to the physical sphere. Life here is more active than in the physical world and forms are more plastic... The outer appearance of the astral world looks like the physical since a significant portion of astral objects and bodies are twins of bodies of the physical world, that is, the astral body is in essence the shadow of physical objects. They have the same outline, but are transparent, but to people who have astral vision they are visible immediately from all sides and from within...An astral body will change its appearance with amazing speed because astral material takes on new forms under the influence of the smallest thought.

A later excerpt from the same book discusses the interaction of thought-forms and the astral body:

Theosophy teaches that space is filled with flying thought-forms. They fly around us and hang on us, pulling or pushing our astral bodies. Thought-forms can be blue, red, black, violet, gold, green and gray. By intensively thinking about a person and imagining his image, a person creates his image in the astral sphere and sometimes, for example, by putting all of his soul and desire to see the person into the thought or by simply accidentally having concentrated on him at a given moment, then he might see that astral image.

Kitaigorodskii, of course, calls these explanations of parapsychology complete nonsense and even dangerous, but their inclusion in his work does provide widespread access to Theosophical ideas and useful information to people interested in such spheres. It is to these very people, the women I met who had become involved with alternative spiritual health during the late Soviet period, that we now turn. Their stories and spiritual journeys provide colorful tales of this ambiguous and ever-paradoxical era.

Sveta's Journey: the Personal Health Crisis

As with her first experiences with Hatha yoga, Sveta's second voyage into the world of alternative spiritual health was also triggered by family illness and crisis. A pivotal time for her was during the years of 1983 and 1984, when she became involved with the club Healthy Family, began exploring psychology and the powers of the mind, deepened her studies of Indian spirituality, and delved into Orthodox Christianity. This was the period directly after she ended what she describes as a difficult marriage that was rushed into at a young age, and at the beginning of her marriage to her current husband, David Persitz, with whom she co-directs Voskhozhdenie. Her whole family was under duress and in need of healing. The official channels were offering little help, and instead she was sent on a search for alternative ways to heal her family. Her search led her to the club Healthy Family, where she began living a healthy life style and learning about the inner abilities that lie dormant inside us. In this excerpt she offers a glimpse of her family's state of disarray and of her early participation in health activities, which were critical to the formation of her current spiritual world view, which emphasizes holism, positive thinking, unity, healthy living, and the importance of understanding the positive impact of crises and illnesses:

Towards the end of 1983 my whole family except me was completely sick. My son had severe psychiatric problems and it was understood that they were incurable. These problems were ensured by the relatives of my husband, along the male line. We aren't taught – in schools or college – what are called the signs of psychiatric illness. And when I got married at a young age I of course didn't notice anything. We were in love, but it was all very difficult. It became clear later and doctors told me that along the male line, that is, his father and my son had signs. So towards the end of 1983 my son had psychiatric problems, my second husband

was depressed because his first wife wasn't allowing him to see his daughter. I don't know if that happens in America. Maybe it also happens there. Here unfortunately it's common behavior. That is, that's how a woman gets revenge on her husband who left her. And my daughter was diagnosed with a chronic illness. She had gastritis. She was then eight years old. And the worst was she had an inflamed kidney. It was a serious illness, and she spent time in the hospital several times and that would help a little bit, but it's an illness that doesn't go away, and doctors, that is, official medicine confirmed that this diagnosis is never lifted. A person has it forever.

Naturally an optimistic person, Sveta was not deterred by the negative prognosis of official medicine. She had a family to care for and was not going to simply accept defeat. She began searching for help, and during this search she came upon Healthy Family, a movement that to this day continues to play an instrumental role in her life and world view. While the movement no longer exists as such, many of the leaders are still active in the alternative health sphere in Moscow, and many of those who no longer work together on a regular basis, still gather together for the yearly summer spiritual health retreat they started back during the early 1980s.

But I was always an active person and today I'm the same and have never believed in the complete victory of any type of evil. I know that there's always something you can do. We just know very little and official medicine knows very little in order to truly help. But we had already tried lots of hospitals and medication with my daughter and also with my son, and I saw that they didn't help or if they did help it was very temporary. Then I began to search for nontraditional methods. And my friend at the time also was looking for nontraditional methods of treatment, and together we came across this remarkable club called Healthy Family that was in Moscow. These people united in order to lead healthier life styles than was accepted as the norm in our society. It was nontraditional in that every Sunday hundreds of people gathered with their children, starting with newborns, and pregnant women participated in the movement. First we met on the outskirts of Moscow, by the ponds, but then we moved to Gorky Park in the

center of Moscow, which strangely enough is right nearby where our group gathers today. We jogged and did various exercises and swam all year round. That is, we swam in water in the middle of ice. They even threw newborns into the ice water. And that movement I think was extremely important in general for Russia. It was primarily in Moscow and several 1000 people participated. Later they broke up into smaller groups, and our group had around 100-200 people at various different times.

Many of the activities of the Healthy Family club focused on physical health, on jogging, eating nutritious food, staying active. But even early on there was a spiritual aspect to their practices. Meditation and the connection between a healthy mind and healthy spirit were actively pursued. During these early activities we already see the importance of the birth experience and the transformative effects positive birth experiences are thought to have on a person's life. Chapter Six explores this idea in much greater depth. Water birthing in particular is highly revered in the Russian New Age community as a more spiritual and loving way of giving birth, and the children who are born this way are widely considered to be more spiritually developed.

And children who were so to speak christened in ice water right after they were born, grew up very healthy. Along with this we had a movement called conscious parenting, where birthing took place in water. Igor Borisovich Charkovsky, who is known in America, was the founder of that movement, and now people participate in it throughout the world. Children are born completely different. And they grow up completely differently. They are open, happy, they're friendly towards nature and they're much healthier. So this all started at the end of 1983 and the beginning of 1984. We did Hatha yoga. Actually I studied Hatha yoga for the first time in 1977. In the club Healthy Family we had a children's group. We ran not for speed but for health. We ran very slowly, but during that we did dynamic meditation. We did for example a program of cleansing with energy meditations, where we cleansed our organs and vessels. With children we did things a little differently. While running we played "fairy tales" with them. For example we'd imagine that we were going to a

different planet or that we went deep down into the ocean while we were actually in the little river in Moscow. But it helped. And in addition to that there was a course on proper nutrition. First we tried the separate food system and then my husband became a complete vegetarian. At least we started to pay attention to that. We started collecting herbs. We would drive out of town to gather various healthy herbs. And the most important of course was the cold water, which created a micro-stress for your organism, which then called up all the protective strengths of the organism in the fight against illness.

This notion of micro-stress is another common thread in New Age philosophy in Russia, reappearing in a variety of forms and situations. Time and again the women I spoke with talked about the importance of stress, crisis and struggle in their emotional, physical and spiritual development.

This is the method of Porfiry Ivanov. He was the main teacher, but unfortunately by that time he had already left the earthly plane, but in his name our teachers taught us to be friends with cold water and of course the most important thing – even more important than cold water – was that one has a completely different mood. There was a mood of unity. That word remains key for me to this day in terms of how I judge myself and of everything that happens around me. If something is working for unity then it's positive. If it's for disunity then it goes without saying that it's negative to me. And the club Healthy Family taught us to find unity with nature. Children were taught that nature and we are one. And our physical body also demands respect. And if it gets sick we should also respect that illness and love it and try to help it become healthy.

This mood of unity Sveta found in this club reflects a deeply held conviction – later developed into her Temple of Peace project. She hopes to see one day a unity of spiritual beliefs, a unity between science and religion, and a unity between people of all nations. It is at its core her pluralistic vision of the coming New Age, and it is rooted in her early activities back during Soviet times.

The club Healthy Family was where Sveta became involved with clairvoyant healing and in turn came to realize that such methods only touched the surface and did not reach the cause of illnesses or disrupted relations. It was this realization that led to deeper explorations of psychology and the power of the subconscious mind. Ultimately, this insight led Sveta to a career change, personal transformation, and later the realization of her mission in life – the creation of the Temple of Peace. She came to believe that the answers lie within the individual, who has the capacity for limitless powers of self healing and transformation. The individual gained significance not only as the transformer of his or her own life, but because of the nature of the universe, each individual thought became important because it contained the potential to influence the outside world. If only people could become conscious of their lives and their thoughts and would stop living “mindlessly like robots,” as she called it, then there could be a positive transformation in the world.

We see here the influence of her intellectual background. The focus is on the thinking individual who works to live in a conscious manner.⁹⁸ Furthermore, individual development is not only for personal self-improvement or gain. A person’s thoughts and actions can affect people the world over. We are individuals joined as one in unity, which is why self-control is so very important. Such control is not easy, however, and is a life-long or multi-lifetime struggle for even those few who truly attempt to attain it. One path to such control involves the deep exploration of one’s un-conscious self. But awareness is only the first

⁹⁸ Again, this is reminiscent of Pragmatist thought, particularly Dewey’s notion of the “intelligently controlled habit” (“Habits and Will” in *Human Nature and Conduct*) and can also be seen as a reflection of the communist promotion of class consciousness and enlightenment.

step. One must become aware in order to control and transform. And while she at first practiced clairvoyant healing in the Healthy Family group, Sveta came to understand that self-awareness must come from within and that she was only dealing with external symptoms.

At that time there was very little literature available on the theme of clairvoyance. I don't remember. If there was, there was very little. We learned to feel sick organs with our hands and to heal each other and for several years we worked doing that, we healed people. It was all within the framework of the club Healthy Family and it was always free. That was our principle. This work was free because we made our money as an engineer and mathematician. I was a programmer. And in addition several times a week we helped people. But then we realized that it wasn't correct. Because if the clairvoyant or healer simply takes the illness out, on the energy level they harmonize the field of a person and the illness gradually leaves, nevertheless the cause remains. And we understood that the cause of a person's illnesses lies within his thoughts/thinking, in his incorrect emotions, incorrect worldviews. And these reasons remain and they continue to act and either the old illness returns or he gets new ones. And we're not talking only about physical illnesses. But certain incorrectnesses of interrelations are manifested. Or a certain hole/blunder [*prokol*] in one's fate manifests itself. And we understood this and started studying psychology.

Sveta also emphasizes here that healing was a helping activity and not a way of making money. Even now that she works full time as a healer, she prefers to distance herself from those who use the healing arts as a way of becoming wealthy. Sveta's explorations of alternative psychology led her to methods that helped reach inside the psyche and develop that self-awareness that she found so crucial to the healing process. The methods she found most useful at the time, rebirthing and the Science of Mind, were brought to Russia from the U.S. during *perestroika*. In addition to self-awareness, the original holodynamics provides techniques for using thoughts in the pursuit of more material and mundane self-

actualizations, such as career success. Again, Sveta made clear to me time and again that these materialistic American pursuits were not the aspects of holodynamics that she later adopted.

We received our second degrees at the First Medical Institute. There was a department for raising one's qualifications. Usually they only take medical workers, but at the time we already knew a lot and they made an exception and took us and we received a psychological education. And at that time we went through a lot of various educational seminars. And here we have to thank our American teachers and a few Germans and then later Indians, but at that time it was mostly Americans. Because people began to come to Moscow to teach what was to become one of my favorite methods, free-breathing. This was in 1988. They led a big seminar for us and since that time we haven't stopped leading groups, having seminars and breathing ourselves. This is a very unique method. I can say that later many other Americans came, and my master, who gave me an international certification in free-breathing, was Ann Leonard. At that time she worked with her husband, but they later divorced. Ann led a remarkable professional master-class for us. Before that there were others and Stanislav Grof came several times and his students – they're part of one of the branches of free breathing, called holotropic breathing. I don't remember if Leonard Orr⁹⁹ himself came here or not. I don't think so. I never saw him. He's the author of rebirthing which is considered a central aspect of one of the central methods of free breathing. We learned the technique, and we give lessons ourselves. And we've added some of our own innovations to the method. We now teach a seminar where we have 6, 7, 8 sessions of free breathing sessions for half the day. Each session is different from the previous one with various modifications. We've been doing that since 1988.

The breathing exercises help a person tap into the subconscious mind. But it is the thoughts themselves that are key. Although she views the methods as rather primitive, a common attitude amongst Russian New Age practitioners about American practices and society more generally, Sveta studied with a group from the Science of Mind, which teaches about the power of the mind. Here was can

⁹⁹ Founder of method called rebirthing breath-work. Chapter Six discusses this method in greater detail.

see the seeds of thought forms and egregores. Sveta also was attracted to this group's focus on unity.

Then a group from California brought the teachings of the Science of Mind¹⁰⁰. We have the books by the originator of the Science of Mind. It's a remarkable movement. It is structured like a religion, a religion based on the science of mind. And the majority of pastors there were women. An interesting picture. The philosophy of the self-regeneration of the body. That's what's most important. Because the methods there were in my opinion rather primitive and not that much was new. There were a few canonical prayers. Very good ones by the way. They were prayers calling on a person towards positive thinking. The Science of Mind is based on an understanding of the world as a unity. Everything serves a good. A person is given an illness so that he would become conscious and change something inside himself. That is, it's exactly the same world view that we currently profess and advocate. I'm very grateful to the members of the Science of Mind. They visited here many times. Then there were also many other seminars. A group of Reiki teachers came from Germany. I took their seminar. There were several initiations. It's an interesting method but I would say it's purely an energy method. It's a somewhat primitive practice. But it sometimes helps a lot. I don't remember now what other seminars there were. There were a lot. And in the end I started my second profession and by that time we had already worked many years as psychologists. But at some point my daughter revolted and said that she was tired of having parents who were never home, and she asked us to give up one of our jobs. She hoped that we would give up psychology. But we decided differently. First I did and a few years later my husband did. We then became professional psychologists. And I haven't regretted that for a second, although I was a successful programmer. I led a group and we made very good programs and everything was good there even though it was during perestroika. Others didn't have orders, but we had them. But I realized that in the grand scheme of things no one really needed that. What was needed was to work with people. I realized that that was my destiny.

We see here that Sveta understands the economic risk she took by changing careers during the unpredictable time of *perestroika*, particularly since

¹⁰⁰ Also called the Church of Religious Science, SOM was started in 1916 by Ernest Holmes, and is considered a branch of the New Thought movement. Primary influences are Emerson and Mary Baker Eddy (founder of Christian Science).

her company was doing well in comparison with others at the time. It was a risk well worth taking, she says, and one that fits well into the overall philosophy of individual responsibility and ultimately led to where she is today. It was an individual choice to make a positive change in her life by striking out on her own. In the end, for her it was not a difficult choice because all that she was learning was so close to her own views. And clearly she was involved with learning a lot of new and alternative methods during this period. By studying psychology more formally, she felt that she was simply learning the specifics and names of concepts she already intuitively understood or knew through earlier practices.

The first psychological studies we had were the Science of Mind. I consider that our first psychological experiences. Although before that a few things were intuitively born inside. It's possible to say that karmically it was inside of me. Because then later when I began to study classical psychology in the First Medical Institute, now it's called a medical university or academy, that is, it's the most serious medical institution in Russia, that was approximately during the years between 1988 and 1990 we studied in the psychology department – I understood that everything that we were being taught, I already knew. I just didn't know what it was called. Freud of course we all knew. That Jung advocated this or that I learned, but I intuitively knew this myself, completely, even instinctively, and I felt this and told people and advocated these ideas myself. And then in 1992 we had our second important event. That is, in 1984 – Healthy family, 1988 – free breathing, and in 1992 Vernon Woolf came to Moscow. First Kirk Rector, his assistant, came to Moscow and gave the first seminar on holodynamics. It was truly a milestone that determined the rest of the path because since then holodynamics along with free breathing have become our main methods. And just in the last few years our own methods have appeared.

Returning to her discussions about Healthy Family, Sveta reveals that while it was a large club, not all alternative practices were met with the approval allotted to those of Indian origin. Some groups were investigated, persecuted and

had difficulty finding literature:

The club was absolutely not official and absolutely not a state club. Simply people. There's an interesting story. Sometime in 1983 several adults who were tired of the fact that official medicine couldn't do anything to help with health, started jogging in Novodereevo. This is a sacred area of Moscow. There are remarkable ponds there and relatively clean air for Moscow. This group was headed by Anatolii Soloviev. They had come from the club "Cosmos", which attracted around 2000 people to the outskirts of Moscow. Every Saturday they jogged and did dynamic meditation and swam in ice water, using Porfiry Ivanov's method. These were students of Ivanov. But then the group split up into smaller groups and Anatolii Soloviev began jogging in the Novodereevo region. And there they found a rather elderly woman who was giving lessons to children – some sort of dynamic meditation and they were throwing them into the ice water and these two groups united and formed Healthy Family. That is, the whole family would go to the ponds and then we moved to Gorky Park in the Center of Moscow. So we had ice water, Porfiry Ivanov, Hatha yoga, lectures and workshops on nutrition. And then a small group of clairvoyants was formed. Soloviev started this group, called Self-Perfection. And here we worked on our negative traits. There were a lot of interesting methods there. And then we learned how to see with our hands that which isn't visible to the eyes. At that time books about non-traditional healing were very rare. It was all, you could say, forbidden. The government didn't sanction or encourage such things. In fact, the club Cosmos was investigated. Even Ivan Ivanich Koltunov - the leader of Cosmos, who started that movement, he was also a student of Ivanov - he was excluded from the Party. He was a communist, but then it wasn't possible not to join the Party if you wanted to have a career. In those years it was that way. Before perestroika. I think that's why he joined the party, although maybe he truly believed, I don't know. I know only that he led the group Cosmos for several years, completely unofficially. But people gathered in the forest and ran and swam in ice water. And of course the group called attention to itself and he was called up by some Party organs and he gave up his membership card. He said that what he was doing was right and that if he couldn't do it as a Party member then he would do it outside of the Party. He did that and right around that time, 1983, the group fell apart into small pieces and we were part of one of the splinters in Novodereevo.

We see here again the complexity and contradictions of the period. Hundreds of people were gathering in the center of Moscow outside in a public park and learning about healthy living and alternative healing methods. And yet the practices were not openly sanctioned by the State and therefore practitioners were at the whim of Party apparatchiki. And while the leader of Cosmos was willing to sacrifice his official career for his principles and the sake of the group, soon after he did so, the larger group fell apart. Again, however, this was not a complete failure because it led to the formation of Healthy Family, the very group where Sveta got her start in the field of alternative healing.

And so back to Healthy Family - in 1984, in January, starting in the beginning of January we all started meeting on Sundays and on Thursdays we also studied aerobics and other exercises, and we also separately studied clairvoyance. We changed our eating habits and my husband became a total vegetarian. And in the middle of January my daughter, despite everything, said she also wanted to go into the ice holes. But her kidney disease requires continuous warmth. But we decided to try it anyway because we understand that micro-stress can truly do miracles. And there was a miracle. We brought along her medication in case something happened. Of course, we didn't need the medication. And my child's face, which previously had been completely sallow-colored, suddenly became rosy. She literally changed right before our eyes. About 10 months later we went to the doctor and she had tests done and the doctor said you know in general it's possible to retract the diagnosis. But we still need to observe her. And then again a year later we came back, and she had had several tests done during the year, and they declared her cured, which simply never happens with that disease. And she didn't have any more attacks, right up to the end of school when she stopped practicing all of this and she quit running – she used to run a lot – but then in order to get her school leaving certificate she needed to pass exams, which she did very well, but she started smoking and three months later she was married and her health went downhill again. But that's another story. It's her own choice.

Sveta reveals so much about her approach in this one small paragraph.

She had given up on the medical system because it could not provide a cure for her daughter. Her positive attitude and belief in the infinite possibilities of the human organism led her to keep seeking. And yet, she did not completely reject the medical system. She returned for tests and used her alternative methods in conjunction with the medical analyses to chart the progress of her daughter's health. The shock to her system, the mini-stress, was able to bring about changes from within that medication was unable to attain. Sveta describes the changes as miraculous and truly believes people are capable of miracles. But it is up to them. Her daughter made the choice then to jump in the ice hole, but later she also chose to neglect her health. While Sveta is not happy with her daughter's choice, she understands that only her daughter can make it.

So first I started working as a psychologist-healer. At first I worked as a healer, I would say. We started doing clairvoyant/psychic healing, we taught correct nutrition, and we went into ice holes with people and taught them how to pour cold water over themselves, etc. We rarely go into ice holes anymore, but I pour cold water over myself in the shower every day, and my husband does also. And the funny thing is that despite doing this for many years, every time just before I pour the water I make a face just like you did! A few seconds after jumping into the ice water or pouring it over you your organism goes through something that can only be compared with a song. In the sense that it's unbelievably colorful. Every vessel comes alive and your organism sings to you out of gratefulness to that micro-stress and apparently it heals itself. Because I can't imagine what our lives would be like without that. Of course later it became clear that we could omit certain things temporarily. But still the thinking and relationship with oneself and the world doesn't change. But my daughter again had health problems. The disease didn't completely return, but she had problems with her stomach, and she still does. But that's easy to understand from today's perspective. So far she hasn't accepted the world. As long as she doesn't resign and see the good that happens around her, her intestines will not become normal. A person who has an illness of the intestines has not digested something in himself or in the surrounding world.

She has digested practically nothing. She condemns everything and she doesn't like anything. And that's independent of the country or social structure. She hates Moscow. She hates New York. Only the little town where she's in graduate school, she likes it there. But of course even that place has a lot of shortcomings. It's inside of her, not on the outside. As long as she does not recognize that, her intestines will have problems.

Part of the problem as Sveta sees it is that her daughter has not reconciled herself with the world about her. She has an antagonistic attitude which creates stress and leads to illness. Here we see a tension that is characteristic of Sveta's world view. Ultimately she is working for transformation – personal and global – but for this transformation to take place she must accept herself and her relationship with the world. She is well aware of this conflict and disagrees with David's extreme interpretation. David says that “we need to be happy with all that happens in life. Otherwise we become slaves to circumstances. If we try to change the world around us then it means we are not happy with the world around us. Local disharmony is just part of general harmony. It's necessary for a part of the whole harmony. It's a moment of general harmony, although to part it may not seem positive. We need to accept the situation.” But Sveta is not satisfied with the world around her. She sees violence, hatred, suffering. In fact, healing itself is geared towards change. That is where she makes the distinction. Acceptance, she says, does not mean doing nothing: “You should accept rain, but why not open an umbrella? You're right and I'm right.” This was her relativist rebuttal to David.

Zoya's Journey

While family illnesses brought Sveta to the Healthy Family club, Zoya, much like Nina from the article above, was primarily attracted to the social aspects of the club. Zoya is a music teacher at a school that allows alternative teaching methods. She has an upbeat and friendly nature and was drawn by the positive energy of the club. She herself was an active member, but she was particularly impressed by the affect the club had on the children, including her own child. As we saw in Sveta's story, there is a strong belief that the children of the new era, particularly those born in water, are of a different evolutionary level.

The club existed half-legally. A girl friend of mine brought me there. It was mostly by word of mouth. And it was all done under secret of night. When my mother in law found out she had a fit. She began calling, searching. She made things very unpleasant for me. She was scared. What I did was water pour cold water on her [my daughter]. My daughter was still small, she was not yet three years old. And my mother in law was afraid that the banya would seriously harm her. The teachings of Ivanov weren't secret, but they were not wide spread. And this was his students who gathered after his death. I never saw him and never knew him. In and of themselves the people were very pleasant and truly helped people. There was such a pleasant and joyful atmosphere that I haven't seen anything like it since then. Maybe only at Sveta's club now. Yes. For one thing there weren't that many of us. Anyone could come with a problem and no one would be turned away. And they observed everyone really well. And this all continued until doctors started to attack us... Therefore we decided half-legally to work in secret without making any noise.

Although she did not give birth in water, Zoya was very proud that she had known Charkovskii, the founder of water birthing and birthing with dolphins, through the club Healthy Family. As we see here, the idea of water birthing is still controversial and not accepted by all in the medical establishment. During the Soviet period, however, it presented a particular problem because alternatives to the state system were not incorporated into the state bureaucracy.

But at that time many people, for example Charkovskii, came to our group - who taught water birthing. He's the most pleasant person, simply unique. He himself has a very strong energy. I brought my friend to him and she gave birth in water. I didn't. I already had my child. He helped a lot. He worked with couples. Everyone who gave birth under him was very satisfied. But he had a very interesting incident. The state didn't want to register a child because it wasn't born in a birthing house and there wasn't an obstetrician and thank god she saved the placenta in the freezer and only then was she able to register her child. I remember that. In fact, last Saturday there was a TV show about Charkovskii. I went to the dacha and watched it there. It was about water birthing – for and against. But when we were engaged in this I don't recall a single death. But now they say there were. But I think that if there had been they would have closed everything. So I doubt there were any. And those children who were born in water, they have an incredible intuition and a certain understanding.

One complaint that many women expressed about Soviet medicine was the reliance on antibiotics, which were considered the standard cure for illness. Zoya liked that she could learn alternative ways of staying healthy without medicine. She learned that everything was already at her disposal – she could maintain her health through physical activity, nutrition or even ingesting her own urine, although she said she was never ill enough to warrant such a remedy. As we see below, sometimes the children are not only seen as more spiritual, but also more daring. While Zoya was hesitant to start toughening her system with cold water, her daughter took to it right away. Seeing her daughter pouring water over herself helped Zoya to take the plunge herself.

And that club, what attracted people to it. Indeed there was an atmosphere of health within the club. We gathered in Park Kultury Gorkogo. Not right in the front of the center entrance. When you go in it was off to the right. On the right side artists work, and we were downstairs in a half-basement type space. At first we were there. We talked about cleansing the organism, about urine therapy, about the fact that you can fast and not die, and that you can live without antibiotics. That you don't have to use antibiotics

when you have the flu, that you can change your diet or, even better, abstain from food. We learned that you need to toughen the body, that you can't pour cold water on yourself immediately, but you need to work up to it gradually. And at that time I was thin, it's just now that I've gained weight. But then I didn't want to pour cold water on myself. I wanted to practice yoga. And my child herself went down that road. She listened to all these lectures. I didn't even realize to what extent she was taking it all in. And when I was home she had me run a bath for her. I went to answer the phone and when I returned to the bathroom I noticed that she was pouring ice cold water on herself with a small plastic pail and was really enjoying herself. So I had no choice but to stand next to her and also start to pour cold water on myself. I liked it and I continue to do it to this day. I do it when I take a shower. I used to pour water out of a bucket, but now I just let the cold water pour down on me from the shower and all is calm. It's just at first there's that "ahh" and it's true I stoop my shoulders and when the water hits me my back immediately straightens out. Something happens to me that is pleasant for me. It's not for everyone, but I really love water. I love to swim and everything, but I didn't think I'd like ice cold water. But ice holes we made over Christmas, in winter. On the 19th of January. I didn't think I'd ever do that. And Charkovsky was there. I have a picture. And when his album came out there's the picture of my daughter in it. My daughter is swimming in the ice hole. She really liked it. It's true that nearby there's a banya. My daughter dunked in the water three times and she shouted that she wanted more, and I said enough. Everything's good in moderation. I mean, it's winter more or less. But it's true, in kreshinsky frost no one gets sick when they bathe in the ice holes. They say that there's some sort of magnetic field and it's not without reason that that day is considered holy. You don't get sick. So, my memories about that club are very pleasant.

Zoya sees many parallels between Healthy Family and Voskhozhdenie.

She was drawn to the warmth and sociality of both clubs. And while she notes that the activities at Healthy Family were forbidden, they were somehow available and actively pursued. And the club even had its own membership card and logo.

But at the club we studied everything, everything that was forbidden to study – astrology – but that we studied in people's apartments. Someone would offer up their apartment. And at that time the dues were five rubles a month so that the club would stay

together somehow. Just like Sveta now collects twenty. And we didn't pay anything else. I was struck and surprised by these people. They risked their own safety. From what I heard they even attracted fatally ill people. I didn't need that kind of help. But I believed them and am endlessly thankful to them for everything. I also studied yoga then and then like Sveta's Wednesday evenings now... Then it was a different day. I don't remember. We had a very interesting membership card. There were two dolphins and inside they formed an image that looked like a mother and inside of her was a child. That was our emblem. And you could choose any activity. There was yoga, simply discussions about health, and then even after the club fell apart I continued to follow these things. I already bought books. Urine therapy. But since I didn't have any horrible illnesses I can't really say. Urine therapy – even cures cancer. There was a Sveta, a different one. Sveta knows her. I don't remember her last name, but she cured herself of cancer with urine therapy. I don't know how, but that's what happened. They rub in on themselves, do massage, drink it. There's a whole technique. But that's when it's an extreme situation. But now that Sveta, I saw her recently, she's gone into Orthodoxy. And there she also has a circle and they listen to her.

Although Zoya is baptized, she continues to be much more involved with alternative spirituality than Orthodoxy. She sees a transformation taking place with the children who are born into and raised in this alternative spiritual atmosphere.

But our Sveta does holodynamics. But at that time rebirthing had just arrived and we were at their classes. Sveta and David led courses on rebirthing back then. Olga, my daughter went to the classes with me. She took yoga with me and she practiced at home. She saw everything and heard everything. Sometimes when I look at her I get the feeling that a small yogi lives at home with me. Somehow god sent her. Everything reached her despite how young she was at the time. What I was struck by – what I wanted to mention about the children who've gone through water birthing with Charkovskii – in the banya there were also separate baths. And there was also ice water in the baths. And when he threw a newborn baby in the water like a kitten the baby swam directly to his mother. This despite the fact that there were I don't know how many people swimming there. I was amazed by that ability. And these babies swim. They swim on their own. And I

was struck by how flexible they were. I have such pleasant memories of that time.

Zoya continues to participate in activities with Voskhozhdenie – she goes to the weekly meetings and takes trainings and attends the summer retreats, but there is a sense of nostalgia in her recollections of the Healthy Family period. The community feeling inspired by gathering together outside under dark of night is no longer there, and she clearly misses it. Even if the toughening could be painful to the feet.

But mostly we worked on toughening and being healthy. Toughening is done when you want to be healthy without medicine. For example, you rub something on yourself. But they didn't give us anything. They gave us a basket and we walked barefoot in the snow. You know, you start out at home in the bath and then more and more. My daughter loved it. When there was snow we never missed a night. Every evening, when it was dark, because lots of people gathered and screamed out swears. My spouse would have killed me. So our group ran around and then you needed to rub your feet so the snow didn't melt. It's painful. It even feels like hot drops of water after the snow. It's a very revitalizing procedure. But you really don't get sick if you regularly strengthen your system. We did that every day in the winter. But I no longer do it. It was a group activity. They said that it's better to create a collective field ... If you go alone then the people around you who see you and don't understand could harm you somehow. So it's better to do it as a collective.

Zoya is not alone in feeling a sense of a lost collective. It is a sentiment heard often when speaking about the Soviet period, that back then people spent time together and really cared about each other. Friendships were strong and even though some of the collective activities were required – such as pioneer work, student field work, or even work meetings – the friendships and camaraderie that developed there were real, and many now regret their passing. But the depth of relationships that developed in the circles of people who met in secret under dark

of night or in friends' apartments seem to be particularly missed by some. Even Sveta with her focus on the individual still longs to recapture the sense of commonality she felt in those days. And in a sense she is striving to do this with both Voskhozhdenie and its group meditations and with the Temple of Peace. As we saw in Chapter Four, it is this joining of the spiritually developing individual within the common group that is key to the vision for the New Era on the horizon.

Anya's Journey

State-sponsored alternative health

Anya, an incredibly energetic woman in her forties who admits she has a tendency to dive deeply into several activities at once and then quickly lose interest, has passed through nearly as many careers as spiritual practices. She started as a medic and then studied cosmetology, worked in a daycare and for a TV program, sold shoes in a market place, and currently works as an independent business woman. Similarly to Sveta, her spiritual path started with a family illness, in this case her chronically ill son. Originally from Saratov, Anya moved to Moscow to go to college, and was not part of the Healthy Family club. Her path touched upon many of the same practices and ideas as others in Voskhozhdenie, but because of her close work with the medical sphere, she also experimented with several of the officially sanctioned alternative healing methods.

Unlike Sveta and Zoya, Anya was raised in a religious environment, but as a child she says she never truly grasped the spiritual meaning behind the rituals of the Church. She became more interested in spiritual matters as an adult. This

interest deepened after the birth of her son, who was a sickly child. As she became more involved with the struggle to find a cure for her son's illness, she became aware of the importance of healing herself and raising her own level of understanding. A key aspect of this search for self-improvement entailed finding ways to control her own surroundings, to create her own destiny.

Anya's spiritual journey sent her through a series of different trainings and practices. Early on in medical school she had experimented with pressure point massage, and later she became interested in psychology and studied Gestalt therapy, the psychology of communication, kinesiology and hypnosis, which she became familiar with while working with Mikhail Lazarev, a doctor, hypnotist and musician who developed prenatal music therapy to help strengthen the mother-child bond. Throughout this later period she was searching first and foremost for a cure for her son's illness, but she came to view this illness as God's way of challenging her to grow spiritually and to open herself up to her intuition and the signals inside the body. Anya's pull was always more towards Eastern religions, particularly Indian, rather than Christianity.

[After the institute] at first I worked as a midwife. And then, especially since I already had my son, and he was often sick – once he even stopped breathing in my arms. I brought him back to life, and for a time I was busy with his health. The main way I tried to help his health was to work on myself. I tried to understand which of my actions led to him getting sick. Now that a lot of time has passed and now that I've discovered such books as *Vedic Culture* – from the first line I read that the path to spiritual life comes either through suffering or from the desire to get a lot of money, a whole lot of money, or the most amazing, the highest people, these are people who believe from their first days that absolute exists, god, and they go on that path from pure motives. But they are extremely rare. But I probably had the following motives – curiosity, and the curiosity grew out of a desire to help my son

recover from his illness. With him it began with toughening. With me it began with observing people. I've been really lucky with people - people who I learned about life from, like a window letting through light. I've met such people often. That is, people who are wise with life experience. People you can study spiritual practices from. These were not famous people. The first one was Pasha, the massage therapist of my son. He studied Tai kwon do, it's an eastern practice, he did massage. But in so far as I did massage myself, given my profession, it was easy. We were taught massage in the institute. And then I did massage on my son. It's easy for me to do that. And what Pasha said surprised and sometimes even shocked me. I understood that he was able to control circumstances. And I still couldn't control them. That ate at me.

Like Sveta and David, Anya found that trying to control circumstances led primarily to frustration. It was when she focused on her inner self and her own abilities that she began to feel better and her child's health began to improve. Initially, however, she looked for external ways of healing, and explored traditional Russian healing as well as Chinese medicine. She notes that even during Soviet times these practices were allowed and taught. She mentioned that she had an opportunity to learn herbal medicine but missed her chance, instead going a more personal route, learning to develop her own inner abilities through yoga. Her lessons from Chinese massage classes in school helped her to understand some of the inner processes at work with yoga and helped her to tap into the energy that, as she notes, was slumbering inside of her.

The herbalist, she simply gave me herbs. She just asked me from the first moments of our acquaintance – tell me, what is it from? How can you cure it? I said I didn't know. And that's all. She had come to me at a time when she was searching for a student. Such people apparently can feel people. But at the time I didn't understand that. And I let the chance slip by. We just stayed good friends and nothing else. This was a person who could control the situation, she was interested in me, she wanted to teach me something. But it didn't happen. But something else happened. A

friend of mine called – we had met in the birthing house and had given birth at the same time. She said that she started to study Hatha yoga and that now she knew how to do something. I asked what she knew how to do, and she said come over and I'll show you. But in so far as massage was something I knew well, I understood that certain strengths sleep within a person if he doesn't wake them up. And the study of Hatha yoga started to raise that same life energy that is now starting. All those flows that are not visible. They exist. I started to do massage more actively. My hands started to really help. I had worked as a massage therapist. I took courses. I did pure massage, manual massage. During Soviet times there were also courses like that. In Soviet times they persecuted people mostly for ideological reasons. If you worked at something practical then there was no problem. The thing was that ideology was supposed to be only Soviet. If even the church supported Soviet ideology then I didn't protest. Everything was much easier. It wasn't such a scary country.

While she notes that there were alternative practices during Soviet times, Anya did encounter some difficulties at work due to her yoga practices, which she was incorporating into her teaching methods at her son's preschool.

And then I got really lucky – in this way – after I worked in a preschool, when my son had grown a bit – most Soviet women – if they accompanied their children to the preschool then they worked there. . . . So then I went to work there, and here the consequences of the fact that I had studied Hatha yoga started to come out. We had full contact with the children. A whole group followed after me. They adored me. They listened to me. They listened to me in that they slept, they gained weight. But we had a noisy group. And according to our Soviet ideas noise is a sign of lack of discipline and an inability to control. And having worked at one preschool for a year they fired me and said 'you're a revolutionary, not a preschool teacher'. At the other preschool that I went to through a friend I worked for five years – until Misha finished and was ready to go to first grade.

During Misha's preschool years Anya searched for methods to bring him back to health. This search led her to the Center for Bronchial Pathology, where she worked at first as an administrative assistant and later led courses in alternative psychology. This Center is where she found the massage therapist for

her son and where she met the hypnosis specialist, Lazerev, who was the Center's director. While this was an official state medical facility, Anya was able to learn and experiment with a variety of alternative methods here. It was already *perestroika* when she started working there, and American visitors were invited to offer courses on a wide range of topics.

And as parallel to the preschool we went to a health group where they taught us - us because they first taught mothers how to love. It was called the group of health. The leader was Mikhail Lazerev, a doctor, pediatrician. And there I met that same Pavel Ivanich Makarov, the massage therapist. Then I already started to have an understanding of life. That strength of energy – that it in fact exists, is powerful and there is a person who is able to control it. So if I knew that Misha started to get sick, I took him to a séance to Pasha. And he no longer had allergies, he no longer had false croup. And I was calm. And I thought as long as I can take him to Pasha, I should try my own hands. And I tried my own hands and it started to work. And so that things can go further you need to study somewhere.

With her background in medical massage and yoga, the massage techniques Anya learned at this center came easily to her. Although she saw that it was only one step. But the release of energy gave her the strength to go forward to face later stages in her development.

I went through courses – channel massage, point massage. Channel massage is like point massage. The points are situated along the channels. The channels are inside a person, but their energy is projected outwards to the skin. And when we massage the skin we practically work on the channels. And channel massage – with a certain pinching- it's rather interesting, rather painful and effective. But this type of massage is very close to masochists. If the channels are not clear then it's horribly painful. But later it's worth it – you feel lightness. Even if small bruises – they go away and the inner state remains. But as they say now, if you start to solve one problem then you can start working on the next problem. If you solve one problem then you can start working on something higher. So thank god that we still have problems.

For Anya the courses were not simply a means for learning new skills. She saw an opening up of her inner intuition, and interprets these experiences she went through for her child as a gift from God.

It's not secret knowledge. It's for normal users. For those who already feel a certain energy and those who can influence. I started to feel when working with Misha. He often had nosebleeds. And before that his head started hurting. Because of my son God gave me the chance to hold back and as I understand all my life as been structured in such a way so that I developed and helped regain the health of my son. Because this stage was a powerful school for me – the center for Bronchial Pathology. Misha took lessons there and I worked there. I was an administrator, an organizer there. But given that I had the medical institute and I read a lot of various literature I was able to work with parents and children. Every day I had two hours of work with parents. We worked on a selection of their problems, on how to talk with a child, and since a new direction like that appeared for me, I started being interested in psychology and I went through courses about dealing with conflict situations.

Anya admits that as a strong-headed woman such courses were useful in her own personal and, as we will see below, work life.

And further things got much more interesting. I had a serious problem with the head doctor. He was a person with a lot of complexes. He was a talented musician, but his profession was as a pediatrician. But when he was engaged with two directions he was a horrible administrator. Since nothing was working out for the administrator, where will the problems be? With the person in the true position, me. And I tolerated it for a long time, but it was difficult for me because if I had planned one thing in the evening, and if he would come up with other plans, I was supposed to know about them. And there were always calls at 11 pm when my husband and I had already settled in and talked, the Mikhail Lvovich would call with a new idea and ask what I had done. At 11 pm he would be reprimanding me. But I was very lucky at that center because Carol Holmes organized courses in kinesiology with us. You've probably heard of this. And at one of the first seminars - Carol always picked a person out from the audience who she intuitively knew she should help. And for the first seminars the organizer of the seminar was me. This was around

1987-88. And Carol called me from the audience up to the stage. Mikhail Lvovich was in shock. He ran up to her and said – you don't want to pick her, don't touch her. And Carol said I need her. That is, there was a conflict on the stage. Carol did a séance with me and she said we need people like this. You will work with adolescents. And then it turned out that that indeed is what happened.

Despite her tense relationship with the director, Anya found the Center to be a good space for spiritual exploration and creativity, and she even had some good words to say about Lazerev, who she describes as a colorful and talented person who simply found the wrong path for himself.

So Mikhail Lvovich took me in even though he was against it. He did hypnosis. He's an interesting enough person. He took from the Americans the system of prenatal pedagogy. In America there was a system that allowed a pregnant woman to connect around her waist a belt that played her heart beat, so the child would bond with the mother from the very first days - there was a connection with the mother. He reworked this system in such a way that he started to bring in music, songs. He chose the music individually for each pregnant woman – that is Mikhail Lvovich Lazarev.

While at this Center Anya was able to develop as a person spiritually, but for some time her focus was still on her son. Anya's work at the Center came to an end during the period of late *perestroika* and she entered the career path that she continues on to this day – business. She continued her healing practices and her spiritual path, but she was less focused on her son and was no longer involved with healing as part of her work. She notes that it was when she started really focusing on herself that she started to see changes in her son's health.

As strange as it seems, when I started working on my own life and when I began to look after myself and not just my son – when I started working on myself our relationship became equal. I let go of power over him and he started to develop himself. My son was in the seventh grade at the time when *perestroika* started. We had really bad pedagogues at that time because they needed to pay a lot

of money to those pedagogues who had already learned to work. And those pedagogues who worked poorly or who moved to Moscow from small towns with the hope of finding a better life, they were satisfied with low salaries and worked in schools. So for me it was strange to see how a teacher of Russian language didn't command the style of speech, well her speech was not correct. I understood that my Mishka didn't accept the teachers because we worked together a lot and read various books and we talked a lot. At first I taught him with the newspaper when he was one and a half years old. I would point to the newspaper and he could say where certain letters were. But then later he told me to hold on, hold your horses, let's go a little slower. And I realized that I needed to do something else. Why not go to the market? I asked a friend if she wanted to join me, and she said it was too dirty there, but I went to work there. In the beginning I was very embarrassed. I was especially embarrassed in front of the people I worked with at the camps. The market is rather dirty work. But I came to understand that people think the work is dirty if you relate to them rudely or if you cheat them. If you simply help them pick out what they want and try to understand what their problem is – what is keeping them from buying – then they start to relate to you with respect.

Although at first embarrassed to work in the market, which was associated with capitalism, cheating, and greed and was generally looked down upon as uncivilized work, Anya was able to create a meaningful experience for herself in the marketplace by incorporating her spiritual healing interests and impulse to help others.

And my work was built on the basis of helping people. People came to me – either someone close to them had died or they were sick and not healthy, that is, my medical profession continued on the market – seller – consultant – psychologist. At first it was amazing. I had winter coats hanging and here come by my pioneers who I had worked with in the camp. I had a whole group that I had taught massage – in the cabins we had set up various massage tables. Then I worked in a child's camp, and they gave me a group to work with, a health group. It was rather active work and this work continued on the market. This type of work is so strongly ingrained inside of me that I can't escape it. It was interesting, but the market surroundings were difficult because I

worked with each person for around two hours. People would end up buying things, but it was a long process.

By entering the market place as her career, Anya was also able to avoid the tension that exists within the healing fields about the role of money. As we have seen, those who take money, particularly large amounts of money, are often held in suspicion. Furthermore, healers themselves feel conflicted about the money because some of their skills are deemed gifts from god or the universe. How can they charge for something that is not theirs? This is a common worry for women in the spiritual health fields in Moscow.

If earlier I couldn't take money for massage, because the gift of healing is not mine and I can't take money, but I still need to live on something. And money – that which I got for selling things – so I have the following chain – I receive money from products, but I still do my psychological practice. I'll never forget when I started getting my own money – we didn't have enough money to get by with my husband – no matter how much I tried to economize it was always complicated. And here I realized that I could allow myself to buy books. It was such a joy. I could feed my son and buy him fruit and then the second joy was that I could buy myself books. So that process of learning continued. Plus there was an enormous collection of people who I came into contact with. It was people from small towns, from villages, it was people from intelligent families and everyone needed to find his own word. Because every person has their own system of values. So the practice was powerful.

For Anya the market was also a place for spiritual development and practice. Here was a pluralism of people of all backgrounds, social and ethnic, who needed to communicate. Finding a common language and connection with these many people was a challenge, but also a profoundly rewarding experience for her.

Valentina's Journey Alternative Pedagogy

Many of the alternative methods Anya encountered were practiced in the open and taught through official channels. Chinese massage, acupuncture, hypnotherapy, music therapy, yoga were not underground methods. Valentina also began her spiritual journey through an alternative but sanctioned methodology. A professor of English as a second language, Valentina came upon Dr. Lozanov and suggestopedia while taking a required professional development course in the mid-1980s. This course turned out to play a decisive role in her life. Through it she gained an interest in psychology, one strong enough to send her back to graduate school for a second Ph.D. And the course opened her eyes to the hidden possibilities buried in the subconscious, and she began to work on developing and improving herself and the quality of teaching she could offer her students. According to Valentina, the main idea behind Lozanov's teaching is the need to create an atmosphere where the reserves of the subconscious can be activated. There is an element of hypnosis in this. With suggestopedia students relax and become susceptible to the lessons that are taught through the use of music and other actions that are hypnotic so that the learning takes place not through the conscious mind but at the subconscious level through art and movement and song.

In 1982 I entered graduate school. When I had two children I went through a very interesting stazhurovka, it was called "activization of possibilities of personalities of the collective". It was where you came to visit me during the English lesson. When I learned about that method I learned that I wanted to seriously study teaching and psychology and I entered graduate school in psychology in the Institute of Foreign Language. And for three years I was in graduate school. It was a very difficult time for me, in terms of morale. I had a, I think, simply crazy advisor. That is, she was not

normal psychologically. With sadistic tendencies. But still, I finished graduate school. And I defended my dissertation and went back to work at my economics university. The stazhurovka – it was a seminar to raise one’s qualifications that I was sent to. Every five years teachers on the faculty have to take a professional development course to increase their qualifications. It was a teaching methodology – for teaching foreign language. But it was such an amazing method that was very psychological. I really liked it. Its roots are in suggestopedia, from Bulgaria. Dr. Georgii Lozanov. He’s a doctor and a psychotherapist. He developed the method of teaching called suggestopedia. It’s a very psychologized method. And Galina Kitaigorodkaya, she worked with Lozanov, she worked at Moscow State University, and she developed her own center. I went to her center simply in order to increase my qualification. It turned out to be my destiny. Then I went to graduate school. Then back to work where I had previously worked. There everything had changed. The director of the department was changed. There was now a young departmental head and she really didn’t like me, and I became the head of the section of English language. It was a very large section – 25 professors - and I became an administrator, supervisor and continued to teach. I was leader for 3 and a half years. The environment was filled with conflict. And then my health started to decline.

After returning to a difficult work environment, Valentina began falling ill with all sorts of problems. Interestingly, her first step was not to visit a doctor. Instead she decided to change her lifestyle. She ran and poured cold water on herself as a healing method, although she was not a part of any of the outdoor health circles in Moscow.

Aside from general symptoms – racing heart, head aches, I got hives, then spasms of the blood vessels, and it’s interesting how I began to treat the spasms of blood vessels. When I had such spasms my head would spin. I would fall. Instead of going to the doctor I began to jog. I simply understood that if I begin to go to doctors for treatment that I’ll become an invalid. So I began to exercise. I thought it would bring general strengthening to my system. Literally in a matter of days I started to feel better. I continued to jog for a month and the symptoms passed. Although I had a few attacks at various points later in my life. But more or less I simply cured myself. Plus, it was the end of grad school and

it was stressful at work. This must have been 1986. My back hurt, I was having problems with blood vessels.

One of my friends told me that she started to pour cold water on herself and that it really helped her. And I developed my own method of using cold water. I decided to use ice water, but not all at once. First arms, then legs, then up to my waist. That is, I decided not to lower the temperature of the water, but to gradually introduce the water bit by bit to my body. It turns out that such a method already exists. But I came up with this idea on my own. I felt that I would feel better that way. And for 13 years I poured ice water on myself. Or swam in cold water if I was near water. I didn't read literature about it. Then later I began to read about it and about how good for you it is. But first I just started to do it and then later I read about it. I read about how it works, how it affects you, that you're not supposed to dry the water off with a towel. When you pour cold water on yourself then energy from inside begins to cleanse your skin. If you begin to wipe the water with a towel then the energy gets directed back inside and there's an energy imbalance.

Then after a while I noticed that my back didn't hurt at all any more. I began to treat not my back, but my nerves, and I stopped having colds and flu and my back stopped hurting. And I liked the cold water. It doesn't take much time. If you're in a water hole then of course you stay there for a while, but you can just stand under the faucet or pour buckets of water on yourself. When we went to the dacha my husband used to pour buckets of cold water on me. In Russia there has long been the tradition of pouring cold water on oneself – especially after the banya (steam bath). Either cold water, or walking in the snow or in a hole in the ice. Hot-cold that contrast – there's such a tradition in Russia. But when I started doing this – in city culture that tradition was of course lost. And I started to feel good. But I once went to a doctor – homeopath. I went because one of my colleagues said that she was having problems with nerves and asked to go together. It was at the same time when I was having all of the conflicts at work. And I went to the homeopath. They took a lot of money from me. Did a whole series of tests. I calmed down – they looked at blood vessels in the brain and said every thing was normal.

Ultimately, however, Valentina realized that her personal life style was not the primary cause of her illnesses. Rather, the negative atmosphere at her job was slowly wearing her down and making her ill. It was with this realization that in

1989 she, like Sveta, took the extreme step of quitting her stable job, after which she began to fully immerse herself in alternative methods that went beyond teaching.

And then I realized that these measures weren't for me. The main reasons for my condition remained - problems associated with my work. I decided to leave. I read - one of my students brought two books by Eric Bern - *Games People Play* and *What We Say after We Say Hello*. I read these two books and I saw my scenario where all of these problems were happening and I decided I didn't want that scenario. And therefore I was ready to make such a drastic decision. The situation was very negative. It was 1989 and foreign languages were being cut in all universities, professors were being fired. It was possible that I wouldn't be able to find work. But I already decided that I didn't care, I was leaving. And when I left, my teacher - Galina Kitaigorodskya - offered me a job with her. Literally two days after I quit. I called her about something completely different. She asked how I was doing and I told her that things were very bad at work and she said come work for me. Her center is called the Center for Intensive Foreign Language Learning. And it turns out that at that time the center was expanding. It was perestroika and there were more contacts and while universities were cutting foreign language departments there was a great demand for spoken/conversational language abilities. And since 1989 there have been very serious changes in my life. Very, very serious changes.

This was already the period of late *perestroika*, and new opportunities were opening up for travel and for foreign teachers in Moscow. Valentina took advantage of both of these possibilities along with the new creative space she found at the Kitaigorodskaya's Center.

Well for one thing I began to work in a place that was really interesting for me and very comfortable - a high level of creativity, everything nonstandard, a lot of freedom. In 1990 I went abroad for the first time. Galina sent me to England for training in assertiveness. She sent one of her psychologists and we were invited there. And with that everything began for me. It was a training course for us. Before the trip there was yet another thing. I began working there in September 1989 and at the same time we met - our friend brought his acquaintance - he was a clairvoyant.

And he started to talk about various fields and bodies and began to diagnose and to open things.

During this same period she began to explore some of Russia's spiritual roots, finding particular interest in the Rerikhs, who she had previously known only as artists. According to Valentina, this was also a period of growth in the realm of alternative healing, with new medical facilities opening up and new opportunities for the establishment of private healing centers.

And then we were already interested in seeing the clairvoyant just because he was a clairvoyant. He wasn't from Moscow, but he lived here for about half a year, and I became very close with him. He introduced me to Rerikh's books. Up to then I had only known about Rerikh as an artist. I knew that there was such an artist and I had seen some of his paintings. And then it became more interesting. We started going to the museums and looking at his works. His books weren't available then, but some of his writings and notes were there. And this clairvoyant came to Moscow to study at the center for non-traditional medicine. That is, at that time – around 1989-90 – there was a growth in non-traditional methods of healing. He came here to study and he introduced me to a woman, a homeopathic doctor who had studied in the same courses. And aside from being a homeopath, she also is a bio-energetic healer. It was private courses, for money, but it wasn't underground. Just like now there is the Institute of the Person, Norbekov's institute, there was that center. It was a private business.

Her first trip to England was on a course on assertiveness training sponsored by Kitaigorodskaya's Center. While she primarily went for the chance to see England, she continues to this day to give lectures on assertiveness. These courses are widely attended at her school, primarily by women interested in learning how to get ahead in their careers.

Out of that acquaintanceship then there was also my assertiveness training. At the time I didn't even know what assertiveness was. I looked in dictionaries – the course was called Assertiveness at Work – to see if it was needed or not. But for me it was my first

trip abroad and to England. I never had been to England, the country of the language which I taught. So for me it was primarily a trip to England. That training wasn't important. But the training ended up being very, very important to my life. As soon as I returned I immediately began to give lectures and courses for the students at our institute – those who had come to learn our teaching method. Because these methods and practices went very well with our method. It's important that the behavior of the teacher is assertive and so that that students are assertive and that was remarkable.

Valentina's Center offered educational exchanges with international organizations involved with alternative teaching as well as health methods. Such exchanges continue to this day and Valentina herself continues to explore new methods for herself and her classroom.

And then I helped Galina organize an international conference that she had at our center. And it was a conference on non-traditional teaching methods. And quite a few people came from the west – people who had studied under Lozanov, who had studied suggestopedia or who were searching for other methods of teaching and since I was responsible for this, I talked with everyone on the phone, or by fax and met them at the airport and I became friends with some of them. And amongst them there was the president of the English organization called the Society for Effective Learning, and he invited Galina and me to the conference in England.

Valentina's English language class touches on all of the senses. It's a full body work out, incorporating music as well as body movement. I sat in on one of her current classes. Using the suggestopedia method, she introduces each new phrase or subject with particular body movements and with pictures. The sounds, pictures, and physical motion are all designed to promote rapid learning and to aid in the memory processes.

The main idea of Lozanov's teaching is that it's necessary to create an atmosphere or conditions where the reserves of the subconscious are activated. And at the same time the important thing is the teaching of conversation and not the rules of language.

There is also an element of hypnosis. Suggestopedia is when students relax and are susceptible to the teacher who by means of music and certain motions that are hypnotic and ease the learning of the information – not through the conscious mind but through art and movement and art. Galina worked out her own system but she took from Lozanov's and at the conference in England I was at several workshops with completely non-traditional orientations to learning and even some not directly related to teaching language, including kinesiology, educational kinesiology. It's from Dr. Denison. I was at that workshop – they are movement exercises in order to bring the mind and body into harmony, to establish balance. They are remarkable exercises. But it seemed so complicated to me – the muscle test – it's a system that you really have to study. You can't just do it and be done with it. You have to really put yourself into it. I took a few exercises from there and started to use them, but not the system. And really I used them more for fun than for their effect.

But then my health interests split off into several directions. For example, when I would feel stress or exhaustion, I would go to that woman, the homeopath, who worked with bio-energy and homeopathy. Probably I wouldn't have gone to her on my own. But one of my friends started asking if I knew anyone – she had problems with her child – and I remembered that doctor - she had given me her telephone number – and I took my friend to her and when I was there I asked her to check me as well. And I started going to her and developed a friendship with her – and I continue to be friends with her and to go to her for treatment. That began in 1990. She has her own office within a center for women's health (women's consultation). She is called a doctor-bioenergy-therapist. It's a private business. But her primary method is homeopathy and then she works with various instruments, instruments that harmonize energy currents – electricity, magnetism. But besides that, she was in China for a long time and she works with meridians and she sees what is happening inside a person's organism. And she became my personal doctor. She studied in many places. In the Center for Traditional Medicine, the Korean system, in China several times and then she developed on the basis of all of this a super sensitivity. At first her services were very affordable. Now they've become more expensive but it's still possible. A visit with her costs \$20. But she takes many people for free. She doesn't do this for money.

Yet again the question of money comes up. Valentina felt

compelled to assure me that this woman is trustworthy and genuine and

offered as proof her flexibility with money. Since the early 1990s Valentina has continued to explore different spiritual health practices, attending numerous trainings and groups. We will learn more about them in Chapter Seven, along with her spiritual advisor, who is a clairvoyant healer who also does not take money for her services.

Dasha's Journey: Spiritual Crisis

Dasha is a woman in her forties who I frequently saw at holodynamics events. Her entrée into the spiritual world differs in certain key ways from that of the other women we've met in this chapter, although it too began during the Soviet period. The primary difference is that it was not instigated by a health crisis or a desire to live a healthier life style. Instead she suffered more of an existential crisis, a crisis borne out of the feeling that she had already accomplished all of her goals and that now everything was meaningless. Surely there must be more than career, marriage and children, she wondered. This crisis transformed her from a rather carefree materialist nature lover to a fully conscious believer in the spiritual world, the immortality of the soul and the cosmic harmony between humanity and the natural world. It was a step that around 1980 or 81 sent her on a path leading from the occult to eastern religions, Orthodoxy, Vedic thought and many others to her current position as creator and teacher of her own spiritual curriculum for children:

And somewhere around college age, maybe around 20, I began to sense inconsistency between what science taught and my inner feelings. That harmony of nature, that amazing beauty, even in unseen nature. I remember how I was surprised when we looked under the microscope at the antennae of mosquitoes. I was astounded by the amazing beauty, and it seemed to me

meaningless. What is it for? Who sees it? Why such astounding beauty in such an insignificant animal as a mosquito? And then it even bites! And then those thoughts and generally the feeling – the mystical feeling of nature that I always had, it started to reach the level of thought, that is, I came to understand that everything isn't simply that way. I sensed that here was some sort of design, some sort of certain consciousness and development also goes in the direction of consciousness.

This all began internally. I didn't read anything. It was simply from the experience of life, studying life and contemplating. That appeared spontaneously. It was an inner process. And I had a very severe crisis. Well, like any young person I strove to get an education, establish a family, have a child. For me they were goals, and while I was working towards them I had a full life without any crises of the spiritual sort. There were crises connected with love. That's all normal, but there weren't any spiritual crises. Everything was the way I wanted and then I remember when my oldest son was about two or so – I was then 26 years old or 25 – around that age I had, which was very abnormal for me, a huge spiritual crisis. It was in the forest. I had drunk a lot. That is, I had a somewhat altered consciousness because of the alcohol and suddenly I sensed the meaninglessness of life. It was very sharp, very sharp and very abrupt, very unexpected and mercilessly harsh/cruel. I was in an absolute pit. I realized that I had accomplished everything. I had my education. I have a family. I have a child. Everything. What do I have to live for now? So when you learn and become wise you see it's all meaningless. So that's all there is? That was a real discovery for me - that that kind of approach in life couldn't be. It simply couldn't be.

It is interesting how looking back Dasha refers to the altered consciousness created by her drunken state as facilitating her spiritual crisis and realization, just as Grof looked first to the LSD experience and the members of Voskhozhdenie, again following Grof and others, turn to breathing exercise to create such consciousness changing experiences. Following the mystical theme, Dasha explains that after this experience new worlds and information simply

came to her. It was then that she first became involved with an underground occult learning group.

From that trip I returned a different person. I understood that there is a plan and that within that plan a person cannot die. That the death of a person, that ends with the death of the body, is meaningless and it can't be – according to the laws of nature. And it seems that that inner discovery that I was given from above, it led to books coming to me. At that time it was forbidden, but it worked out in such a way that a young man – a close comrade of my youngest cousin – he already went to this secret esoteric group. They studied Theosophy, Blavatsky, Alice Bailey. This was my first entrance. He introduced me to this guy – he had samizdat literature. It was all typed on a type writer. We copied them – they were in these big folders. We had a group and we met in apartments. One time the police caught us – when we were at that guy's place. He made extra money at some factory and we were at his place and he told us about some secret teacher he had. We discussed books, we tried our first experiences at feeling energy. It was really interesting and enticing and the police discovered us. Apparently one of the neighbors saw out the window that young people were gathered there. We had to pretend that we were celebrating a birthday. But they saw what we had in our bags and they confiscated our books and wrote us all up and said if you gather here again there will be big problems. So we changed our location.

Like the other women now involved with Voskhozhdenie, Dasha found herself particularly attracted to Eastern spirituality and less in touch with Christianity. Dasha attributes much of her initial distrust of Christianity to the Soviet propaganda she grew up with.

At the same time, I had a very strong aversion to traditional religion, of, that is, Christianity. I understand now that it was based on our Soviet propaganda that was very intensive – the anti-religious propaganda was. There were a lot of children's jokes on church themes where they would make fun of lines from prayers so it was really difficult to – through those stereotypical relationships to those texts – to begin to accept it. I always felt a pretentious pity towards religious people – they're poor, unhappy, they've been fooled and were uneducated. And when I realized that everything wasn't the way we were taught in school and at the

institute then came that literature – mostly Eastern. There was the Theosophical direction and then the Karmachakra one and psychedelica, then Osho – he was then Rajneesh. There was a flow of information. And if Theosophy had a complicated influence on me, because there were energy experiences – I could feel them – but there was a certain schematization – as it seemed to me then – a mental overburdening in Theosophy. It bothered me then. But Vedic literature reworked for western readers fit my way of thinking 100 percent. I felt inside that I wasn't learning new knowledge, but that I was learning what I had already known for a long time. It was complete agreement of how I felt inside with what was in the books.

As new religious and spiritual groups entered Russia, Dasha and her husband Sergei explored everything they could. She was particularly drawn to groups that promote a tolerant and peaceful worldview. Later she and Sergei developed their own spiritual education curriculum while working with the International Sathya Sai Baba Organization. In Chapter Seven we shall learn more about these experiences as well as the complex ways in which she interweaves her alternative spiritual beliefs with Christianity, which she tentatively yet critically embraced during her early experiences with the occult during this Soviet period.

Conclusion

These brief excerpts from five women who entered into the sphere of alternative spiritual health during the late Soviet period reveal the complex variety of activities, attitudes and beliefs prevalent at the time. Numerous practices were developed and studied at this time, some Russian, some from the West and others from the East. People found literature, groups, and were taking an active role in their own health and self-development. And while some underground health and occult groups were raided by the police, the state-run

newspaper published articles about and even lauded some of the very same practices and ideas these groups promoted. In fact, so much media attention was given to supernatural phenomenon that scientists felt compelled to write books in rebuttal. The State itself promoted seemingly alternative ideas and practices, offering classes on yoga and encouraging scientific explorations into our deep inner potentials. Close political-economic ties between the Soviet state and India further promoted the flow of Indian spiritual ideas and practices into Soviet Russia, continuing a spiritual bond with roots in the early precursors of the New Age movement itself.

Not only practices, but aspects of the alternative health ideas were also percolating during Soviet times. The importance of individual will, of energy fields, pure thoughts and self perfection all were promoted during these earlier years, perhaps even as part of the Soviet promotion of communist consciousness and enlightenment. And while the results were perhaps far from those imagined by the State, the women who began their searchings and personal strivings during this period retain certain values dear to Soviet state. They encourage a sense of unity and collective, with a concern for the social well-being of the broader world about them. The individuality they promote is not selfishly disconnected from the whole, but is part of a plurality of voices striving to make the world a better place by learning and developing themselves to their full potential. In Chapter Six we explore in more depth these paths of self-development, turning to life stories that draw heavily on metaphors of motherhood and birth, experiences believed to offer women particularly divine inspiration for self-transformation and empowerment.

Chapter Six

Transformation and Empowerment

Such words as transformation and empowerment seem to imply a certain finality. One might expect a picture of completion – a transformed and empowered person, or woman in the case of these stories. None of these women, however, are there. None feel they have reached spiritual perfection or that they have found all of the answers. All are still facing problems, be they health issues or relationship problems. As the women often told me, for development to take place, there must always be movement forward, and movement forward requires obstacles and crises. For those attuned to the spiritual and subtle realm, they say, there are always new lessons to learn and new heights to strive for, and it is these obstacles and problems that often act as the catalyst for such movement forward. Hearing the obstacles and sometimes even tragedies these women have grappled with it is difficult not to be amazed by their transformations and strength. These are, then, stories of great transformation and empowerment, without completion; these lives are simply still in motion, which accounts for the frailties and weaknesses that still come through.

Listening to the stories of women involved with alternative spiritual health, several patterns of transformation and empowerment emerged. Over and over the women named three pivotal moments in their journeys, three life events that pushed them forward, brought them deeper into the spiritual realm, and helped them to realize their inner abilities and powers and thus turn their lives around. These are the birth of a child; motherhood – and the problems of raising

children, particularly ones with illnesses; and relationships – particularly divorce or discovering one’s soul mate. These pivotal events sent them on journeys that turned them inward and outward at the same time.

Confronted with events outside themselves, they were brought into closer connection with the world about them and at the same time compelled to look deep inside themselves and make sometimes painfully honest assessments - of their own character, their own actions, their own responsibility for creating the situations in which they found themselves. But these painful and at times humiliating assessments came with their rewards. The same inner self responsible for creating negative events was also blessed with the ability to create positive change – both within itself and in the broader world. The methods these women discovered along their journeys offered them tools that helped them take responsibility for their own lives and helped them believe in the infinite possibilities and powers that reside within.

This chapter follows the stories of three Muscovite women as they employ alternative spiritual methods to tap into what they regard as innate powers and transform themselves through the lessons presented by childbirth, motherhood and relationships. It is the first two moments – birth and motherhood – however, that are of primary importance both experientially and metaphorically. They mark significant moments in each of the women’s journeys and inform the very methods they have adapted for spiritual development. Two of the most powerful methods for them incorporate aspects of what are known as “rebirthing” and the “birth canal.” Far from rejecting traditional ideals and roles of women as

nurturers, these women embrace them, regarding them as literally gifts from God that endow them with powers unattainable by men. Childbirth is regarded as a spiritual experience, and the gift of motherhood gives continuously, with the numerous opportunities for learning occasioned by the mother's interactions and relationships with her child and the child's father.

Childbirth and Motherhood

So, what did I do? Most of all I loved my children. I thanked God every day that I had them. Because the feeling that a woman gets through child birth, a man can never experience that feeling. They don't get that point of self-development. Therefore, my own deep conviction is that reaching such heights of self-development is maybe not even possible for men. But in any case, comparing the efforts of men and women to attain a certain spiritual potential inside themselves, for women it happens simply from out there, from above, just because she's a woman. She is simply a perfect creation of God. But for a man to reach such levels he has to exercise and train and do various practices. A woman doesn't need these practices because she does these exercises as a mother, as a loving being. But they need to work.

I first met Lyuba at a training course at Sveta and David's home. We later became closer when we happened upon the same course at Norbekov's Institute of the Person, where we were learning Sufi energy massage. Lyuba is a career woman, an independent, tough-minded lawyer in her late forties who entered the sphere of alternative spirituality relatively late, becoming involved with holodynamics and Voskhozhdenie for the first time in 1998. The occasion of her spiritual awakening happened in conjunction with her divorce in that same year. Her views on the importance of motherhood and childbirth in spiritual development reflect the world view I found amongst the women involved with Voskhozhdenie and the New Age in Moscow more generally. Childbirth and motherhood are a source of women's power and magic as well as a primary focus

point for spiritual lessons and growth. At times these lessons help a woman face great personal hardships. Other times she learns through the painful trials of her children. Many women spoke of the illness of a child as their initial reason for learning about alternative health methods. With both positive and negative events, a woman's love for her children is often regarded as a stimulus for personal spiritual development.

One of the first lessons a person learns in the sphere of alternative health is the great responsibility that comes with motherhood. This responsibility starts long before the child is born, perhaps even in a previous life time. The very act of childbirth itself is such a powerful one that the emotions and physical labors experienced by the baby at that time are believed to mark its psyche for life, causing physical and psychological blocks in the unconscious that continue to influence a person well into adulthood.¹⁰¹ This process can be a source of joy or on-going pain for the new born child. A great deal depends on the mother. The fortunate thing is that such blocks are not necessarily permanent. There are methods for releasing them, and Voskhozhdenie practices several of these methods: holodynamics, rebirthing and the birth canal. It is no accident that two of their primary methods are named after the birthing process. Before turning to the personal stories, this chapter first explores these two "birthing" methods. Both are described as powerful methods of release, of which I can attest – my first

¹⁰¹ This is a central tenet of the work by Stanislav Grof, the Czech therapist and co-founder of transpersonal psychology. He developed neo-natal and perinatal theories of psychology that indicated stages of neo-natal development that leave enduring "stamps" on a person's psyche later in life. Grof worked for many years at the Esalen Institute in the United States, influencing generations of New Age practitioners there.

experiences with both rebirthing and the birth canal methods were extremely emotional, leaving me in a temporary state of lightness and euphoria (see Fig. 16).

Rebirthing

Rebirthing is a type of psycho-therapy that uses breathing exercises to tap into the subconscious level. It can be used alone or in conjunction with other methods. The members of Voskhozhdenie use rebirthing-type breath work, which they sometimes refer to as free breathing, with their holodynamics processes, and they also give re-birthing sessions on their own. The method of rebirthing David and Sveta teach was strongly influenced by the work of two psycho-therapists - Leonard Orr, whose method is called rebirthing and Stanislav Grof, who called his method holotropic breathing. They are believed to have independently developed similar methods around the same time, in the 1970s. Both methods are believed to induce altered states of consciousness that open up the subconscious mind and at times produce spontaneous healing. Sveta and David do not follow strictly any particular breathing method and they and other members of Voskhozhdenie often use the terms rebirthing, holotropic breathing and free breathing virtually interchangeably.

In their book *The Teachings of Voskhozhdenie or the Road to the Temple of Peace*, Sveta and David discuss the physiological changes brought on by such breathing techniques, which call on a person to breathe quickly, deeply and without pause between the inhalation and exhalation of breath. This constant pause-less breathing leads to a shortage of oxygen that set off a series of mini stresses and transformations in the body at the cellular level. It is interesting to

note the important role of stress here. With breath work, ice-water therapy and with spiritual development more generally, stress and negative events are seen as catalysts for positive development and transformation. Is it any wonder then that the birth process itself is considered such a powerful spiritual motivator!

My first rebirthing experience came during a seminar Voskhozhdenie held in a small town outside of Moscow called Chernogolovka. Chernogolovka is about an hour north of Moscow and is one of many elite scientific cities that were created by the Soviet government. This one, according to David, specialized in rocket fuel. Such cities flourished under Soviet times, but now are suffering severe economic hardships because of lack of government funding. Sveta said that there is a lot of alcohol and drug abuse in the city now as well as a division into classes. The seminar was held in an experimental school for children with special needs and was attended by six teachers, all women. While we all settled down on mats in a large classroom, Sveta explained the rebirthing process to us. She said that rebirthing was brought to Russia from the US in 1988. It differs from other types of breathing because it is done without pause. During rebirthing a person, in theory, falls into unconsciousness where inner blocks are contained. Blocks print themselves into the subconscious, and with rebirthing we are able to reach these blocks more easily. Often, according to Sveta, we start to feel physical and emotional pain during rebirthing, physical and emotional. Unlike holodynamics, it is not vital to see images with rebirthing. What is important is to feel. Often with the start of breathing people feel pain in their legs and arms. She instructed us all to simply breathe through the pain, just continue breathing and to

imagine bringing cosmic energy into ourselves with each inhalation and that with each exhalation this energy is taking away the pain. If we felt emotional discomfort during the rebirthing we were told that we need to repent – to ask for forgiveness for those we have offended and to forgive those who have offended us. We should love the pain, speak to it and imagine it as something else. If we already knew holodynamics we could track the pain – ask it where it hurts, etc. We could stop the rebirthing exercise when we no longer noticed any physical or emotional pain. If something ached or if we did not feel happiness then we knew we were to keep working.

We started the exercise by lying on our backs on the floor. Sveta instructed us to just let our breathing happen automatically and to let our body do what it wanted. We were to concentrate on ourselves and to forget about our neighbors and their breathing. In rebirthing, she explained, while images are not vital, the primary image is that of oneself in a boat on a river. We were to imagine ourselves as a child and we were to send love to that child. When you breathe, she said, you become three: one who breathes, one who feels and one who observes everything (an interesting take on the idea of multiplicity of individuals within unity). When we finished breathing we could leave the room and relax. While some of the women were very emotional during the rebirthing process and cried or even screamed out, everyone agreed that they felt a certain inner joy and peacefulness after they were done.

Birth Canal

Rebirthing is an integral part of both holodynamics and the birth canal method as taught by Sveta and David. Other practitioners do not incorporate this practice. The birth canal method is based to a large extent on the neo-natal and perinatal theories of Stanislav Grof. According to Sveta and David's book *How to Live in Happiness or the Latest Model of the Universe*, Grof identified four critical stages during the birth process that leave enduring stamps on a person's psyche in later life. These stages are called the four basic perinatal matrices: 1) The first stage is the period spent in the mother's womb over the course of nine months. Here the stamp is dependent on the relationship of the parents to the baby. Loving parents will imprint a sense of protection on the baby while neglect or negative relations between the parents can lead to feelings of pain and despair imprinted in the subconscious of the child. 2) The second stage starts from the moment of the first contraction. At this moment the baby can feel that there is no escape and may be imprinted with a sense of futility and victimization. 3) The third stage is the process of going through the birth canal itself. Here the baby must struggle to get out and can develop imprints of aggression and activeness or, particularly if movement is impossible, can develop instead the imprint of helplessness and weakness. 4) The final stage is the baby's first experience with the outside world. These moments can determine whether a person grows up feeling confident and wanted or lonely and useless to the world (Prival'skaya 2001a: 32-33).



Fig. 11. Retreat grounds, July 2002

With the birth canal method a human canal is formed by people standing on all fours in a long row. Several people then form a womb at one end and a loving mother welcomes the newborn at the other. Generally Voskhozhdenie conducts this during their yearly summer retreat because it requires space for people to create a human birth canal with their bodies. The goal is to recreate the birthing process so that the people traveling through the canal can release blocks that built up during their natural births and so that this time around they can be brought into the world with love rather than fear or some other negative emotion. During the summer of 2002 I attended the summer spiritual health retreat, which that year was located in a wooded meadow area south of the town Serpukhov in the Tulskaia oblast⁷. Members of Voskhozhdenie set up a large tent out in an open field so the participants could be protected from the sun and rain. Sveta first explained to the group the main principles of rebirthing and the canal and people chose their roles. Some acted as care takers of the womb. They prepared the

“babies” for their entrance into the canal by encouraging them and offering words of love and support. Others knelt on the ground side by side on all fours to create the canal itself. The “baby” would wriggle through the canal head first on its back. Those who formed the canal were to engage in rebirthing breath work and create a field of love for the baby inside. And at the end of the canal a midwife or mother waited to greet the newborns into the world where they could begin a new life filled with love and confidence. While this method did not take place very often, the general consensus amongst those who had tried the methods at Voskhozhdenie was that the birth canal was the most powerful and amazing experience of them all. Here Dasha explains how everything came together in her first birth canal experience:

I use holodynamics, rebirthing – I tried that with them for the first time and I was reborn. Not now. It was a very strong experience. It was a state, I have never experienced such a state before. This was with Tamara and Dima. There was not a very large canal, but it was very, very dense, everyone breathed really well, there was good preparation and I had a very strong experience. It was a state of unity with everything. And inside there was the sensation of heavenly creativity – of creation, creation of creation - at the same time from the point of view of heaven and from the human point of view. That is, everything was included – like a spiritual act of creation – an act of creation between a man and woman, the birth of a child, and the birth itself. It was all at once. It’s difficult to describe but it was all together and very strong.

As we see here, the experience was not only emotionally uplifting, but also had strong spiritual meaning for Dasha. She felt an exalted vision of creation and birth and experienced them as a point of convergence for heaven and earth, a seed of strength and spiritual power.

Lyuba, the lawyer we met above, explains how the birth canal method helps one understand the universe and our origins. Through this exercise she was able to come to understand her purpose here in earth and to see why she was brought here:

And going through the birth canal is simply amazing. You enter a particular state. You breathe rhythmically, like a dog breathes. Your head – well if Norbekov says ‘sunny conscious’, here the person’s conscious flies here and there. A person falls into a trance-like state. One person might be in that state for five minutes, another for 25. Some cry, others laugh. I had horrible convulsions. It’s those sensations that we don’t remember at all. It’s the sensation of a baby being born into this world. It’s a canal from space. You understand what happens with birth? From out there to here. The soul, our souls are immortal. It’s those feelings – God, why have I come here? It was good there. What am I to do here? No one is waiting for me here. Why do I need the trouble, the physical pain – the pressed head of the new born going through the birth canal. Your head feels all of those sensations when you’re going through the canal. Everything is like going through the canal, everything trembles, energy is pulsating, and the soul that is looking at all of this from out there says God, I know why I’ve been sent here. I should have a certain strength. And there is no one around, no other living soul. It’s as if you’re in the desert, you’re drinking in the desert. And you know that there is no road back. You have to be realized, embodied.

Through this recreation of the birth canal we learn some of Lyuba’s fundamental views on the universe. She imagines a conversation between God and the soul, who has just left its residence in the universe. Coming to earth is not an easy feat for the soul and not something it welcomes eagerly. Earth seems like a lonely place. But each person is here for a reason. God has sent her soul here.

Lyuba continues:

And I remember I yelled, God, somebody, anybody of mine and I see how someone is being carried towards me, flying towards me. I remember the face of that person. Help me, someone, someone who’s mine/like me. And it turns out that there are very few like

me. Now spiritual groups have grown and there are more people like me, but if you look at the gray masses you see how many people know nothing about this. It's not possible to find a common language with them. And that's the state of your soul when it's becoming embodied. I remember that that person was in the clothing of a Buddhist monk. I saw his orange clothes and shaved hair, shaved gray hair, like a master should be. I felt his help. And there was also a deep deep feeling about where we came from. You understand, that's a limitless puzzle – where are we from, and I felt in reality where my soul came from. I understood where I'm from. And I became very sad because it's better there. And I thought God, what are we doing here on this training ground, this earth? It's a training ground. There's some sort of goal here, some sort of mission to fulfill in this world. And that was the feeling I had. But others might have different experiences. I understood my mission. I had the feeling that I'm close to Bathi satva? Practically speaking it's a sense of service for people. I understood that higher than that, purer than that, a greater joy than that doesn't exist – no where – not in Orthodoxy, not in Buddhism, not Judaism, not Islam. No where, no where, no where, no religion.

The birth canal method taught Lyuba that she was here on earth for a purpose and gave her the strength to strive to fulfill that purpose. The earth is still filled with spiritually downtrodden people. She realized that she was one of the lucky few who had found a space for spiritual enlightenment and growth, and she felt that it was her duty to use this gift to serve others. Through this experience she came to understand that her time here was a training ground for something much greater, in a space far greater than any religious creed could imagine. But this outward pull, this longing to rejoin the universe did not send her running from her earthly life. Instead it helped to focus on what she needed to do here and helped her to see the struggles in her life as lessons rather than obstacles and filled her with a sense that she had the power to not only overcome difficulties in her own life, but that she could help others do the same with theirs.

The Birth Canal Transforms the Mother Too

Sonya is a young woman I met during a kinesiology seminar at Sveta and David's place. Here she describes how the birth canal exercise is organized.

During this particular exercise she took on the role of mother rather than new born baby, an experience which she also found profoundly transformative:

And we did the birth canal, rebirthing. We helped give birth to over 300 people. I was a mom to a minimum of 100 people. A mom, a real mom. I received each one – he went through the birth canal and I opened my heart to each one. I cried for each of my children. There was a man with a big belly, and I felt like he was my son. It's not known how he was born in reality. Maybe the surgeon didn't accept him correctly. But he is born a second time and the second time he should be accepted with joy. So I accept them and open my heart, and to each of them I say, my sunshine, I've waited for you my whole life. You're just what I've been waiting for my whole life. And he believes it. And finally he understands that he was waited for on this earth. And the block that developed there then is taken away. Can you imagine, I met my children all day long. I had such an open heart that day. It's very powerful work. It's such a huge joy. It's a joy when you understand that you are needed by such a huge number of people, who are open to you. Of course, I was a mom in reality, I was pregnant, so I was truly ready for this role. And generally pregnant women already have open hearts. They already love their offspring. So my trackings were very easy because of that.

Again in this excerpt we see the power and joy that comes from being a mother. Even simply taking on the role of a mother during the birth canal exercise allows a person to tap into those powers. It opens one's heart and allows one to see the significance they play in another human being's life. The mother welcomes people into the world with love and gives them a chance to improve and transform their lives. And in doing so, the mother witnesses and comes to appreciate her own significance and power. While this exercise opens up this

opportunity to everyone, it comes naturally to women who are actually pregnant and whose hearts, according to Sonya, are already open.

Sonya continues her discussion of the birth canal and goes into an explanation of how the method is done:

To do the birth canal you need a minimum of five people, and a maximum of 20 people. They stand on all fours in two rows – with their heads pointed towards each other. You end up with a birth canal made out of live people. They stand and go into a rebirthing state. They breathe deeply and sway and it really turns out like a living canal, each with his own life – each cell has its own life. They breathe and maintain a field of love. When a person goes through – the person crawls. The one being born is first prepared. He's also in a rebirthing state. He also breathes.



Fig. 12. A person being prepared for the canal. According to the practice, she is said to be in the womb at this point

Each person in the canal breathes and keeps a field of love, because the canal is for the child. So the one who's being born begins to breathe. He feels when he's ready and he goes. But it's very difficult to go through the canal. It's just like when you're born – everyone squeezes you. You can't move. You get hysterical. Some even lose consciousness. And some go through easily. I've gone through three times and two of these were horribly scary and the other one was just like Tibetan lava. I just

crawled right through. It all depends on the inner blocks that you want to examine in the canal. When the canal is difficult you're completely confused. You're in a totally confused state. And those blocks that developed back then in the birth canal become unblocked. So you practically relive your birth. So in the canal accordingly you are bumped – you're also bumped then – the walls press against you. So first, you need to get the courage to go into the canal. It's actually very difficult. A lot of people stood there and breathed and left. Having seen how difficult it is and the kinds of screams that were taking place – 'let me out momochka, I don't want to live' and other such things. But I recommend that you do it despite all the fears. The first time, by the way, many go through easily. And then those who stand and breathe – they also are periodically taken out and changed because it's also difficult and they are also watching what's happening. Everything works together. The one who is going through the canal screams out momochka and one of the people breathing also remembers something connected with his momochka. It someone says a certain word – there's a certain resonance at work. Here a huge organism of birth takes place.

The birth canal method is supposed to recreate the actual birth process.

It's a difficult struggle for all involved. People go through lying on their backs, and with the canal moving and pressing in on them, they can start to feel claustrophobic and panic. Some people scream out or start crying. And the canal itself is in a heightened emotional state. They are immersed in rebirthing which is bringing out blocks of their own. The emotional scene can be too much for some, and at times people standing in line will decide they are not ready for such a huge step. Despite the powerful emotions involved, we see here that one time is generally not enough. Most of the women I spoke with had gone through the canal several times, each time working out different blocks and each time experiencing different degrees of transformation. All agreed, however, that the struggles were well worth the resulting emotional release.



Fig. 13. The birth canal and people waiting in line to go through it.

As with Lyuba, Sonya emphasizes the lessons to be learned from going through the canal. She too came to understand that life is a school, with many lessons and many second chances. As she explains here, not only is the birth canal method itself a second chance to repair mistakes that occurred during one's actual birth, but life itself is a school that offers on-going opportunities to amend mistakes one has committed during this life or earlier ones:

And then the person crawls out and here he should be met by his parents. In reality, his soul stood in a huge line to reach his incarnation on this earth. The earth is the only place where there is an emotional body. We wait so long in order to be incarnated here and then we complain that we live here. It's amazing. We wait a long time to go to this school. To this school on earth. Not to other schools on other planets. It's most difficult to end up in this

school, on earth, mother earth (matushka). And then when we end up here, we don't want to be here because it's the hardest school, but the most necessary. And a person who's been born a second time needs to be explained that someone was waiting for him here. That people are happy that you are finally on earth. Your spirit, soul, waited so long for the opportunity to correct your mistakes – while existing as a spirit it's impossible to correct these mistakes. You can only plant a rose, but you can only plant a rose on earth. That is, there you will torture yourself. What is hell? It's when you torture yourself for doing something not right. Oh, I'm a fool. I broke a rose. What am I going to do? And now you have to wait in a long line in order to be incarnated on earth and plant that rose. And when a person comes to this earth, his mother should give him the impulse for goodness and kindness by showing how happy she is that he's here.

Sonya, as with many in the New Age, believes that earth is the place we come to mend our karmic soul. In spirit form, according to this theory, we cannot make up for these mistakes. As she notes, we need a physical body to replant a rose. If we leave it unplanted on earth we will have to wait until our next incarnation here to make amends. The answer is to act and change and make amends while we can here and now. And so we see here how the seemingly fanciful theory of reincarnation is brought down to earth and transformed into a stimulus for practical change and personal responsibility.



Fig. 14. A woman is being born and greeted by her "mother," who in this case happens to be a man

Each person gets something different out of the birth canal exercise. But generally, as with the rebirthing method, a person will feel a sense of blissful peace at the end of the canal. Here Sonya continues:

After the birth canal you feel a certain euphoria and the blocks go away for a certain amount of time. Some are able to maintain this feeling for a very long time. Some even for their whole lives. For one person one tracking might be enough. And for another 30 won't be enough. It all depends on the inertia of the soul. It depends on the strength of the karmic knot. If it's small then you can go through just one birth canal and the euphoria will be enough for the rest of your life. And another person might have a huge lump.



Fig. 15. Me with the silly grin I couldn't lose for nearly an hour after being reborn in the birth canal.

Karmic Lessons of the Birth Canal

While during this particular birth canal exercise Sonya was in the role of mother, she had gone through several birth canals herself and was able to accomplish some very serious work and come to some important realizations regarding herself and her relationship with both her child and her husband. The importance of the birth canal exercise to Sonya is not surprising, as she sees children as the primary channel that leads women towards spiritual development. According to her view, children choose their parents according to their karmic

goals. By learning one's karmic purpose and the karmic purpose of one's loved ones, a person can develop to a higher level and bring happiness to those around them. The birth canal method was not the only source of her self realization, but it brought some of her blocks and karmic lessons to the fore:

Women get interested in spirituality through what they are most attached to, what they love most of all, and what do they love most of all? Home, family, and most importantly, children. And most of all they learn through their children. But I think that in terms of me I think the main thing was through my child because I was a very egotistical girl. I was very self involved, beautiful, talented, and I always considered myself the most splendid. And my husband just carried me in his arms and when I gave birth to my first child it was a shock for him (my first husband) because someone came between us. Why do we need a child when I love you so much? So accordingly, when the child was born then conflicts in the family started. Although he also loved the child. The law of Karma went into effect. One of the strongest effects of the law of Karma happened just when I gave birth to my first child. And accordingly, the soul of the child chose particular conditions for its birth, a particular family. Potentially I was ready to be his mom, but in the state that I was in – he didn't need that kind of mother. That is, he was supposed to teach me something, change something. And so I started to change. I started to change myself. I got divorced from my loving husband and to this day I'm still getting over that wound. Still when I read his poems, and he's a poet, now he works at a radio station and he's a very rich person. So I also was deprived of money.

I lost everything, you understand? And so my first lesson started. I remained alone with my child. And the second was the horrible illness of that child. It was horrible to such an extent – it started such that on the third day of his life he was taken to the resuscitation room. And I sat and prayed to God that he would leave him with me. That was my first lesson – if he had left this life then my life would have gone along one path, but if I prayed for God to help him live then I should be a different mother. But the child became very ill, practically from the day of his birth. He's now 12 and a half, almost 13 and he's almost not sick, but he also has a different mother, you understand? Everything changed. Of course there are still a lot of complications, but still.

Again we see here the importance of child birth and motherhood for spiritual development. And once again we see the role of crisis and struggle. For Sonya the birth of her first child was a great joy, but it also brought with some of her first major struggles in life. She had lived a rather charmed life up to this point. Spoiled and frivolous, she expected the adoration she received from her first husband. Her child's serious illness and then her subsequent divorce were significant blows to her idealized world. She was not prepared for such events and at first found herself unable to cope. But as she looks back on that time now she sees that these events were karmic lessons. She needed these events in order to grow as a person. Going through the birth canal helped her come to this understanding and to see that she could learn and grow from the experiences rather than simply suffer and bemoan her plight.

It was her love for her child, her role as a mother, that first sent her on this path, as she sought any way she could to ease his suffering:

And when he was six or seven years his illness reached its peak. When he was born I didn't realize yet that it was a Karmic lesson. I just wanted a child. But at that time from his birth I was just suffering. There needed to build up such a load of suffering, such a load of pain so that the world view in my brain could change, so that I would start to do something. He needed to reach six years – when he stopped walking - he had a very rare form of psoriasis on the bottom of his feet. Very few people have it here and it's practically incurable. He couldn't walk because there was a bloody mass on his feet. Plus, the worst thing is when your son feels pain. And my son was in pain nearly 24 hours a day. And since I wanted to take away his pain so much, I took it very much to heart. I started to pray and asked for the disease to come to me. And it came to me, but it didn't leave him. So we were invalids together. Can you imagine? And since traditional medicine didn't treat this, I turned to non-traditional medicine. Traditional medicine said it was chronic, he could go to the hospital for

treatment and he would feel better for two or three months, but then it would return again.

So I went to a healer [*tseletel*']. And the healer told me – and thank God I went to a good healer – I found him through an ad. I just went to the first one that I saw, so thank God my guardian angel didn't take me to a charlatan, but instead to people who didn't just say 'ok we'll rub this on your palms and the bottom of his feet now and get rid of his illness' but who instead said 'mama, you need to change yourself'. So I went where I needed to go. I'm thankful to my guardian angel and teachers who led me. And now for seven years I've been going from school to school and am clearing up my spiritual health. I still have a long ways to go to reach physical health, but I'm supposed to let my physical health slide a bit. But I've been healing my child.

During her spiritual journey to heal her child and cope with her own emotional health, she learned how to identify karmic lessons through the help of holodynamics and the birth canal. Over time she came to understand why she was given a sick child, why she had to give up her first husband, and why her current relationship with her second husband was so fraught with conflict:

I tracked my husband and it turns out I gave up a child during several lives. And I was given a person who was really given up by their mother in this life. And he hates women. So now I'm still working through the fact that some time ago I gave up my child. And I was given a person who was given up and hates women. And now I need to work this out. Because I didn't give him up – I gave another up. But I need to work on the fact that back then I was a scoundrel who gave up her child. And now I need to explain to my husband that woman – is a good thing, and that I've reformed and will never again give up my child. I will love him no matter what, even if he's sick, and for that reason I was given a sick child. I will even love that kind of child, a sick child who I will suffer for. A woman loves even if she suffers. I should prove that on earth – that's why I've come here. It's very difficult.

And, by the way, the birth canal also prepares one for the kind of awareness that I'm speaking of now. Aside from giving up my young child, in my next life – this was three lives ago – a loved one begged me to love him and I rejected him, and then in my next life I again rejected him. And you see, my husband left me twice

and for me one birth canal was not enough. For me, one tracking was not enough. I have a large lump. So of course it depends on the inertia of the soul and the extent to which the soul persists. So, you see, to live in joy is a lot more difficult to do than to live in sorrow. It's very easy to live in sorrow and suffering. To live in joy is very difficult. You need to work on that euphoria. You found the euphoria one time – and maybe it lasted two days. The second time, maybe it lasts for ten days. You know, one of my friends told me a phrase – if each day you will love for at least one minute, in a year you will love at least 365 minutes. Everything is very gradual. The soul is huge, but if you have many times broken roses then you need to plant a whole garden.

Overcoming Fear and Insecurity

Zhenya offers another perspective on the birth canal method. She is a business woman in her mid 30s who is one of the core members of Voskhozhdenie. She had been training for several years in the method and often helped Sveta and David organize trainings. She found that the birth canal helped her to overcome some of the insecurities that had been holding her back for years. During one of Zhenya's birth canal experiences, she believes that she reenacted a dangerous moment in her actual natural birth that had left her feeling both a fear and inadequacy because she was not the son she believes her father wanted. This exercise helped her overcome those fears and insecurity in herself.

I did the birth canal one time, last year. I had a problem with my third matrix. I saw already somewhere near the end of the birth that I felt a fear of coming out. And I was able to overcome that fear. Because I received a lot of love and compassion. There was such warmth towards me – “such a beautiful little girl, soon, you're almost there, just a little bit more”. Because I felt like I was losing strength. I couldn't move any more. And I thought well that's it, I'm going to die here. And then I found out from my mother that indeed during birth everything was going fine – I was moving through and then suddenly I stopped. I don't know how they dealt with me then, but thank god they didn't use forceps. We have that practice here – totally sadistic – they pull the baby out with a forceps. The birth canal exercise helped me overcome that

fear that formed inside of me in that period during birth. When we tracked it later, it turned out that my father wanted a boy and children are believed to hear, and I know that I'm a girl. But he really wanted a son. And I had fear. How am I going to be born, how will they relate to me if I'm not what they want.

During the summer retreat in 2002 Zhenya took on a different role during the exercises. Some of the fears that were released during her previous experience remained in her psyche, and she was hesitant to re-live them again so soon. Her new role, as midwife, allowed her to learn new lessons – here she learned to share deeply in the joys and fears of the people she greeted, and she learned that she could open up and love altruistically people she did not even know.

A few days ago we had the birth canal here, and I of course, wasn't reborn. I was scared – what if the fear appeared again? I was a midwife – one of the people who accept the people, and I also was part of the canal itself. For a little while they needed someone to take someone's place and I took over. So I was just in the accepting role. It was remarkable. I never thought that, well to love people in the abstract is of course easy, but to love each one individually is much more complicated. But here was some field created by the people being born and I felt true love and I felt a love for the person being born as if it were my child being born. I even physically helped people come out and I never felt tired. Because I really wanted them to be born and for them to feel joy that they were located on earth. It was an amazing state. I felt tired only afterwards. In fact, I had a process done on me afterwards. Usually when you are part of the canal then you need to be born afterwards. You start to breathe and you enter into that process and you start to integrate, but to fully integrate you need to be born. And then you need to keep breathing for a little while. I didn't do that so I felt bad afterwards. I felt really bad and I was tired and I had to wait until the next day for the process, and then Sveta did a process on me and everything was wonderful. In any case I realized that I had gone astray by trying to go without going through the canal. But otherwise I'm really happy that I tried a different role, not to be born, but to accept the people into the world. I had never had such an experience before. It was really interesting. And I got a lot out of it. I realized that I could do it. I

realized that it's possible to commiserate and feel joy with others.
I liked it.

Sonya

And so we turn from the methods to the stories of spiritual transformation, transformations that integrally involved birth and motherhood as both instigators to change and tools for self realization. It is here also where the importance of relationships comes clearly through, as we see these women work to better their relationships with their children and husbands. For many of the women I spoke with, it was actually the severing of relationships, or divorce, that provided the opportunity for change and growth. While most had remarried and several spoke about finding their true mates, their spiritual transformations required a break from bonds tying them to a constricting or negative space.¹⁰²

Sonya, who we met above, is a lively woman in her mid-thirties. She works teaching English at a state school, but makes most of her money through private lessons. As we have seen earlier in her account of the birth canal exercise, Sonya's story of transformation begins with the birth of her first child some twelve years ago. At that point in her life, however, she says she was still immature and unaware – unaware she was at the start of a spiritual transformation and unaware of the lessons the birth of this child offered her. At that time in her life she was simply suffering - from problems in her first marriage and due to her new born baby's serious health problems. After his birth she was not even sure he would survive. Looking back she has gained new perspective on the many

¹⁰² In some ways the move towards spiritual circles made up primarily of women – where they can not only bond with other women but learn a potentially money-making skill – is similar to the *wok meris* of Lorraine Sexton's (1988) work, where women formed separate spheres for exchanging and saving money outside the restrictive economic relations that disproportionately favored men.

obstacles that have occurred in her adult life and she has come to see each of them as a karmic lesson, each of which prodded her forward in her spiritual development. As she explains, she now has an awareness of herself and the events about her, and this awareness has allowed her to change in ways that have helped her children and her relationships. She attributes her son's improved health to this transformation in herself. Sonya views the twelve years following her first son's birth as a series of schools she was required to pass through in order to grow as a person. These schools have taken her through many practices and beliefs and have opened up abilities and creative energy that she believes otherwise would have remained dormant in this lifetime. And more schools lie ahead. While she has attained new levels of awareness and sees her present world in greater harmony than ever before, Sonya laments that awareness does not always lead to the ability to change oneself and one's surroundings. She understands that she still has much to learn and plenty of immature character traits and that the future is unknown, but she is comforted in the belief that each new lesson will bring her further along her spiritual path. In the following passage Sonya recounts several lessons from her life and the spiritual methods she found along the way that helped her learn from these lessons. She found this first spiritual health method while searching for a health cure for her son, who by this time was already six years old and her first marriage was long over.

It's a school for astral massage. It's an esoteric-healing school. There they teach how to heal with images. That is, you see the image of a healthy child. They taught me how to think in images. They taught me to see. Although I don't know how good that is because, well I don't want to think about it. I don't see a person's aura. I can see the distortions in a person and I can see his life – if

the person wants – what awaits him if he behaves himself this way and if he behaves differently what awaits him then. I can see what holes or distortions he has, but I don't see an aura, but I see the essence. I learned this as a healing method. Just like when you're studying holodynamics – you're studying, but you're also healing yourself. But I went there completely unconsciously. I didn't need to be a seer or to learn how to do massage, I was still a fool. For me the most important thing was that my child was there with me during the class, so that he was in that field. But, by the way, there he didn't become much better. It was just the first step.

Like many of the women I spoke with in the New Age, Sonya began with what I have called external healing, or a type of clairvoyant healing. Here they are taught how to work with the energy of the subtle bodies, how to heal with the mind, and the importance of the energy a person emits. While she did not end up continuing with this school, she learned here the importance of the energy a person emits and she took from this school a new ability to see the subtle energy that surrounds a person, an ability she is not always happy she has, and she learned to think in images, something that she has developed much further with holodynamics.

Her initial work in the alternative sphere was slow and hesitant. Sonya learned that healing takes time and involves many steps and many schools. Not all of them give the desired results, but they provide movement, something necessary for growth. Sonya's spiritual journey has taught her as well how to find guides in her own life. Often, she finds, she does not seek a new school. Her guides instead send her to a new school. And sometimes the schools are not what she expects. They may offer only palliative care or open sides of herself she is not yet ready to see. But even these are necessary parts of the journey. Sometimes palliative care is what is needed to get up and continue towards a deeper lesson.

And sometimes a peek into one's innermost self can be the preparation one needs to look more deeply at a later moment in time.

I found this course through an advertisement in the newspaper. I just read it and went. And then I realized that that was too little for me, it wasn't enough, and life started to teach me, you understand? I met my second future husband. We already had a long relationship over the course of four years and he declared that he was leaving me for another woman. That was my second big hit. That is, my loved one started moving away from me. He went to another woman and I couldn't even get out of bed. I would just lie there like I was dead. I was in a state where it was like I wasn't there but there were just individual little cells. I couldn't even get out of bed. And then my teachers led me to the school of Reiki. That's healing with your hands.

But in addition to healing with hands there are also moral teachings, well not moral, but some sort of psychological cleansing. I believe that everything is guided by teachers. Some friends called me and said 'are you feeling terrible?' I said yes, completely horrible. 'Go take a Reiki course'. But still I think that my own teachers, my own spiritual teachers led me there – through my friends, through the paper, etc. If you have a strong spiritual core, then you have strong teachers and they will lead you to such places where you need to go. So through my friends they sent me to Reiki and I was healed in three days. I was flying around like a butterfly.

As soon as I recovered, it had been two months since my loved one had left me, as soon as I recovered and became strong, spiritually strong – the biggest changes happened with Reiki - he came to me after the third day of my class and he proposed. And I like a complete fool, without thinking about it, agreed right away, without giving him a trial period, nothing, I just went with my emotions and agreed. I paid for that later. So we get married, but we get married and a really complicated life starts. That was four years ago.

And so again Sonya learned a powerful lesson. Sometimes what we most desire to do is not the wisest move to make. Sometimes gifts can be deceptive. But again, these moments too are opportunities to learn. At times it seems that everything in life is a lesson. While initially it was her sick child that sent her

searching for help, her relationship with her second husband also creates interesting challenges and lessons for Sonya. Their opposing character traits offer opportunities to learn different perspectives and approaches.

Life becomes very difficult because there's a certain antagonism between my sick child and him. And between us there's antagonism because by astrology I'm a Taurus and he's a Scorpion. These are opposing signs – completely different world views. He works through his body – he does qigong, the Chinese approach, through the body, and I work with holodynamics and extra- sensory methods, through higher bodies. We don't understand each other – we speak in different languages. You know, it's two teachers for each other and two students. We don't have anything in common. We just are looking at each other in the mirror and seeing our distortions. I look at him and see what I don't like. If I'm able to give you the book, there are many poems devoted to that. So, we start having a complicated life. If you look at it from aside it's rather interesting and very difficult. And then another friend suggested that I go to yet another school – it's the most powerful school that I've been to.

At this powerful school she learns to be careful what you ask for:

Oh, I forgot to say, during the Reiki course there was a circle of wishes, everyone held hands – it's a very strong energy – and each person told their most sacred desire – and I stood almost last and the whole time was thinking – what is my wish, what is my wish – we could only wish for ourselves – I couldn't wish for my child to be healthy – but I didn't understand then that I could have wished that I would behave myself in such a way that my child would become healthy – I still didn't know that formula- and so I was in a panic and you know what I said? I said I wanted to understand my sins. And of course you get what you ask for. You know how powerful that is. And I was sent to the next school where I'm taught how to recognize my sins – not how to get away from these sins, but how to get to know my sins, how to see them. Not every person can see their distortions. And I was shown them all immediately.

So I went to the next school, the most powerful. It still exists. It's the school Taana-om-ar-is. She is an alien, as she asserts. I went to an exhibit and ended up in the school. It's one of the most powerful schools in Moscow. It's a school of repentance and acceptance of oneself. It's like candy in a wrapper there. The

wrapper is that they teach mineral massage there. They teach how to work with minerals like with live organisms. They teach how to do a cleansing of the body with the minerals. The person lies down, you say mantras. You sense the subtle energy bodies of the person – through the mineral. The thing is that a mineral has a particular structure. This structure is ideal. It's not distorted. It's ideal. And a particular organ also has a particular structure. For example, a sick organ has a destroyed structure. The structure of a particular organ is matched with the structure of a particular mineral. For example, the color green is the color of the heart. There's a rock called Nephrite. Nephrite has an ideal structure. If you have pains in the heart, you can use Nephrite to normalize the workings of your heart. It's a whole science. But that is just the wrapper. In reality, through teaching that they taught how to give of oneself – how to give yourself to others, to serve, to purify yourself.

At this school Sonya learned practical healing techniques as well as how to open her heart to others. And she was granted the wish she asked for in the Reiki circle – she learned all about her sins, her negative character traits, such as jealousy and vanity. But she also realized that awareness does not necessarily lead to change. Some changes she is not prepared to make. Some spiritual steps are too far removed from this world. Sonya is still attached to worldly pleasures and dreams. She has creative ambition and dreams of becoming famous one day. These ambitions sent her running from this spiritual school.

It's very powerful there, but I couldn't withstand it and I ran away. I studied there for two years. But I didn't study to the end. It's very difficult there. I wasn't prepared. Most of the people who study there – they don't have families, they don't have children, they don't have loved ones, they just serve. For me it seemed a bit like zombification. I'm too creative a person. I'm vain. I want to be famous and I don't hide that fact. Why not? It's one of my moving impulses/powers. Some day I'll track that and look into it, but right now it moves me forward. I'm also a composer. I have songs that I want to use to enter into show business. Again I don't hide that. I want to use that as a way of making money because I want to support my family. That is, I'm still not ready to tear myself away from the earth. I still want to live here. I want a three

room apartment. But the people there are all beyond that. But I'm not ready. And I ran away. But again, since there's such strong energy there, very strong, and I ran, I didn't just go or walk, I ran without saying goodbye. When you work with such strong energy, you need to relate to it with a lot of respect. It's really difficult to say now how I changed. But I can tell you about how my child got well. As for me, my level of consciousness changed. I really saw my distortions and sins. That is, I can say – I am vain, I am proud about that and that and that. I'm demanding of my husband in regards to this and that and the other. I can admit to my distortions – calmly. I think that that is a huge step. And when people yell at me I say, yes, I'm like that. But it's one thing to see one's sins and another to have the strength to deal with them.

While Sonya is not ready to leave her earthly desires behind, there are some traits she came to recognize in herself at that school that she wants to overcome but is unable to. Interestingly, she believes that one of the reasons she found herself with this particular second husband was to help her overcome these negative characteristics.

For example, I'm really jealous. My husband is a massage therapist. And aside from Qigong massage, he gives anti-cellulite massage to young women. That is, every day he paws women. That is like a test for me, and I'm so jealous. It's deep inside me, but I need to work out my jealousy. It's from my father who was jealous of my mother. And accordingly, what kind of husband could I be given? As soon as I start to feel jealous, I say, Sonya, you're being jealous, it's jealousy, it's not mature. But that doesn't mean that I stop feeling jealous. Recognizing your sin doesn't mean that you'll overcome it. It's a kind of funnel that engulfs you. When David, our David, says try to stop, you can always stop. But can you always be outside of your emotions? No, it takes a lot of strength.

Sometimes, she discovered, learning happens even when you don't want it to and in less than idealized places. Here she discusses the lessons of humility she learned when she was sent to a healer she could not afford for her child. Even though in the end this healer did not directly help her child, Sonya values the

lessons learned and feels that indirectly her child benefited later from the changes that took place in her:

And at the same time I also happened upon – my former husband, the father of my first child, he also worries a lot, we've stayed great friends and we help each other. I consider him one of my guardian angels. When I'm feeling really horrible I cry out Yura, Yura into the subtle plane and he always helps. And in the material world if I find myself in a pit he always helps. And he also found a healer. She's also a very strong woman. She's a healer-professor. This woman sees organs. She can find the sick place on an organ. She's like an apparatus. And she can also remove distortions from the organ. She works on the ethereal plane. We didn't have money to pay her for treating my son, Yegor, and she charges \$100 for one séance. And you know our salaries. And since he couldn't walk, I didn't work. I was at home. I taught him at home for the first two years. A teacher would come every three months and give him a test. I had to learn how to drive, because I needed to get my child to her. So you see how life moves forward? I never thought that I would drive a car. I was afraid of the speed. And now I race along like normal. I brought my child to her and he would stay there all day, and I started working at her place as a dishwasher and cleaner. I worked all day like Cinderella. That was also one of the most powerful schools. Here my pride was humiliated. I have two degrees, I considered myself beautiful and smart, so talented. I should be singing songs on stage and here I am cleaning toilets. One time David said, there's nothing more romantic than cleaning the toilet. She made me do the dirtiest work. But the most surprising thing is that I enjoyed doing it because I felt that I was studying under her. She taught me extra-sense without even knowing it. Just being near her and observing how she healed and what she was doing and I learned. But in fact, she didn't heal him, he only got worse. But it's also not bad. It's a result and any result is good. At least you see some sort of movement.

Through her spiritual practices, such as holodynamics and the birth canal Sonya came to realize that she and her second husband were brought together for Karmic reasons. They were brought together to learn from each other's differences. They were also brought together to mend mistakes committed in past

lives. And, she believes, she was brought to him to help him recover from scars he received from birth and his neglectful mother.

And then there was the most powerful treatment. I got married – four years ago, and we began to live, well to say like cats and dogs is an understatement. Imagine two people with completely opposite world views. And I'll say, you know I have this or that and he'll say what sort of shit are you doing – everything opposite. There was nothing mutual between us other than nature, we would go out and relax in nature together. It was the only thing that connected us. But now there's more. And of course each one secretly dreamed that they would find their true other half. I wanted to meet someone with my own world view. But if I had met someone with my own world view – now we're teaching each other – if I had met someone with my own world view, what would that have taught me? Life. That is, I would have been put in such situations – horrible ones – teaching would have happened in any case.

Sonya has come to recognize the importance of learning from the little lessons. Don't miss the opportunities, she warns, because the lesson will always happen some how or other, and life has a way of teaching lessons in the most painful of ways.

So I find out that I'm pregnant – a year and a half ago – well, a little more, two years ago. And my husband is simply in shock. He's simply horrified. Of course he didn't ask me to get an abortion. He knew that I wouldn't do that. I'm really happy. And I tell him, well, fine go. A child is something that completely separates us. He really didn't want a child. For him it was simply a nightmare. He started pestering me every chance he had. I started to kick him out. He left and then I didn't know what was up. Then I realized that he had another woman. But he hid it and lied. But since I can see, I started to go inside and look and see what they were doing. That broke me down completely. What a fool. Then I reached the end of my tether. He came home one day and lied and I said you've been with her here and there and there. In the end he admitted it, but I had a task. He was born with an open heart, a very sensitive boy, but his mother gave him up at six months and only returned when he was three, and he can't forgive her to this day. This is a person with an open heart who's built up anger in his heart. He was born so sensitive – to nature, to

animals, so open, that is, he has such an enormous potential, such an energy that he can break up a kidney stone simply with his hand. He has so much love, but since those things happened with his mother – and there were constant scandals/fighting in the family – he’s built up blocks, rage, and my task was to explain to him that it was possible to love a woman, that a woman is not a monster, that in principle a woman can be something good. And I couldn’t explain this because I also got angry at him – he was cheating on me, so my task was also maybe to learn how to be tolerant, I don’t know. I haven’t completely figured everything out. You see how emotional I get?

The strength and insight Sonya gained from her spiritual teachings helped her to overcome, at least temporarily, her deep-rooted jealousy and to rise above her selfish emotions. That her solution involved the birth process, in this case water birthing. Her husband’s involvement is particularly striking in the Russian context because Russian fathers generally are not even present during the birth of a child.

And I thought up something, I gave birth in water. I asked him to come along with me – the school is called spiritual midwifery – where they teach you how to give birth in water at home. In the bathtub relatives assist in the birth. He agreed. Since he’s a doctor. He’s not a doctor by training, but in his world view. It was difficult for me – knowing that he loved another woman, I was supposed to trust him with the most sacred thing. That is, I was supposed to give birth with his assistance. That was fantastically difficult for me, but I understood that I had to do it. Again it was karma working itself out – I was supposed to do that. I didn’t want to, I was scared, but I needed to. I’m very thankful to him – he did a remarkable job. He himself cut the umbilical cord and tied it. You understand, it’s a very powerful magical act. And this tied him to the child. So now we have a papa – that’s me, and a mother – that’s him. He changes his diaper, puts him to bed. He does everything. But he didn’t stop loving the other woman and three weeks after Max was born he left me for her. He collected his things and left. I didn’t lie helpless like a girl this time. It was already his second time so I was ready.

The birth of her second child was an occasion of striking emotional and spiritual extremes. She was able to find altruism within herself and she felt pure joy at the thought of him, but her emotions were heightened, as she explains here, and this sent her to another emotional low. Again, however, this low led to new spiritual methods and a rediscovery of her creative interests and talents.

When I became pregnant with Max, I began to write poems and paint. That is, I became creative. I was happy about the pregnancy – regardless of whether he’d stay or not. I was still happy. I knew that he was my joy. But creativity was inside of me. I always sang. I’m generally, you know, a Venus, according to astrology. I always sang, always danced, was always the center of attention. I knew how to talk. I had potential. I studied ballet as a child. Choreography. So there was always an intention. I have artistic gifts, that is, during college I studied in a theater studio. And I had a feeling that I would have a qualitative jump in creativity. That is, if I had decided to become an actress, I would be one. If I had wanted to be a dancer, I would be one. I would have become a singer. But it’s doubtful that I would have written poems, such deep poems and it’s unlikely that I would have written music. Apparently, I needed to suffer, and I needed to make some sort of qualitative jump forward and only then open up. And when I became pregnant, I was so happy with the pregnancy that apparently something there broke open. Either my child began to speak – and David called them, not poems, but auto-letters, dictations. That is, poems in spirit. At first I wrote them down. I’d write them down quickly in two seconds while waiting for the train and then read them as if I was seeing them for the first time. But apparently my consciousness had not developed to the extent that... But then I began to compose poems – simply poems as they’re called – lyrical poems, love poems.

As we see the time of this pregnancy was a very conflicted period for Sonya. She leapt quickly from extremes of emotions, feeling great joy for the child and pain from her relationship with her husband. But from these strong emotions came a stream of creativity that proved ultimately healing and, according to Sonya, ultimately brought her family closer together. Sonya found a

mystical significance to her poems and songs. A connection with her child and husband through her thoughts and unconscious mind, perhaps strengthened by the water birth her husband assisted with.

But the most interesting thing – when he left me the second time – the child was three weeks old – I had horrible mastitis – that’s inflammation of the mammary glands and a temperature of 42 Celsius. It’s a horrible state. And of course it was difficult for me without him. I couldn’t breast feed. I needed to go out and buy milk products for the baby. I had my older son and friends, but still it was very difficult. And then songs came to me. The thing is, in poetry and song there is rhythm. Thought is generally material. But if a thought is formed clearly and correctly and rhythmically then it’s even more material, and I composed a song. Not on purpose, again – it happened in my subconscious. I now realized that it’s also a magic thing. I composed a song, and he periodically would call and cry that he missed his child and me but that he couldn’t leave his lover. That was very difficult for me. I missed him a lot. I missed him like crazy. And I told him, you know, I composed a song. And it’s amazing. When we’re apart he accepts everything I do. When we’re together he thinks my creativity is simply awful. How can you write such repulsive poems and horrible songs. But when we’re apart he thinks I’m simply a genius. And that song drew him to me. In a month he returned to me. But he didn’t cut off his relationship with that woman. And he lived with two families. And it was hell. And that’s when the worst suffering started. When I understood that I need to have a family, when jealousy reached its peak, I ended up, well you could say crazy. And it was all after giving birth. I couldn’t recover. The thing is that after birth women’s psyches are generally destroyed. And here I also had this. And I ended up at my next teacher.

Yet again, we see the powerful role birth plays for Sonya. And once again we see how her emotional swings lead her to yet another school, this time one that encouraged her to follow her creative impulse, to write and sing and let her emotions flow in ways that bring joy rather than suffering. This is a school that pointed out her own responsibility for her emotional state. She had the ability to change it simply by changing her perspective.

I ended up at a doctor who I'm infinitely thankful to. This is a doctor who works with soldiers who returned without legs from Afghanistan, from Chechnya, people who are completely schizophrenic. That is, he heals people who no longer want to live. I didn't want to live. I crawled into the closet and sat in the closet. My older son didn't understand. I didn't want to leave. Actually, it makes sense. Going into a closet is like returning to the womb. If you know yoga, it's going to the womb state. The desire to no longer live means you want to go back into your mother's stomach. And so I went there and only wanted to live there. And my husband correspondingly went back and forth and didn't know what to do with himself. He seemed normal, but his eyes were also not normal. And my friends took me to that specialist, amazing. He's a psycho-therapist. Nontraditional. He's not a psychologist and not a psychiatrist. He's a psycho-therapist. Well, it's also extra-sensorica. But he works in a real clinic. He's so miraculous that such a clinic took him. He's a very strong person. And he said – you have inside of you so much creativity that it will explode if you don't start to develop it. So much has built up that you're suffering.

But the main thing isn't what is happening, but how you relate to it. Your husband can come and go and you can calmly and happily watch and say what a fool. Find your nest and you'll feel better. And the most important thing is how you look at things. Try to write. Don't just scribble poems when you're inspired. But write – novels, discuss things. And I ask –write about what? And he says write about yourself. Everything that you're experiencing, everything that is torturing you write down. And he was right. You spit this all out on the paper and it's as if it's all over. But here there is one underwater stone. All that I'm retelling you right now – that's my future novel. It's almost finished. But it's difficult for me to finish it because I'm writing and living it. It's very complicated. Each time I need to have a process. When you write and then return to it and retell then you are drawn back and now my task is to break away. I think that right now I have my strongest, most powerful karmic junction. The biggest mystery. I don't know if I'll live.

And so Sonya embraced her creative side and is working to realize herself as a poet and a novelist. But she realized that she is in fact very attached to her suffering. She finds inspiration from it, even a certain joy. She finds it an addictive emotional crutch that she is still struggling to live without. This

attraction to suffering, she says, comes partly from growing up in Russia and partly from to her strong astral body. She has come to believe that this need for suffering is the cause of many of the problems in her relationship. She is working to over come it, and is able to recognize it in herself, but again, this recognition does not always translate into ready change.

And as it turned out my husband ended his relationship with that woman. They went on vacation together to the south and there he understood that he was too torn up. He was simply running away from his child and me, and he returned and now he's the best father. I don't know what kind of husband – of course there aren't great romantic and loving relations, but everything is tolerable. For now we live together and it's easier, but complicated. Now we're moving to a new apartment and I still don't know if he'll live there or not. Things are still not resolved. It's complicated. The thing is, people with very strong astral bodies, emotional – you see that I have a very emotional body, and almost all creative people, especially those who write music, without a strong emotional body you simply can't write music, they are bogged down in feelings. You see how easily I explain everything with a lot of examples, I give a lot of advice to people, like a wise woman, but I can't do anything myself because I'm bogged down in feelings. And I track that. I see some sort of immature image and I turn it into a mature one. I do all of that. But any resentment is based on feelings, so it's very complicated.

And now I'm sitting and asking to clean my emotional body. I'm strongly affected by all of these things. Suffering. I mean, suffering, how great it is to suffer. Sveta Prival'skaya always says – oh how in Russia everyone loves to suffer. It's pleasant. It's also needed. It's a habit to suffer. A masochistic habit. And my husband is forced to act like a tyrant because I ask him – my love I want to suffer, cheat on me again! Oh, I'm suffering, I'm writing a new song! It's also a dependency, like a drug. But now I understand that. I need to break away from that. But to break out of that is very difficult. I give myself processes. But not as often as I should. But again it's out of immaturity. I don't want to crawl out of that sensitive swamp. Poetry and lyricism come from my peaks of suffering. I give myself processes but they aren't very deep. It's very difficult to give oneself a process because you need to be a very strong and brave person. But I give them to myself when I'm feeling awful or down and I often feel down. I wake up

in the morning and my husband says, what, feeling blue again? But I do mini-processes, small ones. They're actually closer to affirmations. You know there's a practice known as mantakchia – inner smile – it's also like an affirmation. I begin to smile, my body smiles, but it doesn't last very long. It's like an analgesic.

One way Sonya is working on changing her relationship to suffering is through her poetry. She combines the art of poetry with holodynamics in a way that allows her to unite the spiritual and the physical planes, which she views as intimately connected. By looking more deeply at the health of her subtle bodies, she hopes to be able to recognize what behaviors she needs to change in order to set off a chain reaction of self transformation and improvement. While she has always felt a stronger attachment to the spiritual, she has recently come to believe that perhaps it is the physical realm that needs healing at this point. She wonders if perhaps this step will send her on her next journey and to her next spiritual school. Because, as she explains in her poem below, hearkening back to her lessons from the birth canal and the opportunities we are given in this life with our physical bodies to change our destinies, it is through our actions and our deeds that we determine and create our lives – here on earth and beyond. We are responsible for our fate.

I write holodynamic poems. That is I start with repose and end with health. I show people that it's possible to escape these distortions. For now I don't know exactly how, I myself have not escaped, but I myself am getting out. Knowing the pit that I was in, I'm now a bit better. So that you can do – share. But again, if a person is not ready then your experience won't help. Any illness – you understand that a person has seven bodies. Let's say, on the physical level a person's liver is sick. He has a sick liver. On the ethereal level energy suffers. Some sorts of channels suffer. On the astral level – it's anger, rage. On the mental level it's incorrect thoughts – egoism or something else. On the causal level it's incorrect behavior. I don't know further – I don't know what kinds

of incorrect principles are involved. And also, ideals are not correct. David has made a whole program according to this idea. If you change one of the levels, then everything changes. But the higher the level that you change, then the stronger and more powerful the change will be elsewhere. If you just take medicine on the physical level and the problems with the liver stop bothering you then it will only have a very mild effect on the higher problems. But if you change the behavioral problems, as is called for, recognizing this, recognizing that you didn't act correctly, if you repent, then your liver will accordingly work better and truly better and not like when you just take an analgesic. And accordingly, you cure yourself. But it's a slow process.

It's possible of course to just heal an organ. You can for example take supplements. Like my husband – he offers supplements, says to take supplements. And sometimes supplements and analgesics are necessary. You've looked at everything on a superficial level. You've straightened out your causal body. You no longer get so angry. Everything is normal, but the sick organ needs to be treated also on the physical level. There are certain distortions that needed to be treated here and then the distortions on the higher levels – the ill organ will again pull them out. You need to treat everything together. Sometimes you have to do an operation. It's the last straw. Sometimes you need analgesics and supplements. Sometimes you go your whole life and just one half step remains. And that half step could be some sort of pill or some sort of nonsense that you never even thought could help. And it really can help.

You can't, well sometimes I disagree with holodynamics – they always say that it's most important to work on the higher bodies, to track them. But I, as much as I've worked with higher bodies, and my physical body doesn't want to exercise to such an extent, but my husband is constantly doing Qigong – he does exercises. And I understand that while tracking the higher bodies, the blocks have so powerfully built up at the lower levels, on the physical level, that for me exercise will probably be the last half step. And I can't get myself to do them. I just recently gained 10 kilograms and I can't get myself on my feet. I can't get myself to go on a diet although I understand – well not on a diet, but on a healthy diet (pravel'noe pitanie). I understand that coffee is bad for you, but there is an interesting dependence, simply an interesting dependence. And I've tracked it, and tracking helps because the better you understand your dependence, the greater your strength will be to refuse it. But I need to refuse it. I need to make that last movement. You know, I have a poem. But it's better if I tell you a

parable. I have a poem about that parable. Or maybe it's better if I read my poem:

“You stepped on a rose in my garden. I put the love and gentleness of my heart into it. And I poured tears and sorrow over it. That rose hiding my soul was a little door. Now you've come to me repentant. But for you the door to my soul is closed. Having repented and asked for forgiveness, you think that you can bring the rose back to life that way? Well, no. I don't forgive. God does. And you should plant two for me in that place. One to replace that broken one, and the other one like a symbol of peace. Then having accepted your repentance, I'll put your soul at rest.”

I don't remember the whole thing. But what it means is, of course, you've repented, you've asked for forgiveness, but the rose is still gone all the same. They need to be taken and physically put in their place. Then the deal will be completed. You can walk around repentant for as long as you want, but there still won't be a rose in front of my window.

And so now Sonya is at the cusp of a new stage in her spiritual development. She understands that she needs to find harmony with her physical self and she is embarking on a search for a compatible system.

I'm just not ready to take the next step. I'm sitting in my swamp. I'm stuck, and in order to take the next step I need to build up my strength. I don't know if that step will be with holodynamics or something else. I just went to the school of M. Norbekov, but I ran away. The day of open doors was Monday and I had my first day of classes. But it's from 11 am to 4pm. But on Tuesday I couldn't get up and go. I couldn't go to him. But I'm preparing myself. And Sasha, my husband, also signed up. He's going to be in the evening class. And I'll go. I like the way Norbekov works, he's very gentle. Although I didn't really like his students. At least, the ones I saw – I didn't go because my mother in law – who I don't really trust very much – you need to listen to people you trust – and I ended up with a group of teachers who I think my mother in law should have had. I had the feeling that she sent me in place of herself, and I ended up not with the people I wanted to be with.

It was just like when I ended up going to holodynamics with Aronov. And so I'm kind of forcing myself to go, but I don't want

to go to those people. I want to study, but with other people. There just wasn't a field of love there. And I don't trust the teachers who came. Norbekov comes out and everything is open to him, I want to be with him, and his students come out and I don't want to be with them. And I can see so many distortions in them – what can they teach me when they haven't even started to look at their own problems. Maybe it's resonance, but any way, I signed up and want to take the course later. But I also do kinesiology. Alexei came here and gave me kinesiology massage over the course of a week. He also worked with my child. His massage didn't have a lasting effect on me. That's because I didn't work myself. When someone else is working on you, you need to be involved yourself. But I can't say that it was just a waste of money, and not a small amount by the way, but thank you for the fact that I realized that I need to work myself.

Lyuba

As we saw earlier, Lyuba sees childbirth and motherhood as the foundation for spiritual development for women, a source of great power and insight that gives women a natural edge over men in the spiritual realm. When she speaks of her own development as a person, however, we see that she also greatly values her professional life and the qualities she has developed as a career woman. It has been a struggle to combine her desire to succeed in her career and as a mother, but overall she feels pride in her accomplishments, particularly given the difficult social circumstances she was living in and her delicate upbringing. Lyuba is one of the more socially engaged women I met in the New Age. She does not call herself a feminist or political activist, but she strongly critiques both the economic situation in Russia, which she sees as weighing heavily in favor of the wealthy and the dishonest, and gender relations which she believes place an overwhelming amount of responsibility on women and tend to infantilize Russian men. Her own stormy marriage strongly colors her views.

But looking back now she even finds positives in her struggles dealing with a husband she found both abusive and beneath her spiritually and emotionally. It is these combined struggles that made her the strong person she is today. She admits that work was in many ways an escape from a miserable home life, but she is proud that she was able to both maintain her motherly role and succeed in the business sphere, working with top companies, despite the fact that she is not from the class of “new Russians” and without resorting to underhanded means. In the end, however, she attributes her entrance into the alternative spiritual health community to her divorce and the freedom she gained from this event.

As a child I didn't do any sports. My mom raised me a very delicate child. I sang in the choir, I played piano. My mom didn't let me play any sports. I didn't even learn how to swim. I think it's a complex of strong women. It's somewhere in the subconscious. Because my mom can do everything. She can ride horses – although she can't drive a car – but she swims, she's strong, she has excellent vision. She grew up in the village where weak women are despised. A weak woman means a bad wife. And since I'm her only child she raised me as a flimsy person. It was very difficult for me to turn myself into a strong individual. I made myself a strong individual. How difficult it was! There was a lot of personal drama. Things got to the point where I could lose my sense of reason.

Lyuba learned how to be strong through her work. She is a lawyer and managed to juggle motherhood with a demanding workplace dominated by men. The challenges and ever-changing environment, she says, kept her moving forward and developing as a person.

I couldn't sit at home very long. A new born is of course for a mother the most holy, the most precious thing, but as soon as my child could walk I immediately ran back to work. To be honest, I went back to work because things were not very good with my

home life. But I probably would not have become the person I am today if everything had been good. I affirmed myself as an individual at work. But at home I was a Cinderella who loved her children, cleaned the house, cooked for my family, took care of my elderly mother. After I gave birth to my second child in 1985 I ran back to work to a bank – to a middle level bank. I changed my place of work many times but I tried or it turned out that I've always worked at a place for three or four years at a time. But it's not interesting, don't you agree, to work at the same place? You need to change your surroundings, the people in order to spiritually grow. In one collective there will be one spiritual potential. In another there's a different one and you keep going higher and higher. At one time I had two jobs at the same time. My bosses let me carry out work somewhat under the table. I had my legal job and then I also had clients such as Norilksy Nikel, an Italian furniture company – I represented them in court.

While she is proud of her own accomplishments and considers herself a self-made person, Lyuba makes clear that not just anyone can expect to succeed in Russia today, especially educated women. She laments the passing of State funded education and is critical of the market economy of today, which she sees as corrupt and bereft of ethical and spiritual values.

As far as the social cultural aspects of trade, I want to say that for people with personalities like mine it's very difficult – for strong women, women with professional potential and at the same time trying to maintain their family and support their family and take care of their children – to combine a career and home – is practically impossible. You always have to sacrifice something. Take a look – business women in Russia – they don't see their own children. They're at work. If they have money then they have a nanny. The child never sees its mother. The mother is busy with work, she has responsibilities – employees, contracts, banking. This is something new. It's either the wives of new Russians who've either made their own careers or got capital from their New Russian husbands.

But don't believe, please, any advertisements that claim that in Russia you can start a business with just enthusiasm. It's all nonsense. We have a TV program now that spreads these lies – called I'll do it Myself (Ya Sama). The program is a big advertisement – various women come on the show and sometimes

it's so funny to watch them say 'Yes, I'm an honest business man' or 'Yes, I know how, I'm a professional and not like the gray masses of women'. We don't really have a middle class here. We have contrasts – either very rich or very poor. Although there is a huge professional potential. We have many female specialists who've received excellent educations – because of their work ethic and because education was still free during Soviet times. People were able to develop themselves as individuals, were able to find a social position and then everything was destroyed in our system of crises – social and economic. I know many women, even with PhDs who work as store clerks. I have a good friend who's a chemist-technologist and has some other degree as well and she works selling cosmetics at a market.

While critical of the situation for women in general, she feels she was able to overcome the dilemmas of most career women and points to the success of her children as proof. Their wellbeing and success, she explains, are due to her active involvement in their lives. Her husband did not take an active interest in their children's lives. This, she says, is true of Russian men in general. In fact, thinking back to her married life sends her on a virtual tirade about the state of gender relations in Russia today. Lyuba's critique, however, is not against a patriarchal society that oppresses women. She is critical of what she sees as a society that places too many demands on women and no longer teaches men to be strong providers. This, she argues, has led to the moral and spiritual decline of men, who without responsibilities have been allowed to live like school children into old age while women work, raise the children, and care for the family's health needs.

So what is the result? As far as health, well, as far as myself, God gave me such great patience and energy that I've managed to combine everything inside myself– a good mother – I consider myself a good mother. My children love me a lot and I love them very much. In principle they are all healthy and beautiful. My daughter studies psychology and my son just finished his exams at

the finance academy. The youngest is finishing middle school. He's a very good student. He has almost straight 'A's. He works very hard. It all is accomplished with great, great maternal effort. Their father, that is, my ex-husband, even before we thought about getting divorced, he was totally isolated from raising the children. Our fathers, not just my husband, in principle the fathers of Russia and Moscow – they aren't interested in how their children are doing in school, they don't go to meetings, they don't talk with their teachers. Men really think that only women should do that. By tradition, from that older generation, maybe even from the pre-October revolution generation, women are given a lot of responsibilities for many things. Even for those very same husbands – we take care of their health just like our own children. If something happens to them then we go to the hospital, we take care of them. So here our children are moaning, well not moaning but they demand attention and so do our husbands. So, one hundred percent men – in terms of support and protection – patriarchy – that's all in the past. A man might be pumped up with muscles, but they are very weak in terms of energy and morals, you understand? I'm being honest with you. I have the feeling that 23 years I lived with a boy of pioneer age¹⁰³. It's like when your teacher used to say 'Do this' and 'don't do that'. That's his psychological make-up, a 50 year old man, that the woman should make the decision and the man should do as told. So you see the sort of paradox we have. And I no longer wanted to live with that paradox. You know, he was below me spiritually. Morally he was below me. Intellectually, well, with technical things he was better – his education is in technology of steel and alloys – but from the point of view of humanities, general human qualities – the difference was like night and day [*neba i zemloi* – literally sky and earth]. We spoke not just in different languages but it was as if we were from different planets. And of course our children began to suffer because of this.

While successful in her career and as a mother, Lyuba felt smothered by her husband, who she says abused her and tried to limit her circle of friends. Eventually she saw that his behavior towards her was having a negative influence on her children and she realized she needed to get out. This is when her entrance into the realm of alternative spirituality began and when she believes she began to

¹⁰³ Here she refers to the Young Pioneers, or the Communist youth group that in many ways resembles the Cub Scouts, although participation in it was mandatory.

truly flourish as a person. For a while she had long been interested in spiritual and esoteric ideas, only with her divorce was she afforded the time and space to explore outside the realm of literature.

We lived together almost 23 years.... And you know, after the divorce I became a free person. I felt much more energetic. I started making more friends. I was no longer scared to have friends that my husband wouldn't approve of. And when you return home to that dense face and he asks 'well, have you been out having fun' and I didn't even think about doing that – I was returning from work. If I had actually been talking with normal people who were interesting then it's taken as almost the same as cheating. We had many different fights about that. To live in fear of that, of that pioneer, that unhappy man, my husband – why do I need that? You know, he remarried right after our divorce. He lives well. He started earning more money. He grew as a person without me. He has a great relationship with our children. Every week he comes by with gifts and money like it's a holiday. What else is needed? And the fact that we don't share a bed – well thank god for that. Because why should I ruin my organism with that mess? How horrible. Now we respect each other. We're both healthier. And if we were two broken down people together, can you imagine? So, a divorced woman is not necessarily an unhappy woman. It's just a free person. And the fact that I have three children and a granddaughter was recently born – such a joy.

After her divorce in 1999, Lyuba started quickly making up for lost time.

She began exploring the many opportunities that exist now in Moscow for learning different spiritual health methods. She became involved with different groups, including Voskhozhdenie, and started developing new friendships and really developing on a spiritual level.

As far as my own development, right now I find it so interesting to study my own possibilities, the possibilities in general of people. It's with great pleasure that I study various spiritual practices. But I don't stretch myself too thin. I go where I'm drawn and where I feel happy. I've been interested in esoteric things for a long time. I read various books – maybe for ten years or even around 20 years. In terms of spiritual practices that aim for some sort of result and going to various groups or trainings, I started doing that

intensively in 1998. In fact, I just thought of this myself right now – from the moment of my divorce I started to grow. In 1999 we divorced, but in 1998 we no longer lived together. So, jumps in my self-development – even just purely in terms of the dates - are connected with my divorce – 1999.

Speaking about the many opportunities in Moscow Lyuba becomes very animated. You can feel the energy rushing out of her as she begins to run through the many practices she has tried in the last few years. She almost seems overwhelmed at times. Many of the names and practices she lists will be familiar to us from this and earlier chapters.

Every year, even month, things changed so much. I learned so much, I read so much, I attended so many masters and masteresses! There are so many different spiritual practices in Moscow right now. There are many unique practices, a lot of literature. Of course there's also a lot of nonsense and even dangerous things that aren't worth trying or reading, but you come to recognize that during the process of practice of spiritual development. You already study literature and develop skills. The most important thing is skills – the initiation from master to master. I read Louise Hay, there's an author named Podvodnyi, I read holodynamics books. By the way, holodynamics came to Russia from the States. It's in general a method of psychoanalysis that helps cure drug addiction, and then it appeared in Russia, masters appeared, groups appeared, books appeared. I believe I studied with the best masters in Moscow – Svetlana Romanova Prival'skaya and Vladimir Licharov (?) These are authors of books. And also Irina Vorantsova Aronova. These are wonderful groups. And I've read Nemtsov. Who haven't I read? My god.

Some of the practices she learns for her physical health. She has poor eyesight and wears thick glasses and is very concerned about the effect further decline could have on her active and busy lifestyle.

I learned about holodynamics from my friends. It's a really interesting practice. In principle it's seeing with the third eye, but with a particular work with thought-forms which we see with that feeling. I've gone through all of the levels. I think I could already go to the master level and help people, but I don't have enough

time. But I can heal people with my hands, I have Reiki level II. Of course, due to my delicate frame I get tired from these spiritual practices. I need to do exercises, maybe I'll go to the gym, maybe I'll continue with the course I'm doing now. You can get in shape without going to the gym. And aside from that it's really important for me to work on my eyes. I have an astigmatism. Eyes are an instrument, how could I survive without eyes? It's not just the source of my material existence, since I'm a lawyer – I work with books and people. And then there are trips in the car and by plane. Each day I can drive around half of Moscow for work. That's the rhythm of my life. You need to keep yourself together so that your body doesn't give in to malfunction. I've had a variety of results. In 1998 I had bad depression, to the point that my right arm started to go numb. The problems with my arm was fixed quickly. I had massage done and I needed to get out of the state of fear that I was in. I was in a state of fear then and had a persecution mania. The organism was just so over-stressed that it started to malfunction, including psychological malfunctions. So, by studying those various methods and talking with various interesting masters and people, and with my friends who also helped me a lot, including an excellent massage therapist and holodynamics master I was able to get out of that state.

Like most of the women involved with Voskhozhdenie, Lyuba is somewhat wary of the more charismatic healers who take it upon themselves to heal others through their great powers. Many in the New Age sphere see this as an intrusion as well as a temporary solution to a problem because such healers do not heal the source of the problem. While she does not deny that people with magical powers exists, she is clear that such powers come with great responsibility. In the wrong hands such powers are dangerous. This is why spiritual development is so important. Love and openness to others allow a person to use their healing gifts to help others help themselves rather than to force changes upon them through magic. As she has become more involved with the healing sphere she has begun thinking more and more about this responsibility, especially as she considers a career move in that direction.

We have great astrologers in Moscow. I went to a lecture by Lazerev, but I didn't really understand him too well although his books are quite well-known. For me that's all the past. It's a person who no longer can heal people like he used to. Not everything is right with magic and with power through strength. Not just power but there are other things. There are things that mortal, even very great masters, should really not do. The powers available to those who've reached states of super-perfection are very scary and must only be done with pure hearts and pure hands. Because the goal of self-perfection in the realm of healing is to reach such a state that your hands just go, to help people, and the better you are able to heal the greater responsibility you have. And what will happen with me in the future I can't say because maybe I'll totally change my profession, maybe I'll become a healer, although maybe it sounds silly to throw everything away, all my experience, but maybe there's a way to incorporate it into my life.

While Lyuba eagerly entered into the world of spiritual health, she did not immediately trust her abilities or the things she saw. Here she explains how she began to see differently when she started practicing holodynamics, but she did not trust what she saw. Now this world is central to her life, but she needed concrete evidence that this new world was not simply in her head. This evidence came slowly to her, as she learned and began to practice on other people and to see results. She is now convinced that everyone has the ability to heal inside of them. This ability just needs to be nurtured and practices under the guidance of a positive role model or teacher.

But what I'm able to do in terms of spiritual and energy potential I won't give up because I'm not just attracted to it, it gives me the impulse to live. It's the key to human spirituality – and it's the basis of health, business, family, children and in the end it's our inner right. I always distrusted my own possibilities. For example, I can look at a person and see his chakras or his aura, but I never considered that it's a special gift. In general there's an author from New Zealand, Webster, who thinks that there aren't people who can't see. It's just that the abilities haven't been developed. I first realized I could see in 1998 when I started doing holodynamics. Because when I saw that unseen world, to take it as reality, well, to

accept it as reality was not completely, well a person doesn't immediately feel comfortable in such a space and to believe one's eyes in that world, to trust what one sees then takes practice, you need to learn the practice in order to convince yourself that it's objective, that it exists, that it is really your abilities, that you are really seeing something that exists and that it's not some sort of hallucinations. It started in 1998, but trust of my abilities did not develop right away. What is it, what is there about me, how can I help people with this, what if I don't see the right thing or hear the right thing. But when there are results and when the master sees the same things and then a second and third master do then you start to feel respect for the gift from God, but we are all gifted. It's not that I have some unusual ability. It's not unusual. You just need to develop in yourself that which is inside of you and you need to make sure you don't just throw it away. And a person who's gone through intensive spiritual self-development and then stops will be punished for that. How will he be punished? He'll go backwards. In order to go forward you can't stop. You have to work, you have to develop yourself, because any stopping or falling backwards is a risk that you'll end up in a place that is so uninteresting.

Not only has Lyuba discovered new abilities in herself but she has developed new friendships that nurture her soul and keep her moving forward in her spiritual development. She finds inspiration in these new environments, surrounded by other spiritual explorers like herself. Even when she is not attending a group, the contacts remain.

And here you have endless movement forward. And people here are completely remarkable and unusual. You change and the world around you changes. Old friends fade away and new friends appear, even more beautiful ones. I don't know where they come from. I still go to groups to study holodynamics, but it's been a long time. But we stay in contact with each other and we help each other. I even give law consultations. People call and I help with documents and various situations. One girl, well not a girl, she's a woman, over forty, but when she was pregnant with her third child she went to the ashrams and had them bless her pregnancy. She's such an amazing person, also from the holodynamics circles. She's like a little flower, glowing. And in general, you know, when you see the aura of a pregnant women, well in general you're not supposed to penetrate another person's

energy without their permission. She gave me permission. And it's such a fairy tale, it's something that doesn't resemble anything else – there's one soul and another – two glowing souls and what you see there – the unborn child – it is such beauty – you can't even look with your eyes the light is so great. It's like when you look right at the sun. So we stay in contact, but I haven't been there in a while because I have other activities that I can't give up. I know I need to be there and there and there. For example, I also studied holotropic breathing, rebirthing. And going through the birth canal is unbelievable. And so a friend will call and ask 'are you going to breathe' and I say I'm going to Levin or I'm not going to Levin but I'm going to Norbekov.

As will become more apparent in Chapter Seven, Lyuba places great value in sharing her spiritual journey with her children. She is excited that her daughter has joined her in holodynamics and Reiki trainings. She and her daughter have a common spiritual language and often practice their healing arts on one another. Much more than simply an expression of shared values, beliefs and language, Lyuba believes that the children of today are more spiritually advanced than her generation. She sees that spirituality comes natural to them and they have an intuitive desire to learn and become involved in both alternative and Orthodox Christian spiritual practices.

Plus there are also such Moscow practices as the various interesting retreats in the suburbs. Amazing people gather there. And there's not even a drop of alcohol there. It's forbidden to smoke or drink. There's just tea, vegetarian food, there are campfires, guitar playing, people exchange practices – there are tantric practitioners, holodynamics practitioners, Buddhists and others. It has become more interesting to live. And children are also involved. My daughter took a Reiki course and holodynamics. And we talk in the same language about what is taking place. We do work on each other, track each other. For example, I haven't read Freud. I don't have time, but she tells me about him, and she'll say that according to Freud that dream meant such and such. She's studying psychology. And my son will just

say mom, heal me with your hands. Or he'll come and sit on my lap. Children can immediately tell that you have abilities. And animals feel – immediately. I don't have clairvoyant hearing but I do clear – vision – yasnovidnie – I can look at a person and feel exact information. And I can treat myself. Recently at Norbekov's, I didn't tell you, I hurt my ankle and for two days I was walking around with tears in my eyes, but then I woke up in the morning and everything was fine – I used Norbekov's methods and also a bit of Reiki. It was everything together. Everything fell into place. I could even feel how the tendons were regenerating themselves. I did the exercises we learned there – tracing energy along the organs, strengthening the energy of love, working with organs like they taught us in the health course, alternating warmth and cold. One method doesn't contradict the other.

The years since her divorce brought fundamental changes to Lyuba's life and way of thinking. She has begun exploring a part of herself she never knew existed. She has gained friends and learned new ways to interact and relate with her children. And she is learning how to put herself first. She is beginning to value herself and to see the importance of her own health and wellbeing. At the same time she has come to realize her own wellbeing is greatly enhanced simply in the act of sharing and helping others.

I know the time has come that I need to take care of my health. I've tried various things, such as Neways. But I'd rather spend money on good cosmetics, nourishing, because my skin doesn't take to bad cosmetics now, and there's not always money for vitamin supplements. I myself am a distributor of Neways. I take vitamins. But I'm a person who'd rather give to my children or others more than myself. But that's not right. Right now I'm in the process of fundamentally changing the way I see myself and my health. Lately during the past several years I've been spending a lot of money on various spiritual practices because there I get my health. When I go there I don't regret it. And for master work you have to pay – for massage, for breathing exercises. Everything that I get there along with various preparations – chemical preparations, bio-preparations – is far deeper because the human organism is so magnificently built that you just need to help it along. What I've

done with myself over the last four years with spiritual practices – that’s where I invest my money. Although my former husband always chastises me – ‘oh, you’re going to yet another cult’. But how is it a cult? We get together to help ourselves and each other.

Divorcing her husband and finding spiritual health training groups has opened up a whole new world of creativity, exploration and opportunity for Lyuba. She is clearly excited when she talks about all the different methods she has tried. She has grown and found in these groups a community that encourages and helps such growth to blossom inside her.

Tamara

I met Tamara at the Temple of Peace meditation the day I was introduced to Voskhozhdenie. She took it upon herself to help guide me through this new world, taking me on trainings with her, introducing me to friends, and performing holodynamics processes on me as well. A kind, warm and strong person, Tamara is also very emotional and strongly affected emotionally and physically by her spiritual practices. As we learn here, she has experienced a lot of sorrow and hurt in her life, emotions that are delved into and experienced anew during many of these practices. Holodynamics – in conjunction with rebirthing - is her primary method, although she also has tried others, including Reiki and NLP, which we studied together. More recently she has also started going to an Orthodox healer, but we shall learn more about those experiences in Chapter Seven.

Tamara has been seriously involved with alternative spiritual health practices since the early 1990s and believes she is alive today because of them and the changes they have brought to her life – both physically and emotionally. Still, she realizes she has a long way to go and much that she would still like to

change and attain in her life. She has overcome many obstacles, as we shall learn here, but others have proven thus far elusive. She has conquered cancer, overcome tragedy, loss, and two divorces, but she still battles with emotional outbursts. She still is unable to bring her weight under control. And she still has not found a truly compatible partner in life.

Tamara's story begins with her mother. As we have seen in earlier stories, the women of Voskhozhdenie place a great significance on the relationship between a mother and her child, a relationship which starts in the womb itself. Her holodynamics processes have taken her on explorations of this early period. Tamara attributes many of the health problems she has struggled with throughout her life to both a fear of succumbing to her mother's own health issues and to her mother's objections to her birth.

My mama had serious problems with diabetes and I think that somewhere deep inside me and not worked out there is still a subconscious complex that if I really lose weight that the same things that happened to my mom will happen to me.

My mom was simply a queen to my father. They were the same age. I was born in 1958. It was after my father finished studying. But my mom had intended to continue studying and to go to graduate school and defend her dissertation. Everything was all serious. I later saw all of this during processes. I don't know if it was like this or not in reality. But when I suddenly appeared she was in no way happy about it. She had other plans for her life. And I always knew that my dad loved me very much, but mom, although she also loved me, there was still some sort of inner distance. And it goes back to that time, when she realized that she was losing her beauty because of me and that her life became different.

So, in childhood there were already problems with my metabolism and weight and then later I started having problems with my eyes as well. In the fourth grade I was given glasses because I couldn't see the board. I remember that I cried because I was asked a

question and couldn't see. I couldn't answer and I was embarrassed. And at the same time I was in music school. . . I liked chorus most of all, but I had to play violin and piano – there were tears because I couldn't do it. And my eyes started going. I realize that my eyes simply reflected my aversion to seeing the world around me.

As an adult, Tamara's illnesses became more serious and her relationships more complicated. She highlights these relationships – with her parents and with men – as she discusses her own spiritual development. As she looks back and attempts to make sense of her journey and the way her life has turned out, she understands how much she is still affected by events surrounding her parents' deaths. Her early marriage, the loss of her home, and the anger and bitterness that built up inside her surrounding these events all were connected in certain ways to her relationship to her parents. Through her spiritual practices she has come to understand some of the mistakes of her past and to work through them. She sees the immaturity of some of her earlier choices and emotions. But at the time she was caught up in all so deeply and emotionally that it took a great toll on her health.

In 1984 my son was born. That was also quite a story. I got married to Kostya again on the background of a tragic situation. Kostya and I met in 1982 during a student trip to Yerevan. But before that I had a great love – we met in 1980. He was older. I really hoped that he would make a move and ask me to be part of his life, but he was waiting for something. In principle, he thought that we would definitely get married eventually, although when was not known. But I had a youthful approach. I thought why wait. And then also, we got together rarely. But he probably loved me in his own way. And so, officially, my son is named after my mother's brother who died in the blockade, but actually he's named after that Yuri. So, that was my great love. And with Kostya, yes, we met in 1982. In 1983 we lived in that two-room apartment with my dad and mom. In the fall of 1982 – it was when I had hepatitis A – everything happened at the same time – my dad

had a heart attack. This was just before I met Kostya. And my dad barely survived. My father had the type of operation that Yeltsin had, but at that time it was still experimental. And then he started to get better and I'm in another hospital with hepatitis A, and my mom didn't tell him about that so that his heart didn't get worse. I don't know. He probably found out what really happened later. But then my mom practically gave out her last strength. She was helping save my dad in 1982 and then in 1983 her kidneys completely gave out. It happened over several months. And for several months I spent time with her at the hospital near our house. She died there.

And parallel to that my dad's heart again became worse because he understood that mom was going to die. Up to that he still held out hope. Before when she'd had critical moments he had had the strength to pull her out of it with his optimism and attention to doctors. He was an amazing person. He loved life and was caring and helped everyone. But he himself was no longer strong enough. And when she was already really bad he ended up in another hospital with heart problems. And so I had both of them to take care of and doctors said that my mother would not survive, and I felt like I was going crazy. And so in that state I agreed to get married to Kostya. I didn't have anything else to hold on to. And I understood that if they both died that I would definitely go crazy. I needed something.

Although I understood that Kostya – he was my age. He wasn't serious. Of course, he loved me, but he couldn't be my true support in life. But so it happened that I agreed and he out of foolishness accepted it as if I had agreed fully. A more mature person would have understood that things didn't need to be rushed and that I simply needed support and help, but he simply was happy that I had finally agreed. And then there was also the fact that my mom wanted me to get married. And I wanted to calm her. And she was getting worse and worse. And so we had to change the wedding to an earlier date so that she could make it. It was like in the theater. I have photos, and I'm smiling, but it's obviously a forced smile. It was just a play that I was in. But for some reason I made that choice.

Ever the romantic, Tamara often wonders what would have come of her life had she married her first love instead of Kostya. He had the qualities she was looking for in a man. He was strong and older, someone

who could have provided for her. But her spiritual practices have taught her not to regret the past. If it was meant to be, it would have happened, she reassures herself so as not to become too bogged down in thoughts of what could have been.

If I was the person I am now, of course I wouldn't have done that. Especially since that the last moment when we're at ZACS, Yura calls. It turns out – I called his sister as a witness on purpose, hoping that he would find out at least a month before the wedding and would make a move, and I thought if he realized that he really needed me, then he would appear. But it turned out that at that time he wasn't speaking with his sister and only found out when she was going out to get a present – he asked where she was going and she said she was going to my wedding. Can you imagine? I thought I had figured everything out down to the last detail. I tried calling him, but I always called at moments when he couldn't talk. So all of my attempts to contact him and talk with him led to nothing. Although since it turned out that way, then based on our current way of thinking, we probably weren't supposed to be together. Although when we met I had the feeling that finally I had found him, because I felt his life experience, wisdom, and we had a particularly warm and peaceful relationship. And during those years he began to teach me. You understand, a man trains a woman for himself in all relationships. And so I was trained for him, but he was the way he was. So anyway, I got married, and I didn't want a baby right away. And my father thought I was still young and should wait. Especially given the situation. We got married on August 20. And my mother died on September 17. And she died when I wasn't near by. Later I read in various books that when people love each other a lot they don't want to hurt their loved ones and knowing that it will be painful to witness, they choose to die at a time when the person has just left the room or won't be there.

The events surrounding her father's death are still very painful for Tamara to talk about. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, she has been recently working with alternative and Orthodox methods to work through some of the negative emotions that these events brought out in her. She attributes many of the problems that have resulted from these events to a curse put on her by a family

member. This curse, she believes, has driven family away from her and led to the loss of her home and dacha. Her spiritual practices are teaching her to both protect herself from the negative energy of curses and to work through some of their effects through the power of forgiveness and the transformative healing of holodynamics.

And then my father died six years after his first heart attack. He was horribly depressed for several years. And then he started to look for someone who would replace my mother. He went to the Baltics, to health spas and searched. And he found someone. He found Nina, who had her own family and two children. But he loved her. And they had an affair for several years. I don't really know how she really felt about him. Probably she accepted him and counted on being able to come to Moscow with him. Then in 1988 in the spring he brought her here to live with us in our two room apartment. He registered her to the apartment and found her work, and a month later it was horribly hot and he took everyone – her and her children – to the dacha which he had just bought. There was a pond nearby and they went swimming because it was really hot, and he told everyone to go ahead and he rode his bike. And no one thought that something could happen to him. But when he didn't show up for an hour they went to look for him and when they found him half of his body was white and half was black. He had an aneurism. Apparently he died instantly. Can you imagine – on the road, alone? When I found out I felt horrible. And then I ended up with his young wife and children along with my husband and son. And they had no intention of moving out.

Tamara explains that the stress from these events showed up in both her physical appearance and her health. She noticed a rapid decline in both. The stress also took a toll on her relationship, which had not been ideal in the first place, and soon after her father's death she and her first husband divorced. She was being forced to deal with too many problems at once.

Just before he died I had my picture taken for my passport and I looked young and relatively thin, and then just three months later I

looked completely different. I probably gained around 10 kilograms because I was in such shock. Before all of this happened my metabolism wasn't so great, but I was able to maintain my weight by being active, but this apparently ruined my metabolism completely. And since then I've just gotten bigger and bigger. And at the same time, a tumor in my thyroid developed. If it had just been my father's death, but then I was faced with this whole new group of people around me, and somehow the sister of his [second] wife made it seem like my father's death was my fault. And when my relatives came by and would stay in the apartment she would tell this to everyone. And my father was supposed to get an apartment for his new family. Meanwhile he found a small apartment for me so that we didn't all live like we were in a communal apartment. My family and I were then going to move back into the two room apartment when they moved into the new one. But when he died he was struck from the list and they're not given a new apartment. And then things worked out that my words were distorted and people were against me. At the funeral my father's sister asked how I was and I said I wasn't here, meaning that I was thinking of higher things and not this physical space. But as I learned later she interpreted that as saying that I wasn't thinking about my loving father but was instead preoccupied with how I was going to get that apartment. And then his young wife Nina was also crying and everyone was around her and comforting her. If things had been different then perhaps I would have ended up with the apartment, but since I was standing there and not crying but instead was organizing the funeral and dealing with its financing and had sold things so we could have it, well that's what happened.

And again amidst all of the tragedy and sickness, Tamara's romantic nature got the best of her. Her marriage and her health failing, she finds herself once again in love with someone she now understands she should not have been with. The turbulence from this relationship led, she believes, to a series of gynecological complications that nearly killed her. But it was also out of this relationship that she found holodynamics and began her journey towards recovery and spiritual development.

And it also happened that Kostya and I were not getting along even before my father died. My father died in July and in September

Kostya and I got divorced. And then I started having gynecological problems because when we divorced it was a different kind of test/torture (ispytanie) for me. Because Kostya loved me, but I loved someone else. And so since I rejected the person who loved me, the same thing had to happen to me. But at first everything was beautiful and romantic. We were in love. But about a year and a half later, when I realized that I was pregnant I realized that he was cheating on me. And I realize that I can't have a child under such circumstances, and so I have an abortion – it was horrible and I cried because when you love someone you want their child. Plus there were complications. Apparently something remained inside of me and I was hospitalized for two months afterwards. And when I got out of the hospital he told me 'now we need a child'. It turned out that his lover left him as well. If I had known better I would have probably ended things then, but I was so in love that I was willing to still try to work things out with him. We were married in 1988 and all of the problems with the abortion took place I think in 1990 or 1991. By 1994 I finally realize that nothing good is going to come of our relationship. And on this background holodynamics appears.

Tamara and Kostya eventually divorced and she married Rustam in 1988.

The honeymoon period of Tamara's second marriage was short lived. The sickness, abortion, cheating and her husband's temper took their toll. But it was his interest in learning how to influence others' behavior that led Tamara to holodynamics. Rustam had falsely been told that holodynamics was a way to manipulate people to one's will. When he realized this was not the case he quickly lost interest, but Tamara stayed with it and has since been devoting her life to healing and spiritual transformation.

And so on the background of all of this my relationship with my second husband began to unravel. He was a rather argumentative person. And one of his acquaintances suggested a system that would fix his relationship with the person who was kicking him out of his art studio. He was told that if he studied this, instead of kicking him out she would bring him pies. And he figured, why not. They gave him a video where they spoke about holodynamics. Then after half an hour of conversation there was a tape of a process. A person was lying there – and I remember

when we turned on the video – we sat and watched it together – after about ten minutes he fell asleep. He tried a couple more times but it didn't work. But I was really interested. But the people who gave him the video also gave him a telephone number. He apparently called and asked them to call when there would be a seminar. But it happened that they called when I was home instead of him. So I talked with them and found everything out for him, but I decided to go as well. When he found out he was really angry. Because he wanted to learn so that he could use it for his own goals. But we went together and we took the first seminar together in April of 1994.

At that time the center Voskhozhdenie didn't yet exist. But Sveta and David were around, and there were also Volodia and Lena. Volodia directed this first seminar. The seminar was held at Volodia's dacha, not far from Moscow. The people were very warm. We could honestly and openly talk with each other. There was a particular ritual. Each leader brings his own style. There is one method but many approaches. And understandings – if you've read the book, the second book by Aronov – the approach there is a bit different. Sveta has a more esoteric approach. Aronov has a more practical view. But that's good because each person can pick what's closer to them. I went through that first seminar at the level of tracking. I remember that on the last day of the seminar more experienced people came to help. And as it turned out in my group there was a woman who it later became clear was the most powerful master. She told me that it was clear that I would go further with this because I had a reason, I had something to work out, but that Rustam probably wouldn't. And that's how it turned out. He tried it and understood that it wasn't a magic wand.

Soon after her introduction to holodynamics Tamara had an opportunity to test her new healing method on her own son. To her great surprise and joy, the method worked and her son quickly began to feel better.

And in that same year – 1994 – in April this all happened and then in July Yura and I went to a bus trip abroad – he was ten then. During that trip I was forced to use the methods I had learned. On the eve of Yurka's birthday he had ear problems. Ever since he was small he always had problems with his ears. And here – either because it was drafty on the bus with the open windows or for some other reason, but on the eve of his birthday, July 3rd, we were

already on the trip home – we were in the former socialist countries – we were in Poland in the evening and we arrive in the little town where we were to have dinner and then we were supposed to travel on to the town where we would sleep for the night. We arrive and he's got a really high temperature, he's in my arms all hot and everything hurts. Everyone's at dinner and he can't eat anything. And so, everyone is looking at me empathetically, but how can they help? We didn't have any pain killers. I realized that the only thing I could do was trust, to ask my full potential. So Yurka and I go outside and sit on a bench and I take his hand and I start to talk with him – what do you have there in your ear? It turned out that in his ear there was a wolf-cub that was biting him. That was the pain that he had. What does he want? He's sad. He needs friends. Who would he like to play with? A fox cub. So we call the fox cub and they start to play. They ran around together and promised each other that they would be friends. In ten minutes his fever was gone. He was all happy and satisfied and we return to the restaurant and everyone looks and wonders what happened. I remember that it was like a miracle. Since I trusted and I had a child who totally trusted me I was given this chance. And every since – I'll ask him – do you remember what happened - and he does, but later he started saying that holodynamics is all nonsense, but that happened.

At this point, while Tamara was starting to enter a new period of her life, she was still married to Rustam and still was trying to work things out with him. She is happy to learn that she is pregnant once again and hopes this time to have a daughter. But her life, she says, was simply too tumultuous at the time, and she ended up having a miscarriage that nearly killed her.

And parallel to that it turned out during that same trip that I was pregnant again. I was really tired – that was the first symptom. The first was that I didn't want chocolate, which I always want, and the second that I couldn't even ride on the subway because of exhaustion. But again there were tragic circumstances. During a process I could see that there was some sort of soul there, female. I wanted a daughter. I had the thought that if the first would be a son that then there would be a daughter. How nice it would be for her to have an older brother. So there was this thought – here's that daughter. But I didn't know what it was and then there was

bleeding and my friend Galya was there. She called an ambulance and they took me to the hospital. I didn't know what a miscarriage was like. I kept thinking maybe they could still save it somehow. But then I realized they were going to operate and that it was an ectopic pregnancy.

For some reason the thoughts of this miscarriage make her think of her son Yuri and his birth. Up until this point he had almost been an afterthought in the conversation. While other women I had spoken with focused primarily on their children, Tamara seemed to mention him only in passing. It was clear that he was a sore point. This was mostly because she felt so responsible for his ill health and his unhappiness. Her own spiritual methodologies told her the lasting imprint the birth experience and the mother's feelings could have on a child. She herself felt this imprint from her own mother. And she knew as well that while she loved him more than anything, he was not wanted at the time of his birth. He was not in her plans at the time. And then to make the situation worse, his birth was a very traumatic one. And so she feels a great deal of guilt surrounding her relationship with Yura and has not yet been able to resolve all of these issues.

Yura, though is a very karmic child, very karmic. He was the result of a ripped condom, actually. As I said, we didn't want children because of my mother's death. And I know that his psyche is disturbed because at the beginning I refused to deal with the reality that he existed and was born. And he had a difficult birth. I almost died. I was unconscious in the corridor. My water broke earlier at home. And the baby starts to suffocate when the water breaks. But then nothing – everything stopped and I lay there for hours wondering when it would happen. I began to count the contractions, but they were really weak. And I was horribly tired for dealing with this all night. And I started getting really scared. I had the feeling that I would die while giving birth. I just knew it. And during the morning rounds when the doctors and nurses check on everyone, they stopped near me and they saw my condition and decided to put me out for a few hours. So the birth took place for 24 hours.

Returning to her miscarriage, Tamara reveals why it was such a traumatic event for her. Not only had she nearly died, but she was given a hysterectomy at the time. While she understands that this was necessary because of the tumors, this dashed any hopes of ever having a daughter. In some ways she sees this too as a result of the curse put on her by her relatives after her father's death. Although now she is using her spiritual practices to learn how to release the negative energy through forgiveness.

After the operation for the entopic pregnancy they at first didn't tell me what they had done. And then it came out that they had removed my uterine appendages – from both sides. They left my uterus, but cut everything else out. When they cut them open they found out that there were also two giant tumors on my ovaries. Later I found out that if there is a problem with the thyroid that there will also be some sort of gynecological problem. If I hadn't had the entopic pregnancy they would eventually have had to cut me anyways because of the tumors. I remember that that all happened August 1st 1994 – on the day that I decided to finally take my documents to register myself on my father's dacha. As soon as I went to the station – again everything seems coincidental – but I understand that you can see things in different ways, but I understand that the curse on me was not a weak one. It was a curse by my relatives who didn't want to let me have anything. It was all inside of me and somehow that program was working on my subconscious. I still am very careful when it comes to that topic. And later there were problems. As soon as I'd think about taking steps something would always happen to me. I began avoiding it altogether. It seems better to simply lose everything. Or I need to really change – it's so deep inside me – I need to forgive what happened – then it will stop working. That's what I'm working on now with all of these various practices.

During her turbulent period Tamara starts to become more and more immersed in holodynamics and starts to go through some serious work on herself. She begins to move forward and starts to realize that she and Rustam are heading

in different directions with their lives. Her holodynamics processes become deeper and more powerful and she begins to delve into her subconscious and her early relationship with her mother.

So that's 1994 and we're all living together in this apartment. With my mother in law and two children who are poorly behaved and with Rustam who behaves who knows how and Yurka and my work. Everything was horrible. Then after I got out of the hospital I went to one of Volodia's seminars again. When I was feeling really horrible and almost died then Rustam started taking care of me and for a while took me back to the seminars at the dacha. I had some really deep processes already. Although it was the first level I asked to have a real process and I ended up having a nine hour process. A nine hour process and during that time I went through my own birth three times. One time like I really was born – I see myself along with my mother. One time I see myself in some church and candles are burning and a woman in black. I should be born and I don't want to be. I remember that whole "re-live" moment. But then when I overcame everything and I was born I immediately went to my next birth, and I see myself in some sort of water near my mother. So there were three births in a row, with different sensations and different images. That was my first really deep process. So while the seminar was taking place they had me lie down somewhere and different people took turns working on me. They helped me a lot. Rustam tried a couple more times to work on himself. But he didn't have any deep changes. And I realized that he was going away. He was going in a dark direction. I understood after a few processes that our mutual life together was coming to an end.

While she doesn't realize it, one of her holodynamics teachers sees that she is enabling some of the issues in her relationship with Rustam. She was holding on and trying to make him change into something he was not interested in. When she stopped paying for his trainings, he stopped going and she was able to focus more on herself there. This also cleared space for her to meet someone else.

In December of 1994 I took the seminar for the second level of holodynamics. Back then it was rather strict. Now you can go

from one to the other. Back then you had to go through the first level no less than five times before going on to the second. It wasn't enough to have good vision, you had to work through the first layer – especially since I cried during every process. In order to move forward I needed to go deep inside. And this started happening in December. And Lena and Volodia were in close contact with all of the people they worked with. They could feel when something was happening with us. And Lena told me under no circumstances was I to pay for Rustam to go to the seminar. It usually worked out that I worked a lot more than he did and made more money and so I would pay for both of us. She told me not to do that and that if he wanted to come he would pay himself and if not then he didn't need it. I'm really thankful that she told me that. At that seminar I met Dima. If Rustam had been there who knows what would have happened. So Lena saw that. She didn't know concretely what would happen, but she knew that he shouldn't be there.

Eventually she and Rustam separate and she begins seeing Dima, romanticism once again getting the best of her. But at this time she realized that Rustam's aggressive behavior was starting to get out of hand. Their relationship was over, but he was filled with such rage that she began to fear for her life. Her fears were confirmed by several different outside sources at the time. While some of these sources she could not trust because of the advice they gave her, she nonetheless became frightened enough to go into hiding. Dima and other friends from her holodynamics trainings helped her find a place where Rustam could not harm her.

Dima was in my group. Back then there were a lot of people at the seminars. There were probably over thirty people then. We were outside Moscow at a dorm for some institute. So the seminar passes and he also goes to the Wednesday meetings. And then one day he calls me on the phone before traveling back to his home in Chelny - he had traveled to Moscow - and suddenly he declares his love for me. I was stunned. But it turns out that – you see that he's a person whose mood goes up and down. And at that time he was experiencing holodynamics love. It was a period when he loved everything. There probably were some individual elements,

but for him it was likely mostly like that. I in a way understood, but I gave in to those words – and felt like he was mine – and acted accordingly. And this quickly led to a different level of relations. Then either Rustam left and started renting an apartment somewhere or I traveled off somewhere with Dima. And there was that sort of period where it was clear that we were already no longer together here, but at the same time we still hadn't divorced. I still wasn't prepared for that. I was scared. Not so much because I was losing my love. At the same time it turned out that a friend of a friend was seriously studying tarot card reading and I went to her for a séance and she did a really big reading and there it was completely clear that Rustam had the desire to kill me and that that desire could in actual fact take place. Because he was already in a borderline psychological state – resentment, revenge and what not. And so – you know there are different kinds of people who do Tarot readings – and they suggested that I make the first move. I was shocked that they suggested that – that they suggested an aggressive path – and that there were different ways – he could slip under a train or I could hire a killer. If you have money, why lose everything that you have? I left there completely stunned and the fear I had inside increased ten-fold. Before that I had sensed it, but then I realized that it was so.

While in hiding she continued working intensely with holodynamics. She and her new spiritual friends did multiple processes on her relationship with Rustam and on her health problems. She believes that if not for all of their help she may not have gotten through that period alive.

Then I went to a woman, also a holodynamist, who's an old friend of Sveta's. Then I also asked Dima to come stay in Moscow. She immediately saw that the situation was serious, that the probability was more than 99 percent, and she started working with me there. They found me a place in Tekstil'shiki and then Dima came and stayed there and we lived together for two months in that apartment. And at that time I had many processes by phone. I remember that we would work and work and I would get off the phone and there was a feeling of a phantom, as if a killer was standing right next to me. I couldn't sleep. It was a horrible state. It's good that Dima was near by. There were a lot of processes but I remember that the last one I saw a counter and it went down and showed that the probability was lowering and I started to calm down. In reality it all happened later when our relationship became all business and even positive. But I think that if there

hadn't been a process – when I had the entopic pregnancy I called up Sveta and they all sat together and meditated and helped me. She understood that this wouldn't just go away and that it was very serious. I know that without their help I would never have seen Yurka again, I wouldn't have had any desire to keep living.

With that episode of her life behind her, Tamara began becoming more involved with Voskhozhdenie. She had started her holodynamics practice with two other prominent practitioners, but found that the more esoteric methods of Sveta and David fit her style more closely. She and Sveta became particularly close while Sveta performed a series of lengthy holodynamics processes with her to overcome her cancer.

In 1995 I went to Yakarem for my first retreat. It was marvelous. The retreat is a gathering of many different spiritual health practices. It's been going on for a long time, but we ended up at the first one that was in Yakarem. I was all in love with Dima and everything was beautiful. Everything seemed miraculous. At the retreat sometimes I would work and when I didn't work then others would do processes on me. I would work on my relationships with men and my health, and all of the gynecological problems. I had a lot of processes on the theme of that operation where they cut my reproductive organs. And after the operation I was diagnosed with a myoma, quite a large one. And when I found out Sveta – I had by then started going to Sveta and David's seminars. They have a slightly different style. And things worked out in such a way that Volodya closed his doors to us. I realize that all people who I put on a pedestal eventually act in ways that show me that I don't need to do that, that they are regular people, and Volodia did that rather quickly. Even Sveta has managed to do that. And others as well. But by then I was already in this circle. We are in a way all together, but there are different currents. Holodynamics isn't just Sveta, David and Volodya. There are many other people and a center in Moscow where at one time Vernon Woolf attracted everyone around him. These things started, and a lot of it was through Sveta. Probably any movement should have its dynamic development. It begins, develops, spreads and then splits up. Maybe someday they will all unite at a different level, but not any time soon. So at that time I was already with Sveta and she began to work with me. She did a series of processes on me. The main theme was the myoma.

During the period when Sveta was working on Tamara's cancer with holodynamics, Tamara joined other members of Voskhozhdenie on a trip to the Caucasus region for a conference of alternative spiritual healers who were gathering to meditate for peace in Chechnya. She found the experience profoundly moving and powerful. Upon their return to Moscow a peace agreement was signed and tests for her cancer came up negative. While she admits this all may have been simple coincidence, she likes to believe that their holodynamics and meditations had something to do with these outcomes.

At the same time there was a southern conference in the Caucasus – again you might think that it's all coincidence. When the first Chechen war started we all gathered in the Krasnoyarsky region – around 300 people. There were various holodynamists and public figures and others. The conference was called Peace in the Caucasus. It wasn't a political conference. The goal was, by being there to help the situation in Chechnya. There were a lot of processes and very powerful meditations with around 300 people. There were also healing waters. There was a cross where we all met and meditated on peace. Everyone's meditations started to resonate with one another and transformations took place. It was like one general process where everyone was talking at the same time. There were several moments when there was the sensation that something really was happening. When we are returning and are almost to Moscow we hear that they were signing, it was the Savelovsky peace agreement. I know it wasn't complete – Lebed was a general then. But something like peace was established. Who knows? Maybe it was the circumstances and maybe we helped. Anyway, as a result of everything, a doctor had diagnoses me with cancer, but after the processes I had an ultrasound done and it showed that there was no myoma. So, I don't know. I can't say. But I want to believe. Because the processes were very deep, particularly in the sphere of mutual-relations. That is, gynecological problems are indications of relations between men and women. So, inside there was some sort of imbalance. But that problem that I keep working on – my size – it doesn't change. And critics of the method always say, see it doesn't work, it's senseless. But I understand if it weren't for holodynamics,

considering all of the situations I've told you about, in principle, I would have died a long time ago.

More recently Tamara has been thinking more and more about fully devoting herself to healing. She had worked for several years for an American lawyer as a translator making a decent salary. The work was not particularly inspiring, but she had managed to save up several thousand dollars which she had hoped to use for a trip to India to see Sai Baba. Problems in the company had recently led to her being laid off, however, and her India plans put on hold. But she had been a strong presence at Voskhozhdenie from its inception and had long since reached the master level of holodynamics. She helped lead seminars for Sveta and David and was an active practitioner of holodynamics processes. But before she devotes herself full time to healing, she realizes that she needs to work on herself. She needs to cleanse her energy and strengthen her own spiritual core.

And for now as far as work goes I don't have anything, but I feel like I'd like to do something. It's not that I was given a mission from the center. The Center formed around five years ago. It was from Sveta's initiative. She had processes that told her that she needed to do this. She kept saying no, no, why? But she did it. I have a feeling that I'd like to work as a healer, but there are also several 'buts'. When I started doing all of this, my father's sister appeared on the horizon and she told me that she had also tried, but she understood that it's not easy. You can work with your hands and do massage, but at the same time while you're taking away from a person, you're drawing the negative to yourself. And she also told me that yes, we have that in our line. Apparently her grandmother had been a rather serious healer – at the level of znakhr', like in the villages. And I saw that several times during processes. I saw the sin there – on the one hand it's all good, but a person comes to you and you act in the role of judge in the place of God. He was given the illness by God and you try to help him and destroy what was given him, and what the person himself can work on changing. From the outside you remove the weight from them, but in order to really help people you have to continuously work on yourself. You have to become purer and purer inside and then you

won't pull that to yourself. I know this, and it's clear from my natal map. So on the one hand they say I should work as I want, but on the other hand I still have work to do from the past, in the eighth house. The eighth house is the house of death, connection with those subtle things – you can do all of that, you feel all of that, but you draw everything to yourself very strongly, so you need to work on that. You need a balance of your own energy. That's my main issue now. Aside from holodynamics I use free-breathing. I watch Dima – how he breathes and behaves, how Sveta and David work together. At first I decided that I would never do that. It's too scary. But gradually I changed my mind and started to try it. Sometimes I even like it. And now you can see how my body gets tuned into it and starts moving and I feel how the energy flows and all of the severed connections are restored for a time. I can tell the difference before and after. I understand that you need to support your energy level and that you can love your body. Now more than ever I want to do this professionally, but I understand that you need to give out in a measured way and you need to work on yourself.

And so again she is in a period of transition and transformation. She knows she has come a long way and has faith in her new spiritual practices and guides to help her along, but still there is a fear of the unknown. She is not sure what direction she will be heading. She is unsure of her career path and once again finds herself feeling doubts about her newest relationship. But she also understands that change and self-exploration are prime motivators in the world of spiritual development.

But I trust life, which is leading me. I can't say that I've gone through extreme changes. Although people who knew me ten years ago say that I've changed a lot, that I'm a different person. But I know the kind of person I could be and that I still cry easily and I'm easily brought down. But now not everyone can and it's very rare. And also the astrological methods help. I've had my chart looked at in detail. I hope that Boris Levin will look because recently I reached a critical period in the sphere of feelings. So I really sharply feel energy and also the sphere of emotions. Now certain words that wouldn't have affected me if Dima said them, now they open up a whole torrential rain of tears. When you're in a normal state, in a positive field, everything is good, but if you're

in a dark sphere for a long time then it's different. And now my task – since with my former husbands I was first for five years and then for seven years – that I haven't been able to form a family. I always ended up breaking up. And now again I'm starting to have thoughts when things happen – do we both need this or not? I know that they are needed, that I need it in order to work on some deep things inside of myself. And if I make it through this critical period then maybe I'll be able to help Dima and myself.

Conclusion

With happiness ever a fleeting moment - as new obstacles bring new lessons into their lives - we see here how the women of Voskhozhdenie strive on to grow and understand their tasks here on earth. Welcoming into their world views the cosmic and esoteric concepts we learned in Chapter Four, their practices are at heart practical, geared towards overcoming real life obstacles and problems. Drawing on western, eastern and home-grown ideas, their practices unite cosmic and pure spiritual forms with the physicality of such earthly processes as birth and illness and human interrelations, they mold and shape spiritual health methods that serve to help them improve their lives and relationships here on earth. The esoteric practices provide a language and space for deep inner explorations, offering opportunities for individual spiritual and creative transformation and growth. These inner discoveries in turn become guideposts to bettering the world about them, which grows exponentially with each new training and practice.

Within the spaces of these trainings, the women look deep into themselves and discover a powerful creative and spiritual force in their own physical bodies, epitomized by the process of birth itself. Embracing

the metaphors of birth and motherhood, they find inspiration in their feminine designations and roles and see them not as burdens but as spiritual endowments women alone can experience. At the same time, the trainings and groups offer opportunities beyond practices and lessons. In these spaces the women forge new friendships, express their creative freedom and create new relationships and bonds that serve as safety nets and provide support, giving them the strength to grow as individuals in the secure knowledge that indeed they are not alone. Both spiritual and human guides are there to help, guides who draw inspiration from many beliefs – esoteric, Orthodox, psychological, eastern and pagan. In the next chapter we turn to this plurality of beliefs and explore how the women of Voskhozhdenie work to incorporate them into a unified worldview.

Chapter Seven

Alternative Spirituality and Christianity

As we saw in Chapter Two, conservative factions of the Russian Orthodox Church are involved in a heated campaign against alternative and “New Age” practices, marking them as western and threatening to the traditional Russian way of life. These extreme measures have in many ways been prompted and inflamed by western interference and discourses that envision Russia as backwards, forever opposed to western notions of liberty, pluralism and democracy. In practice, the spiritual world in Moscow is much more blurred and nuanced than the Church or western portrayals would have us believe. Russian believers and spiritual health practitioners integrate ideas from many beliefs, including Orthodoxy, into their practices. Many identify strongly with their Orthodox heritage and turn to the Church for spiritual guidance and support. While the hierarchy would likely not approve, and lay believers do not always openly share their views and practices with the clergy, people involved with alternative spiritual health in Moscow freely incorporate Orthodox beliefs, rituals, prayers and imagery into their alternative practices and see no contradiction therein.

For many of the women I worked with in Moscow, Russian Orthodoxy holds a deeply important place in their world view and self-conception. They identify strongly with their Orthodox roots, even as they take what they need from Orthodox Christianity and utilize it in very un-orthodox ways. For them there is no contradiction because the world is One, there is Unity in the universe, and Orthodoxy is simply a reflection of their Russian heritage, the Russian expression

of the Universal and the creator. They feel Orthodoxy in their soul and find power and protection in the Orthodox egregore. At the same time, however, their sentiments are conflicted and they distinguish Orthodoxy from the Church, its hierarchical structures and dogmas. This chapter explores some of the ways women involved with New Age practices in Moscow understand Orthodoxy, how they interpret it in their unique ways and how they use it for their own spiritual empowerment and growth, even as they criticize and disregard elements they find distasteful. At the same time, some of their stories reveal a certain change in the attitudes of the official Orthodox Church positions and a possible movement towards more tolerance of different views.

Most early encounters these women had with alternative spiritual health also included an element of Orthodox Christianity. Entrance into the Orthodox world, however, was by no means traditional or Orthodox in its expression or meaning. I suspect that those involved with the alternative health sphere developed a critical gaze towards totalizing projects more generally, including the state and organized religions with strict dogmas. Their incorporation of Orthodox Christianity into their beliefs and practices are done in a manner that highlights inclusiveness and freedom of expression over dogma. And they utilize Orthodoxy in a personal way that provides them with support and protection on their spiritual journeys.

Historical Connections

There are several key developments that helped shape the reception of Orthodox Christianity by members of the Russian New Age today. A critical

factor in the complex relationship between New Age practitioners and the Orthodox Church can be traced to the schism within Orthodoxy itself during the Soviet period. This schism led to a dissident movement that attracted intellectuals interested in philosophical and spiritual inquiry and who longed for greater freedom of conscience and expression. Two figures in particular are significant in the development of the New Age movement in Moscow: Father Gleb Yakunin and Father Alexander Men'. The schism at hand was primarily caused by the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Soviet State. Upon the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon refused to submit to the demands of the State and died while under house arrest in 1925. His successor, the Metropolitan Sergius, was more cooperative. In 1927 he pledged his loyalty to the Soviet State, and the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to operate under close State supervision with strict limitations, which included a ban on charity work and proselytizing. Many Orthodox believers considered this a deep betrayal of their faith and disassociated themselves at this time from the Church hierarchy, which many came to view as merely a tool of the State. These believers formed small underground groups throughout the country that came to be known as the True Russian Orthodox Church, or Catacomb Church, so called because according to legend, shortly before his death, Patriarch Tikhon had warned a close friend that soon he may need to "go into the catacombs" in order to preserve the true spirit of the faith (Andreyev 1982). Persecuted by both the State and the Official Russian Orthodox Church, members of the Catacomb Church worked to uphold and spread the spirit rather than simply

the form of Orthodoxy, which they felt was all that remained in the official Church due to its compromised relationship with the Soviet State. While by some accounts the Catacomb Church later rejoined the Official Church when the Patriarchate was reinstated in 1943, a spiritual divide remained. From this Catacomb tradition a more open and tolerant branch of Orthodoxy developed that values the philosophical and spiritual input of other religions and ideas, and, hearkening back to the Orthodox hesychast tradition, places emphasis on direct contact with god and inner spiritual development.¹⁰⁴

This underground movement came to symbolize for many the struggle for freedom of conscience and human rights both inside and outside Russia. One of the most outspoken activists was Father Gleb Yakunin. In 1965 he and another Moscow priest, Nikolai Eshliman, co-wrote open letters to Patriarch Alexii I and the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR decrying the relationship between the Church and State and calling on the State to uphold the religious freedoms of the constitution. The open criticism of the Church led Patriarch Alexii to ban Yakunin and his co-author from serving as priests. Yakunin remained active in his struggles for religious freedom and in 1976 founded the Christian Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Religious Believers in the USSR. This was a human rights organization that worked for the rights of all believers, not only Christian or Orthodox (Valliere 1996: 288).

¹⁰⁴ Brought to Moscow by Maxim the Greek in the 16th century, hesychasm was a mystical movement whose members believed in the possible unification with God, through “inner calm,” and that through inner purification “man could gain a glimpse of the divine light” (Billington 1970: 51). According to Billington, Maxim was an advocate of tolerant Christian humanism, but his efforts to incorporate this into the official doctrine of the Orthodox Church at that time failed (Billington 1970: 94).

According to religion scholar Paul Valliere, the religious rights movement and human rights movements worked closely together in the Soviet Union during this period (*ibid.*: 289). Yakunin would later spend five years in prison for his activities, but today continues his struggles in the post-Soviet setting as head of the Committee for the Protection of Freedom of Conscience. In 1997, on behalf of the Church of Scientology and the Society of Krishna Consciousness, Yakunin filed a defamation of character suit against Alexander Dvorkin, whose work against the New Age we saw in Chapter Two. Although he lost this suit, he continues to work for the freedom of all religions and believers in Russia against the encroachment of the State and Orthodox Church.

The other figure to come out of the Catacomb Church whose influence has strongly colored the relationship between the New Age and Orthodoxy is Father Alexander Men'. Secretly baptized in a Catacomb Church when he was a child, Men' was an openly practicing Orthodox priest during the late Soviet period. He worked just outside of Moscow and is credited with bringing large numbers of the intelligentsia to the Church with his personal approach, as well as lectures and books which emphasized the inclusive and tolerant nature of Orthodox teachings, particularly as elaborated by such spiritual forefathers as Berdiaev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Soloviev. Through Men's writings, some within the intelligentsia came to see Orthodoxy and faith as something culturally elevated, a sign of spiritual depth that was missing in the cold calculus of materialism. His works intertwine ideas from a wide range of intellectual fields, including philosophy, literature, religion and even ethnography, and he valued the contributions of

thinkers from all cultures and time periods. One lecture titled simply "Christianity" begins with a discussion of the influences of Buddhism, Islam and Taoism. Even the pantheists were correct in their belief that God resides in everything, he declares on this first page. They just did not take their ideas as far as Christianity. And while he maintains that Christianity is not simply an eclectic collection of previous ideas and religions, he lists as "Great teachers of humanity" the authors of the Upanishads, Lao-tse, Confucius, Buddha, Muhammad, Socrates, and Plato (Men': 12). In this same lecture Men' even makes a reference to Daniil Andreev's *Rose of the World*, which, as we learned in Chapter Four, had a great influence on Voskhozhdenie and the New Age in Russia more generally. Here Men' draws on Andreev's reverence for nature and the abilities within each of us to experience nature's spirituality: "Probably some of you are familiar with the book *Rose of the World* by Daniil Andreev. There is a chapter in this book where nature is spoken about as a carrier of spirituality. This experience, which is accessible to each of us, is the basis of our veneration of nature, our ecological ethics. It is alive, nature is, and it is not for no reason that we call her mother nature." Note his assumption that his listeners would know Andreev's work. Interestingly, this quote also highlights the creative power of motherhood. In another lecture called "By the Sources of Spirituality" Men' discusses the high levels of spiritual development found amongst early humans, as evidenced by drawings left in caves, and how these original notions divided into the myriad forms of religious thought we find today (*ibid.*: 60). Continuing on this topic he writes:

Almost in all cultures there have been discovered notions about a certain unified higher Beginning...They seem like primitive people, but it turns out that the only primitive thing about them is their technology. According to the law of development, the starting point contains within it all the steps that are to come later. Vladimir Soloviev described it as follows: The seed already contains within itself elements of the root, the stem, the leaves, and the fruit. Then out of this unity the root, stem, leaves and fruit are differentiated and further the plant gives more fruit, that is, a new synthesis takes place. The same thing happens with the history of culture and the history of spirituality (*ibid.*: 60).

But while people have divided the world into differentiated fragments, different religions, Men' writes that people are "programmed to unite with their Original Source. But this is not a harsh program – we have the freedom of choice. And we would not be right if we crossed out people's free choice from the history of religion or the history of spiritual searching. God calls on us and He awaits our answer. Our answer is the whole history of religious consciousness" (*ibid.*: 62).

Drawn to Men's tolerance and respect for other religions and his focus on such notions as unity and the presence of God in nature and within each person, Sveta and David make reference to his ideas several times in their work *How to live in Happiness*. His inclusion also serves to add credence and gravity to their own views. Bolstering their idea of the intertwining unity of all humanity, they quote from his work *Good News*: "From the time of Noah people began to separate and settle in different places. This is a concrete, visible expression of humanity as a singular family united by blood" (Prival'skaya 2001a: 194). To Sveta and David, this unity of a vast plurality of beliefs and voices serves as

evidence of the inherent fallacy of either-or thinking and dispels any notions that any one group has a monopoly on the truth.

At a different point in their book they turn to Men' to support the theory of reincarnation: "Reincarnation of the immortal soul in other people - these are temporary stages, all part of the grandiose game of the Absolute" (*ibid.*: 108). They note that according to Men' reincarnation was first mentioned in writing around the year 1000 b.c.a. in the *Upanishads*. Because Men' has become a universally respected figure in the world of Orthodox intellectuals and his works have sold millions of copies, Sveta and David understand that their audience will be familiar with Men' and that his words will carry significant weight. His stamp of approval on the notion of reincarnation and his knowledge of the *Upanishads* is offered as evidence of their importance and validity. In 1990 Men' was brutally murdered with an ax to his head, and the murder has never been solved. Since then his life has taken on mythical significance for many in the Orthodox world, and his words have become even more revered and sacred.¹⁰⁵ In the year 2000, Gleb Yakunin, who was a friend and disciple of Men', established a new Orthodox Church, the Apostolate Orthodox Church, which canonized Men' as a saint.

Men' was the godfather of another Orthodox figure significant to the New Age scene in Moscow today, the journalist and Church historian Yakov Krotov, who in 2001 was ordained in Yakunin's new Church. In addition to being Krotov's godfather, Men' baptized Krotov's wife and children, and profoundly

¹⁰⁵ See Yakov Krotov's online library for extensive commentary on Men' - http://www.krotov.info/yakov/7_auto/eng/_00.htm.

influenced his interpretation of Orthodoxy. I first learned of Krotov and his work towards increasing religious tolerance in Russia at a conference I attended just four days after the conference on “totalitarian” cults. He was a speaker at this very different conference entitled “The Russian Orthodox-Protestant Dialogue on Mission, which aimed at better relations and understanding between the various Christian faiths operating in Russia. The primary issue of discussion was the proposed revision to the law on freedom of conscience that the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was promoting. Krotov made clear, however, that he was not only concerned about the rights of Christian groups in Russia and criticized both the Orthodox Patriarchate and Protestant missionaries for their intolerance of non-traditional religions.

The Moscow Patriarchate, he stated, was synonymous with government officials. But its “intolerance, ignorance and dishonesty” he explained, was not representative of all Orthodox believers. Not all Orthodox wanted a ban on western missionaries. The problem, according to Krotov, was that Protestants often proselytize amongst Orthodox believers and view them as heretics. Krotov suggested that Protestants focus on non-believers and that they should protest the proposed new law on the freedom of conscience quietly and indirectly lest further animosity develop as happened when an earlier version of the law was proposed in 1993. At that time, U.S. congressmen sent a letter to Yeltsin asking him not to sign the law. While outside pressure may have influenced Yeltsin’s decision in the end not to sign that version, Krotov said that the congressional interference was seen in Russia as proof that missionaries were involved with the CIA.

Furthermore, Krotov explained, “if you protest a law limiting the rights of certain religious groups, you must fight for the rights of all religious groups, including cults.” With this statement Krotov was referring to the involvement of Protestant missionaries in the conference on “totalitarian” cults, which he saw as part of a larger campaign to ban any non-Orthodox beliefs in Russia. “To unite Christians of different creeds against non-Christians is dangerous in Russia, and it is dangerous everywhere, he continued. Jesus came not to condemn the world and didn’t waste time on apologetics.” While he employs the language of those critical of alternative spiritual groups, calling them cults, he has worked to spread a more tolerant message of Orthodoxy, one that sees room in Russia for a wide variety of spiritual practices and beliefs. It is this tradition of Orthodoxy that resonates most clearly with members of the contemporary Russian New Age scene.

Finding the Power of Orthodoxy While

Maintaining a Critical Distance

Sveta Prival’skaya, the co-director of Voskhozhdenie, is deeply opposed to autocratic control by State powers, and this carries over into her relationship with the Orthodox Church. She has a conflicted relationship with Christianity. She does not consider herself part of any religious confession, and is disturbed by the absolutism and intolerance of the Orthodox Church. She and David are of Jewish backgrounds, but they only recently became interested in the Jewish religion and have begun studying the Kabbalah. Still, Christian iconography, symbolism and certain key figures play an important role in their lives. This

complex relationship to Christianity is characteristic of many of the women I met in New Age circles. Prayers and certain rituals may be embraced for their collective powers, but narrowly defined creeds and prohibitions are generally rejected. Here Sveta discusses her initial entrance into Christianity, the power of the collective Orthodox egregore in Russia and her reasons for moving away from the Church structures:

Starting in 1984 we became deeply involved with Orthodoxy although neither of us were christened. But we were in a camp, a family camp, similar to the Healthy Family club, and there happened to be a teacher there who not only taught children but was able to christen people as well. He was simply a genius, he's now become a priest, went to Volgograd and became the rector of the Orthodox Academy. But then he was a teacher and it was just his love, belief. And he did this when it was still forbidden to say the word god. But we studied with him rather intensively and we did a lot in order to enter into that egregore. Becoming christened is always very delightful. You feel like you're a part of a large society of people – see how many of us there are and we all see alike and approve of the same things. Just like with communism, Orthodoxy also has this, and any religion does. But I think amongst Russian egregores this is especially true of Orthodoxy. It's strong, it was very delightful and the preacher was very wise and quite flexible. He satisfied our intellect in many ways. But still at some point we felt a trap and we left. We didn't leave completely, and I understand now that that would have been a great mistake because Christ is a close being for me, a teacher, and my image of the Christian egregore is very important for me, but Orthodoxy and Catholicism and really any Christianity I'm sure has strayed very far from the teachings of Christ. But I'm generally not a ceremonial person. It's very difficult for me to observe the regularity of rituals.

While the dogmas and structures of the Church are alien to her way of thinking, Sveta's home is filled with Orthodox iconography – icons of Jesus and Mary and Orthodox candles share wall space with her other spiritual guides, Sai Baba, El Morya, and Kalki. She incorporates the symbols and energy of

Orthodoxy while distancing herself from its rituals and rigid world view. It is interesting that she notes her difficulty with rituals, however, given the rituals she incorporates into her own programs at Voskhozhdenie. While certainly not the rigid forms of Orthodoxy, there is a rituality to the weekly meetings, with the candles, icons, and gentle music. In the passage below she discusses how she has gained spiritual guides along her journey and how they continue to guide her life, even if one or another may be dominant at a given time, as Sai Baba currently is.

From a distance and on the subtle plane whenever a problem appears, and in general every day when I look over my day and develop a plan for the next day I always imagine that I'm with Sai Baba – I've been doing this already for several years – and I always get very good advice. I always get help and always feel love. Before Sai Baba, and now, I always felt my teachers – still two other essences – from 1988, from my first rebirthing experience – I feel the protection of the mother of god, and I speak with her and feel her near by. Besides that from 1984, from the time of Hatha yoga, the teacher El Morya, his image is always with me, and now the image of Sai Baba is also. You can believe in this or not. You can just imagine them as archetypes from our consciousness. For me these three archetypes are the most important. They are the leading ones for me at the present time. And in February 2001 our group arrived at Satya Sai's ashram. There was a sea of love there, an ocean of love. He's always with me now and I feel that it doesn't only help me but also everyone I work with. Although in holodynamic processes or with free breathing each person finds their own images. But in any case I understand that all of these images are from one source. You can call it the creator, you can call it the common-information field. I don't care what you call it. For me right now it's Sai Baba. But I work with Orthodox people and people of all beliefs. And I recently met with some Buddhist monks.

Here we see several recurrent threads of Russian New Age thought. Sveta is won over to Sai Baba ultimately because of the strong sense of love she feels in his presence and through her spiritual conversations with him. Love and the field of love created by a community are a deep part of her practices. But the entrance

of Sai Baba into her life does not translate into a rejection of Mary, the mother of god. Mary's image is prominently displayed in her home, and Sveta consults her often. The joining of spiritual guides is part of her belief in unity. She reiterates here the importance of unity, the common-information field, or egregore, that unites people of many different backgrounds and views. And in the end, she reminds us that it is not so much the ultimate truth that guides her forward – the images may just be archetypes – but an understanding that these images, these spiritual practices, work for her at this given time.

Dasha, who spoke about her spiritual crisis in Chapter Five, has an even more ambivalent relationship to Christianity than Sveta. She too does not belong to any religious confession, although her background is half Jewish and half Muslim. Her parents were not religious observers, and she did not learn any of their religious traditions. This was in part because she grew up only with her mother, whose own father was persecuted for his leadership role in the Moscow Muslim community during the Stalinist years. Dasha also rejects some of the repressive and anti-women aspects of the Orthodox Church. Yet, when she began to explore alternative spirituality during the Soviet period, she too was christened, despite the danger this posed to her career as a teacher. As with Sveta, this christening was seen as providing support for her spiritual journey – support in the community of Christianity:

And then I went to that metaphysical circle and there arose the question about the acceptance or non-acceptance of some sort of religion. The question arose out of purely pragmatic reasons. That is, the teacher who led us at that time, a woman, she spoke about egregores or egregorov, I don't know, everyone puts the accent in a different place, that is, some sort of mythical structures that are

connected with large religious institutes, that in any instance – at the beginning stages of entrance into an egregore – it gives one support and to a certain extent an amount of protection along the spiritual path and so she recommended that those of us who weren't christened accept a traditional religious confession that had a good structure to support on the subtle plane. And so I was totally, I didn't know, I had the feeling that I was indifferent – Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy. I didn't know anything about them and it didn't matter. My parents didn't tell me about their religions. They were people with completely materialistic views. The culture was such that there was Russian, Soviet culture that was accepted. And besides that even if there were some – well I lived with my mother and she tried not to talk about her childhood because she knew that her father was arrested and shot because of his religious position. So it all remained a secret.

Having grown up an atheist without learning about any particular religion, Dasha was at first ambivalent about choosing one for protection, as her spiritual teacher at the time suggested. Only after experiencing a vision did she decide that Orthodoxy was the right path for her, at least for the sake of its protective powers.

And I had a mystical experience- it wasn't a dream. It was a half-dream like state – between a dream and reality and this mystical experience was connected with the church. In short, it was as if something, as I felt it, it was Christ – in white clothes. He led me like his bride to some sort of door of an Orthodox Church under the ring of the church bells. It was a very powerful vision. I understood that it was a sign – with a dual meaning – and I understood that if I live in Russia, in Moscow where Orthodoxy is traditionally accepted that I need to go there, into that egregore. And it turned out that it happened on its own, and I was baptized and it was also very mystical. I was already thirty years old. It was also a rather unusual activity because, well first of all, I wasn't supposed to be baptized because in my official position – I was a teacher and I worked in a museum – that is, if they found out that I had – at a conscious age – been baptized, I would have had a lot of problems at work. So I couldn't get baptized in a regular church in Moscow. They would have notified the KGB – it was all written down. But it turned out that I was baptized in an anabaptist, that is a Greek church where there wasn't any list. That is, no one but me, the priest and god knew about this act. I didn't have a god father or god mother. The priest himself who baptized me – we were in the church alone – the three of us – because Jesus Christ

was there of course. That is, the priest baptized me – put the rubakhu [ritual christening shirt] on me, so he himself was my godfather. That was a very important step for me because it was truly conscious and thought out. There was a very strong and deep entrance into the Orthodox religion – into their ritual, their teaching and there was very serious inner work taking place – deep changes.

Dasha was touched by the mysteries and significance of her baptism into the world of Christianity and she understood the importance of living within its protective shield, and she came to feel that Orthodoxy, with its powerful egregore in Russia, could provide the best protection for her. But she did not accept Church dogma and maintained a certain distance from the Church because of this.

But at the same time there were strong changes, not at the level of Christ but on the level of the dogma of the Christian church that I didn't accept. For example, that a person is only on the earth one time and the relationship to women – as the carriers of sin and the relationship to sexuality – that it is dirty and a lot of those type of things. I didn't accept them inside. So although I had a rather strong mystical acceptance of Christ and his teachings and certain miracles connected with the cross, I felt like it was something temporary for me, and I gradually drifted away. I didn't trust the priests. I felt like I wasn't completely sincere during confession and that the release of sin that was given me during the confession wasn't really a release, and that karma is karma and doesn't work itself out that way. In short, that path wasn't mine. And I didn't want to say during confession that I read books on Eastern religion, and I started going less and less often and began to feel freer from the duties of the Orthodox Church.

While Dasha drifted from the Church and eventually became involved with the Sai Baba society in Moscow, she and her husband continue to explore certain aspects of Orthodoxy, are familiar with Church history and have special reverence for particular Orthodox saints, about whom they discuss in their own religious teachings textbook.

The protective power of baptism was mentioned by several women as the primary reason for connecting with the Orthodox Church. The rituals and dogmas were superfluous. The baptism was important because it provided a channel to the universe, the creator, and the strength of the collective Orthodox Christian egregore offered strong spiritual protection. Zoya, who discussed her experiences with Healthy Family in Chapter Five, was baptized after returning to Moscow from Afghanistan where her husband was stationed. Whether it is a coincidence or not, she does not know, but when she returned to Afghanistan after the baptism, she remained healthy, while her husband, who refused to be baptized, eventually became crippled with psychological problems:

I was in Afghanistan with my husband and when we left there I understood that I definitely needed to get baptized. You just never know. I went to a village in the middle of nowhere. At the time it was forbidden to get baptized. My husband was a vyezdnoi. That's a person who goes abroad. Very few people went abroad. Only from, either from certain universities, or well anyway there were great complications, so it was not possible to officially get baptized, so we went to a small village, but he didn't get baptized with me. But it seems to me that things got better after that. First of all, the priest that we happened upon turned out to be very entertaining. The village was far away, and he used crutches. He said that during the war he was lying there and dying. Everything was all torn open. And he made a pledge – God, if I live I'll become a priest. And he survived and became a priest, can you image? And he told me don't go to Afghanistan, and I said I have to, my husband's going there. And he said let him go with god. But I went anyway. But my husband ended up with in the psych hospital after Afghanistan. He's an invalid.

The connection made with God through baptism is believed not only to protect but to guide. It opens up channels that allow God to communicate with a person. By developing one's intuition, it is believed, one can learn to interpret the signals God sends. Valentina, the English language professor we met in Chapter

Five who uses alternative teaching methods, was baptized quite recently. She discusses here how baptism helps open spiritual channels that connect to God and help guide those down below as they make their choices in life:

And around 5 or 6 years ago I also accepted Christianity. And she [her spiritual advisor] explained to me that if I'm connected with the Christian field that I can act not only with my own energy but that the prayers of priests can also help, and it works out that you are not fighting something, but instead it's a struggle between light and dark. The whole Christian field is helping. You're not working alone, but you have the support of God. It's a faith – in God and Christ and in the rational creation of the world, that it's not just a coincidence, but that the world was created, that His love exists in the world, that there is freedom of will. That you yourself are creating your fate, but that on the other hand God is guiding you in that. That their might be tests and the tests might be very serious. An illness as a rule is an opportunity given to you so that you can purify yourself. An illness is from thoughts and when you start to transform your thoughts, when you purify these thoughts then you begin to purify your body and it can be accompanied by very painful effects.

Here Valentina joins the members of Voskhozhdenie in their interpretation of illness or crisis as a sign from god. It is not a negative but rather an opportunity to learn from god and to move forward in one's spiritual journey. Valentina clearly respects and has faith in the guiding powers of Christ and Christianity. As noted in Chapter Five, I often saw her sharing and trading Orthodox prayers with Tamara when we were taking the NLP course together. She is baptized as an Orthodox Christian and feels a direct and strong connection with the Orthodox egregore. But it is her spiritual advisor, a clairvoyant healer outside the official structures of the Church, who initially connected her to this egregore, a notion that itself is not a part of the Orthodox belief system. And

despite her deep connection and reverence, Valentina too is critical of the Church and distinguishes it from Christ and the sacred energy that flows into and from it.

The Orthodox Church doesn't just not condone certain practices, it just condemns them. It tries to pressure, but there are people who are outside of the church. And, you understand, Christ and the Church are different things. And the church for me is a place that has an entrance to the channel above. The church is a profession. It's the same as like in a store they sell products. But not even products. I don't know. Well, if you want to buy clothes you have to go to the store, although of course if you know how you can [make them] yourself, but most have to go and buy. It's a very low metaphor, but still, priests are professionals. They are covered in God's energy. Even if he's not an elevated person himself, he's learned how to connect with above. For example, he can do baptisms because he's been taught and he has something open in order to do it. I don't have my own priest and don't seek advice from priests. I have my own godmother. She earlier long ago when she just started she went to church but any religion limits a person a lot. You understand, a person in his spiritual searchings, any system puts him into a cage. And Orthodoxy also puts one into a cage.

Valentina chooses Orthodoxy not because she accepts its dogmas as absolute. It is but a part of her identity and belief system. She enters into Orthodoxy as a Russian, but does not feel obligated to adhere completely to Orthodoxy's strict system, realizing that if she had been born in a different place she would connect with the absolute, the universal, through a different channel, a different religion.

I think that for me I need to be baptized in Orthodoxy. For example I shouldn't be a Buddhist or Hare Krishna because Russia is Orthodox. All of her roots are Orthodox. Its whole egreore is Orthodox. And when you go into a church it's a current that comes from everyone and this strengthens everything. If you'll be a Buddhist by yourself or three, it's not here. It's there. In Taiwan, China and other countries. Vietnam, Laos. If I lived there I would be a Buddhist. The Church for me – I go to services, I take communion, and several times I have had confession because it's a particular ritual of cleansing and if it is Orthodoxy here then I

do it this way. If I was in a different country there would be different rituals of cleansing. I can't say that Orthodoxy is higher than Islam or higher than Judaism. It just happened that people have created different systems. Of course the idea that there is a single god is higher than various pagan religions. Because paganism is lower.

Valentina taps into the spiritual powers of the Orthodox egregore not because it is the one absolute truth and also not simply because she is blindly following the traditional Russian way. Her approach is very thoughtful and considered. She taps in to the Church to gain the support of the strong collective spirit of Orthodoxy in Russia and finds that its cleansing rituals help her to spiritually grow.

Blending Orthodoxy with Nontraditional Methods

Lyuba considers herself fully Orthodox and a highly spiritual person. She also says that she can read a person's aura and is well versed in the language and world of chakras and the subtle sphere. She believes in the power of the Orthodox Church and found consolation in the fact that she helped bring her former husband to the Church and thereby helped him to overcome the negative effects of an act he had committed in the past. Although her husband had caused her enormous pain during their marriage, this act allowed her to release some of the anger she had towards him, and as a result they were both able to grow stronger after the fact.

You have Catholicism and we have Orthodox Christianity in Moscow. My parents baptized me when I was little, so I was under the protection of God and am a believer. And then just before our divorce he came to me and said – 'help me, I don't know how to go about it'. I went to the church with him and when the baptism was over an amazing priest came over – you know the kind – tall, beautiful – he comes over and says – 'congratulate your

husband. In Orthodoxy there are two times when all sins are forgiven – baptism and the moment of anointment for the heavens – according to Orthodox tradition.’ He says, ‘Your husband – no matter what he did, he is now pure as a large flame.’ And really his eyes shined with joy.

Lyuba does not see a contradiction between her Orthodoxy and her interest and involvement with other spiritual traditions. In fact, she believes that knowledge of other religious and spiritual practices is necessary for any educated person. She particularly values direct interaction and work with practitioners of other religious faiths or spiritual methods as a way of learning more deeply from them.

I also met with a Buddhist Lama who came to Russia. He gave a talk in a closed auditorium. It was remarkable. I got his blessing. The Buddhist tradition is also splendid. Buddhist prayers are something – I mean, although I deeply respect Orthodoxy, our Russian tradition, but you know there are such high levels in other religions as well. It’s a completely different kind of level. And without knowing that type of high level you can’t consider yourself a cultured person. A contemporary person needs to know that. And if you get the opportunity to get to know them directly and to meet with masters then my god. These are true religions, not lost. Although there are those who just wear the clothes – we have a lot of those here unfortunately, from various sects, who are not well in the head. But thank God I haven’t come across such masters. I always feel where I need to go. Everything has always worked out well in terms of teachings and masters.

In some ways, we see, she connects with different religions as part of her training as a cultured intellectual. They are part of the required repertoire of the cultured class. But her involvement is not merely intellectual. She is deeply involved at the spiritual and intuitive level. Her spirituality shows through in her level of intuition, which she says has generally led her in the right direction in terms of spiritual health practices, due in part, no doubt she would argue, to her

experiences as a mother. It is the children of today, however, who she says have attained a deeper level of spiritual intuition and development. They are part of the true avant-garde of the new spiritual era awaiting us just around the corner. She sees this illustrated in her own children's interest in religion.

People are gradually coming to view spiritual practice as necessary for survival. And I think our children will go even further. My children are also interested, especially my daughter. My older son right now masks his interests – right now he still has that boyish demonstration of distrust, but deep in his soul he's very interested. And my younger son is just like a flower blooming – Orthodox Church, on Easter – kulich, eggs – he himself pulled my arm and said 'mom, why haven't we gone to church?' He asks about all the icons and wants to light candles, and then when he leaves he's so happy and all wet from holy water. He's 8 years old and recently he came up to me and said 'momochka, the Matrona (the icon Holy Matrona) I made a wish but didn't finish it.' He wanted to finish it, so I said go on and he said 'you know, I wanted to ask her to make me grow faster and I forgot to ask.' And I told him not to worry it will happen even without that, you'll still grow even if you didn't ask.' But you know that interest and not just interest in religion and church, but he was drawn there like a magnet, that's what surprised me. When I was his age I was scared to even go into a church because I was worried that I wouldn't behave correctly or know how to act. But he drags me there himself. And I don't know where it comes from because I didn't teach him. He is just drawn to the spiritual and pure and he's drawn to church. So I think that the children will go further than us. I think they've already realized more of their abilities than we have. Things that came difficult to us, and only with great effort, will probably be easier for them. They're different. They're simply different.

This notion that the children are spiritually advanced is a common theme in the New Age. As we have seen, water birthing is supposed to aid in this, but even children born out of water are believed to be more intuitive and sensitive to the subtle world.

Sonya, whose sick child led her to a wide range of alternative spiritual health practices, also feels a closeness to Orthodoxy and finds that the physical act

of being in the Church strengthens her connection with the higher world. She hopes to bring the blessings of Christianity to her new apartment, although she also intends to seek the blessings and guidance of other spiritual beliefs, especially since her husband is involved with Chinese practices. This split in interests – Orthodox versus Chinese – is a source of frustration in their marriage, but according to Sonya this dissonance provides fertile soil for learning from each other.

I was baptized along with my eldest son when he was five months old. We were baptized together. But I wasn't really aware. It's just that the priest asked if I was baptized, and I decided to get baptized as well. Now I often go to church. And I take communion. In Christianity, for communion – you shouldn't eat meat for several days, and you should pray for two or three days and then on a hungry stomach confess your sins and then stand through the service and they give you a spoonful of heavenly bread and wine. Unfortunately, I very rarely go to confession. But on the other hand, it's not necessary to confess in church because I confess to myself. That is, I have confession in front of myself. And I go to church, often I'll light a candle for health. Well, I speak with my teachers, you know, and at home it's one thing, but in church it's a lot stronger. I go there for escape/salvation when I feel really bad. You go and stand there and there's that kind of energy – you attune yourself to it, I go to cry. And then I'm also from a family of priests. So for me it's really strong. Sometimes I'll talk with the batushka, but rarely.

But for example, when we move into our new apartment I'll definitely invite a priest there to purify it. That goes without saying. And not just a priest. I'd also like to invite someone who has nontraditional practices – Chinese. There's this man I know who does feng shui. I'd like him to help me arrange everything correctly. He also purifies rooms with claps and bells. My husband does some feng shui. He's into Chinese practices. But I'm more Orthodox. Although I can't say that I'm purely Orthodox because I'm interested in Buddhism and I sing mantras. I'm probably outside of religion, but for me Chinese is further from me than the others. But again I accept it. I understand that it's a path. It's not my path. It's foreign to me, but it's also a path, also a path to God. Of course I'm sad that we aren't going along

the same path. They are so different – opposite sides. But right now I'm buying various things that he'll hang. And they work. For example, we have chimes, and they work. It sends away negative energy. Maybe it's that little droplet that is needed to find happiness. Who knows?

Sonya has been involved with many spiritual methods as she searched for ways to become a better mother and to cure her son's illness. Her world view is based on the existence of past lives, the ability to learn the lessons of karma and the unity of the universe. While she feels distanced from the Chinese beliefs of her husband, she understands them as one of many paths to the unification with god. And Orthodox Christianity is only one path of many for her. One of the schools she attended for an extended period of time is headed by a teacher known as Taana-om-ar-is. This is a Russian woman who died and supposedly came back as a different person, one with direct contact with the cosmos. She creates drawings, called cosmograms that are claimed to carry "information about the construction of the universe and its expanse, about the birth of planets and other forms of life in the cosmos, great civilizations for saving the earth." These cosmograms are also believed to have healing powers, and each corresponds to a specific human organ or ailment. Taana incorporates Hindu symbolism into her teachings and is said to be in direct contact with Sai Baba. In addition to the cosmograms, she teaches about the cosmic power of stones. Clearly the Orthodox Church would not approve of her teachings and practices. Sonya is able to mesh these practices with her Orthodox identity, as we see here:

I saw my other lives during processes and at the Taana school. I worked with cosmograms. I have some of them at home. As a student I could keep them at home. There is a cosmogram called entrance into karma. And through this cosmogram I entered my

karma. Through the teachers, there was a teacher Tanya Mikhailovna, my dear mother, she helped me. She herself receives cosmograms. And actually my own pictures resemble cosmograms. It's all from out there. She receives cosmograms and through her cosmograms I went into a trance state – well, tracking is also like a trance state – and I went into my karma and examined what was there. But in truth, it's that wrapping that we – 'oh, in my past life I left someone', but in fact, maybe you didn't leave anyone, but instead you acted in a certain way that wasn't right. But looking at it from this life, you wrap in that kind of wrapper. Simply, there is energy – distorted – I can't see energy, but energy in the form of candy you can see. Therefore, I wrap certain distorted energy in the form that I gave up my child. It's not necessarily a fact that that's exactly what happened. But there was a similar distortion. And again there was a similar distortion in the next life and I've imagined it as having rejected my lover. It's all from the perspective of this life, from this body, but in fact there was simply a certain distortion. And for some people, it's completely unimportant if it's, for example the Christian egregore doesn't allow one to look back at past lives. But it says – you have these distortions – pray and it will pass. And those who take that path – cleansing through Christianity – they are truly cleansed through prayer. They don't need to look into these things. It's not their path. For example, Sasha cleanses himself by doing Qigong. He cleanses himself by going out into nature and doing his various exercises. He cleanses himself by being with what he loves – he becomes one with nature, he loves every stone, every trembling branch of the birch tree. He doesn't need to examine past lives. It's not his path. And I need to go there. And Sasha says, 'see, it's not the correct path', but there aren't incorrect paths. If you are going toward God then you simply have your path. For the soul there are a million roads, but still you are going to the top. And one doesn't understand the other. I'm really sorry that he sometimes doesn't understand me. The main thing is to maintain a direction. This way or that way. You just need to love. And, by the way, it's very difficult to love a minute a day. Sometimes I'm in such a state of depression that I can't love.

Like Valentina, Sonya sees the powerful spiritual cleansing that

Orthodox prayers and other rituals such as communion can provide.

Repenting sins and seeking and giving forgiveness and love are cleansing

rituals we have seen in many of the alternative practices. In

holodynamics, rebirthing, the birth canal there is a cleansing of blocks, a forgiveness of past wrongs and a sharing of love that stirs and helps practitioners move forward on their paths. Prayers and mantras and chakra energy work also provide cleansing. As she discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, at the Taana school Sonya learned of the cleansing and healing power of artistic works, cosmograms, and of minerals from the earth. The practitioners view these rituals and actions as multiple paths to the same universal source and thus find comfort and guidance rather than dissonance from the combined application of many practices in their lives.

Below is a picture of Taana and one of her cosmograms, taken from the brochure of the Taana museum exhibit in Moscow. I attended this exhibit with Tamara and Oleg from Voskhozhdenie. Chairs were set up in front of the cosmograms in order to take in the healing energy. Stones were available for purchase at the entrance. Most of the people at the exhibit were elderly, and several sat quietly the whole time we were there with large stones in their hands. Each stone is said to emit a different energy wave and works to cleanse and cure particular physical, spiritual or psychological illnesses. I must admit that I did not feel any energy from the cosmograms and did not try any of the stones, but Tamara was very moved and stayed behind when Oleg and I headed to the Center for the Wednesday meeting.



Fig. 16. Taana with one of her cosmograms. At the top of the brochure is a quote by Sai Baba: There is only one language – the language of the heart; there is only one religion – the religion of Love; There is only one God and he is everywhere.

Tamara did not become involved with the Taana School during my time in Moscow, but like Sonya she also freely entwined Orthodoxy with alternative beliefs. In fact, one of her first visions of Christ came during a session with a non-traditional healer whom she was visiting because she had lost her voice during an operation on her thyroid. Here we can detect Tamara’s frustrations and distrust of the medical establishment. And again she comes back to that fateful dacha that she lost to her father’s new family.

And for two months I tried to find an alternative, but a medical alternative. I found specialists through friends, but it turns out that surgery in our country is based on cutting things out. And it turns out that if I had gone to the first place where I should have gone right away – they do the operation while the person is still talking, so that way you don’t lose your voice. But I ended up somewhere else and was operated on there. And they did it in such a way that afterwards I couldn’t talk. I could just whisper without a voice. They ended up sending me to a phoniater. It turns out that there are specialists who help both singers – they work with singers in

the Bolshoi Theater – and with people like me who’ve lost their voice in operations. They gave me particular exercises and sounds to try to sing. I worked with them for about two months. And at the same time, at the dacha – and the dacha is still a damned place for me. I still haven’t been able to get the paperwork worked out.

Not all of her associations with the dacha are negative, however, because it was here that she was introduced to non-traditional treatments which, she believes, led to the recovery of her voice. It was through these treatments that she also made her first strong connection with Christianity through the image of Jesus that came to her during her first session.

At that time it turned out that one of our neighbors there was a pair, a mother and daughter – the mother was around 70 and the daughter over 40 – and we were good friends, and when this all happened Maria Ivanna, the mother, said why don’t you come by – she worked at a center for non-traditional medicine. She was very inspirational and I figured why not, maybe it will help. So I went there. It wasn’t cheap as I recall. I remember that most of all the doctor talked with me. Then he had me sit on a chair and told me to close my eyes, and I could hear that he was walking around me. I didn’t know what he was doing. He told me I would need ten séances. And somewhere around the third time, when I sat in the corridor and waited, a boy, his son, sat near by. His father, Zhenia, had blue eyes that seemed very honest. I don’t even know what method he studied, but at that time there was a huge burst of various different methods and it seemed that he had good results since he was at a center like that. And the boy just started talking to me and asking questions – why are you going to my father? What’s going on with you? Why don’t we try? And he told me to place my hand out and then as I recall he asked me to either imagine how a ray of light went through my hand or something else. And then he asked me to open my eyes and I see how my hand is vibrating. And he’s all happy and says that it’s working. Then he tried again, and then Zhenia called me into his office.

Echoing the common belief in New Age circles that children are more spiritually developed than adults, Tamara believes that Zhenia knew that the power of his son’s abilities would bring out Tamara’s own innate

abilities and thereby make her more receptive to the treatment and prepare her to set off on work on her own. The vision she had of Jesus during the session only strengthened her trust in the powers that were taking place inside of her.

And then it turns out that it was a sort of plant. He specifically asked his son to sit there because he apparently understood that I could work on myself now. And the son was just there to get things going. And the son is much more developed in his extra-sensory powers. When I went into Zhenia's office he almost immediately said I should try to gain contact myself with higher powers, and he said that if it worked that he would work with me and that I would work on myself as well. I remember that he told me to stand up and to close my eyes and to imagine that above my head there was a ray flowing to the heavens. And then he said some sort of verbal formula directed towards the higher powers and parallel to that I was imagining and he stood at my back and I don't know what he did. I remember that picture today that I had in my head – of the ray – how it went through the curtains and the little house and how I saw a starry sky and that on the background of the sky I saw the face of Jesus. For me the ray went directly there. Of course, who knows what kind of essences there are and where we get energy, but for me it was clear. My thoughts went immediately to Christ. And then I had the sensation of goose bumps. You probably know how it is during meditation when all of a sudden you have goose bumps and you're hair is standing on end. And then I felt vibrations not only in my hand, but throughout my whole body. That went on for a time, and he said not to hold my body back. If I feel like bending or dancing then go ahead. And this went on for around forty minutes. It was a really pleasant condition and I fell into a trance. I simply knew that I was feeling a ray from Christ, that I was getting energy from him.

At this time her interest in Christianity was still superficial. While she worked with the alternative healer and the voice doctor (phoniater), she was encouraged to get baptized by one of her friends, and even after the baptism, although now somewhat closer, she still retained a rather cursory interest in

Orthodoxy. This is possibly due to the somewhat grotesque comical style of the baptism itself, which Tamara explains below.

But I spoke about Lena earlier because I remember that it was during that same period that she suggested that I get baptized. I don't know why she was drawn into that. I didn't ask, but for me it was like an experiment. I went out of curiosity. I went with her to keep her company. She often would ask me to accompany her places and I often agreed because I didn't have anyone else who I was good friends with in school. So on the one hand I went to keep her company, but on the other hand I was curious. I wanted to compare because at the same time I was going to Zhenia. This all took place the same year I had my thyroid operation. I think 1993. I remember it was August. In July I finished working with Zhenia and in August we went to get baptized in a church in the center of Moscow – on Tverskoi Street. I didn't have any particular preparation. She just knew what time to go. You needed to pay a certain amount of money, there was a short conversation, and a group of people would get baptized.

It wasn't inside the church itself. There is a special building nearby with a cupola - a silver one like a chalice where the holy water was kept. Everyone wore special garments because they couldn't be baptized in their ordinary clothes. There are places where people are completely immersed in water and places where they just put a few drops on you, but here was something of a middle ground. And I stood and watched. There were adults and children. I'd say about 5 to 7 people. Some cried and others simply observed. As soon as the priest began to read from the book I started feeling those vibrations. And for me it meant, although I don't know for sure, but it was an answer to the question – that the source was one, that Jesus Christ had appeared that first time, and this here meant everything is one.

And so the service continues, he reads and does all of the rituals and I at the same time am inside all of that and am observing everything out of curiosity. I'm observing myself – from inside and out – and what was happening there. At the same time, why I probably didn't go any further – it was nearly ten years before I was pulled closer to Orthodoxy. I was baptized then, but it ended there. Why was that? That was because the monks were like personages out of a Gogol story. The first one, as soon as he started reading started to cough and he couldn't read at all. Each time he would try he would just cough more. Then they called another one, and he came with this big red face as if he'd just been

drinking. So he continued the services, but my God. Still, I understood that the energy continued to go and an important mystery was taking place despite the person who was doing it, but after it was finished they brought us all into the church and he began to talk with us, and he came up to me and said, 'Ah, I see what sort of loose woman you are. Now you can't do that anymore.' He was quite aggressive and kept telling me I couldn't do all these things and I had to do this and that. And so when we left I was left with a particular impression of Orthodoxy.

By the time of our interview, nearly ten years after her first vision and baptism, Tamara had become much more deeply immersed in both non-traditional spirituality and Orthodoxy. She became involved with holodynamics later that same year (1993) and has continued her participation and teachings to this day. She now holds holodynamics seminars herself and is considering becoming a professional healer. At the time of our interview she had also recently started consulting an Orthodox healer, Father Andrei.

But now the strictest method I use is Father Andrei. I went to him with the concrete goal of him helping me on the physical level. He does healing on the spiritual and physical levels at the same time. I've been to him three times now. Each time is deeper – through prayers. At the beginning it was simply a sort of good feeling – you go to the service and feel good. Someone changed a bit, you got a bit sick and it went away. The second time was much deeper. The third time when I went I was in a different emotional state – a worse state – and I didn't have that feeling that my soul was soaring afterwards, but that is probably because I had waited too long. It had been a month and he said it's better to go more often, at least every two weeks. It's just the two of us and he reads the service and in various places during the service he repeats my name. He addresses various holy higher powers and there are particular parts where I repeat his words. And there are moments where there's a pause and he raises his arm and I can with my thoughts ask for what I need. So we do the service together.

Tamara takes an active role in her healing sessions with Father Andrei.

She follows his ritual movements and also takes to heart the words he speaks to

her. This is a private session and the words are not simply excerpts from scripture. According to Tamara, he can see into a person and read the issues and problems inside that they need to work on, something that is not always a comfortable experience. She then takes his words of advice and works on those aspects of herself during her holodynamics processes, which, because of her sessions with Father Andrei, have started taking on a much more Orthodox character.

I don't just sit there and listen to him read the service. I stand there and when he crosses himself and does various ritual things then I repeat them. And I feel the affects very strongly. He said that during the prayer the person is covered with grace. And when he decided to work with me – he said that we needed to do this at least ten times in order to see an effect. When we first met he spoke about the aspects of my personality that I needed to work on. He spoke for half an hour about that. And when a person looks at you who can see more than you and who sees very subtle things that you haven't recognized in yourself – some of them I knew, but there were also things that were hidden from me and he told me. So this is supplementary to the other things I do. I do the processes and work on myself. And often when you are told what you need to work on you can't do it right away. I don't ask him for specific advice about my life, but from the moment that I started working with him my processes have had much stronger elements of Orthodoxy in them.

The stronger influence of Orthodoxy in her holodynamics processes is not only due to her sessions with Father Andrei, Tamara notes. Through her friendship with Valentina, who she studied with at the Kitaigorodskaya Center, Tamara has started to consult with Valentina's spiritual advisor, a clairvoyant healer. While not part of the Orthodox hierarchy, the spiritual advisor is said to be immersed within the egregore of the Orthodox Church and to receive her energy directly from Christ. This energy allows her to see information about a

person. According to Tamara, this woman was able to look inside her and immediately see her problems with her family and understand what she needed to work on to be rid of the ongoing curse that was poisoning her life.

But that's also connected to another person, who is connected with Valentina. She goes to her for advice, and that woman is also within the Christian egregore, also Orthodoxy, and her vision was opened spontaneously – before that she hadn't done any of this. She works directly with several people. I don't know how she works – but if you ask her something concrete, about a problem, so for example, a person goes to her and says I've been trying various methods and there's been no improvement. She'll focus on that person and she receives information. She receives information – not images, but simply a flow of information and she'll say, for example, well, there's a structure that at approximately 22 years old had the future opened and there was a shock. And inside there was a strong resentment towards its mother. Some sort of unforgiveness or something along those lines, so work on that. And she will tell you directly – work on this – say Our Father for six hours.

Through her sessions with this woman, Tamara came to realize the extent to which she had hidden her own culpability in the situation from herself.

Although she had done numerous holodynamics processes about this issue, she realized that she always came out feeling that she was the victim. She could not understand why she was being pursued by such bad fortune when she had taken all the proper measures to forgive and move on. But through her experiences with this clairvoyant healer and with Father Andrei, she came to realize she had only begun to touch the surface.

When I first heard that I thought how is that possible, I thought it wasn't possible. But it turns out that it is; it's not all at one time. At first you should truly think about it all the time, but when I first did this the six hours had gone by in three days, and by the end of the second day I felt an increase in strength, a pleasantness from it and a feeling of lightness. And now when I realize when I feel that energy that I've subconsciously accepted, that is, when other extra-

sensory people such as Lazarev say that what you recognize – when you feel like you have forgiven everyone and that you love everyone, it's all on the level of recognition/consciousness (osnovanie), but what is inside might absolutely contradict that. You will never understand that – you'll always say that you're great, so why do all of these bad things happen to me. And I had that thought – how many processes – even really deep ones and I became conscious and things were transformed, but I didn't feel the depths. Probably, the more you do the more you feel how it could be. Everything is relative.

Feeling overwhelmed that she could never reach the depths needed to solve all of her problems, she took to heart Father Andrei's advice. Rather than trying to solve everything, she should focus on a few key problems within herself. At this point she started really applying the advice and methods offered by these two Orthodox advisors.

And he said you don't need to scatter yourself all over looking at every detail. You can take the main two or three situations and understand that you need to forgive and work through that inside of yourself. Each has his own way. And for me, when I started saying that prayer – during the night going into the third day I had a dream – I was back in that time when my mother was dying. There was a situation, I loved my mother a lot, but I understood that she was leaving. I understood like when my father died. I felt fear inside. I understood that she was going to die soon and that I would be left alone and couldn't survive that. I had to guard myself ahead of time so that I wouldn't take it too badly. And apparently I created that inside during the last years of her life. I could take care of her and do things for her, but I created that protection, that in reality came from the subtle world only six years later with all of my hormonal problems and the problems with my thyroid and the tumors – it was all in there and connected with my world view – my critical views. One the one hand idealism is good, but on the other hand you build up others according to your own ideals and principles. But the main principle should be love and not various issues of fairness. But I just speak for myself. Everyone is different.

Tamara began to follow the clairvoyant healer's instructions to repeat Our Father for six hours. She did not do this all in one stretch. She would start

meditating over a candle for several minutes. And then she would repeat this for a longer period of time. Eventually, she realized, she accepted the prayer into her heart.¹⁰⁶ This realization came out in an extraordinary dream.

So that night I have a dream that I am in that apartment – the two room one. There was a big room and a little one where I lived. And from that little room my stepmother comes out and I stand and look at her. And she starts to throw magic at me. That’s one of the methods that various old women use for curses. I remember that back then I found them – needles – in my clothes and in the curtains. So in the dream she is throwing them at me and I realize that I need to protect myself. In the dream I realize that I can say a prayer and that will protect me, so during the dream I start to say Our Father. That was all after I had been saying it for two days. Before that I had never thought of such a thing. So she keeps throwing them, but I see that they don’t go far and they just fall to the ground. They don’t reach me. So now I feel that I’m not dependent on her, I feel my strength. In the dream I’m filled with hatred for her and start to strangle her. But then during the dream I realize what I’m doing and again I start praying and during the second prayer I woke up. For me that was a signal that the prayer had gone inside. I had thought that I no longer had any connection with her, but at the practical level I couldn’t register with the dacha. Because that damned place has an effect. Because it all sits inside, all of that hatred and desire to kill. And when I had all of that with Rustam several years ago, when I woke up one night and my whole body just shook with hatred, it simply was bursting out. After it left things became calmer and calmer and our relationship became better. And now with these prayers to a certain extent similar things are starting to happen with her. I understand that maybe it’s just a small part of what’s in there, but I hope it’s getting better.

While the dream, with its combination of Orthodox, folk, and clairvoyant healing practices helped her blend more fluidly her various beliefs and methods, Tamara still feels she must hold back in her conversations with Father Andrei.

¹⁰⁶ This is much like the 19th century anonymous narrator of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, who during his pilgrimage across Russia learned to internalize the “Jesus Prayer,” bringing the spirit of Jesus into his heart. This practice was central to the hesychast notion of “inner calm.”

Orthodoxy is not yet ready for such a mix of beliefs, she says, although she is hopeful that some time in the future it will be.

I told Father Andrei about the dream – I didn't tell him why I said the prayers – and he said, yes, maybe it wasn't a dream. And now my processes have taken on more Orthodox traits. At the same time there are also other ideas that have been placed there over the years from the Temple of Peace – there are some things that are deep down in principle different, but for now I've been able to mix them and I hope that it will continue to be so.

Tamara's friend Valentina also blends Orthodox and non-Orthodox belief systems. She practices a variety of alternative methods – including Reiki and polarity – and she was present when her daughter gave birth in water. She speaks openly about past lives and karma and regularly consults her spiritual advisor. The energy she receives from above, however, is Christian, she believes, and, as we saw earlier, she strongly identifies with the Orthodox Church.

When my husband went to the clairvoyance classes, he went with his cousin. She is an artist and they studied together. But then he later stopped going, although he later did Reiki and polarity with me and he works with this a lot. He does distance Reiki – he has the second level. But she started to work with clairvoyance all the time. And abilities began to open up inside of her. She started to see. She understood very quickly that clairvoyance is bad, that one shouldn't mess around with another person's fate. She should be the way she is. But a year after the course she accepted Christianity, she was baptized and she developed a connection with the field of Christianity. And she developed yasnovidenie/clairvoyance and I began to work very closely with her. Yasnovidenie – it's not extrasensorica. It's when you see the processes that are happening– what is happening now, what happened in past lives, when a problem started and how you can overcome the problem. As a rule you can overcome the problem with prayers. This isn't energy like Reiki, but this is prayers, sometimes concrete prayers to concrete saints. Sometimes the person says the prayers himself. Sometimes you can do it for a person, especially if it's a child. Sometimes she does it herself because she can sometimes do it in five minutes whereas it would take me ten hours to get the same effect. But sometimes she can't

do it. She asks if she can and she gets signals, she has a connection. And she's told me many stories about myself and about all of this. As a rule, if I have an illness I go to that cousin, she became my godmother when I was baptized, and she looks and sometimes it's just a cold or food poisoning but often it's some sort of subconscious energy effect or there's a cleansing flow. If there's a cleansing flow it can be very torturous.

Although Valentina is generally critical of clairvoyant healing, her spiritual advisor's connection with Christian energy seems to make the practice more trustworthy. Given that her motives are pure, she has come to believe that it would be unethical for her advisor to ignore her clairvoyant abilities.

And about 5 or 6 years ago I stopped pouring cold water on myself. I felt that it had become unpleasant. Before I enjoyed it. But I began to listen very closely to my intuition. I already could feel that this is good for me and this is bad. This I need and that is not for me. An inner voice appeared to me. And when I was studying various levels of polarity on one high level we worked with spinal-cranial fluid and I began to see energy. When you do something, on the level of the subtle, subtle sensations you start talking with your organism and I started seeing images, figures, certain flows. And then it turned out that others also see this. But I don't generally work with this. Mostly I work with prayers and Reiki, but my godmother said that it's no longer Reiki for me, that I use Christian energy. When I lay my hands, Reiki is an earthly energy, an energy from space, but I have energy from Christ. But I generally read prayers. And my godmother offers advice. Often it's like with Lazarev. That is, she names some critical years – when this quality was built up – and now these qualities are growing into some sort of critical mass and that you need to remember those years, you need to cleanse them. You just need to tell her 'I have a friend who has such and such' and she already can tell you the problem. It's remarkable. It's her style of life. She does this all the time. If she knows she can do something then she simply can't do nothing, so she's always doing it. And sometimes people close to her call her up during the night. But sometimes she'll say something like you need to read a prayer in say three monasteries, that it's something very, very strong, that it's a karmic issue, that it's the *rodovoi* field, that it's from one's personal karma from a past life, etc. So sometimes stronger measures are needed, but sometimes she is able to take care of it herself. She just takes a particular uchastok or meridian and she

does some sort of movement and sometimes says a prayer and she cleanses the meridian.

Although critical of certain Church dogmas, for Valentina Christianity adds a certain legitimacy to her alternative spiritual practices. Even her spiritual advisor, she explains, was hesitant to use her healing powers before she understood that she was tapping into Christian energy – even if the language and methods (e.g. meridians, karma, reiki, subtle images) link her closer to the New Age sphere.

Others in the New Age movement do not identify as closely with Orthodoxy. For some, Orthodoxy was instead purely an entry into the spiritual realm. Now their lives are much more colored by alternative practices and beliefs. Take for example Zhenya, who explained the spiritual portrait in Chapter Four and later spoke about the birth canal method and how it helped her realize and overcome trauma she experienced during her own birth. For her Christianity marks primarily the beginning of her spiritual journey.

That is, my spiritual path began with my christening. I was christened at an already mature age. In 1990. Perestroika had just started and things were freer. I got a diploma from a very serious occult school – Narodnye tseliteli USSR – clairvoyant-healing. I got a B.A. in occult sciences. This school started in the beginning of perestroika. It gave me a lot. And with that I began my spiritual path. I stopped my practice because I realized that I wasn't getting to the reason/source. We learned how to heal people, but the reason for the illness remained untouched. There we studied medical astrology, bioenergetic healing, diagnostics, karma diagnostics, general astrology, yoga. There was very strict discipline. We weren't allowed to smoke, drink coffee, or eat salt or sugar, or meat. And I observed the rules. Everything worked out because otherwise there would have been no way of fitting in. It wouldn't have been possible to withstand the rhythm. There were a lot of courses, it was intense. There was meditation, a lot of information, and practice. It lasted three and a half years. It was a

serious school and it changed my world view. I realized that I couldn't stay on the path of simply working and having a family and hobbies. And I'm an artist. But that alone wasn't enough for me. I needed something else. I needed to help people, to help people realize themselves on the spiritual level. And only realized several years later, when I came to Sveta and David that I realized that my place is here.

Although she continues to consider herself Orthodox, Christianity does not seem to factor into Zhenya's life very much any longer. Her baptism led her to other spiritual spheres, to the occult school, which eventually led her to Voskhozhdenie. Zhenya rarely brings up Christian symbols in conversations or during group meditations nor does she discuss specific conflicts she has with Church dogma.

Religions of Unity find Tensions with Orthodoxy

In contrast to Zhenya, Dasha feels compelled to address issues concerning the Church and Christianity because of her teaching and leadership roles, even though she feels much closer to spiritual practices from the East. Sai Baba has been a central figure in her spiritual journey, although recently she and her husband have become interested in Kabbalah. Growing up she was not drawn to any religion and considered herself an atheist well into adulthood. While now baptized, she does not identify herself with any one specific religion.

Myself, I don't consider myself a member of any particular religious confession, although my mother is a Moslem and my grandfather on my mother's side – he was one of the Moslem religious leaders in Moscow. That was at the only mosque in Moscow in those years, during the 1930s – the time of Stalin's repression – he was the main mukhti in Moscow. He was arrested for that and died. And although his family and children were from the beginning a religious people, they were raised by the Soviet powers and grew up without god. Therefore, although my mother considers herself closer to Islam, she's not a religious person and

always maintained an atheist point of view. My father is Jewish. A Jew who also grew up in a traditional Jewish family, but his views were materialistic. That is, like my mother he didn't accept any religiosity. He didn't bring any religiosity into my consciousness, especially since I was born outside of marriage. He visited us all the time and I felt like he was my father, but we didn't have a traditional family. And so it works out that Jews determine nationality by the mother, so I'm not Jewish, but Moslems determine it by the father, so when I'm asked what nationality I am I say Soviet because I grew up during the Soviet period. I had a normal atheist Soviet upbringing. I was a pioneer, was in the Comsomol.

As we saw in Chapter Five, Dasha became involved with esoteric circles during Soviet times. Like the late Soviet youth of Yurchak's (2006) work, Dasha did not consider herself a dissident but was also not blindly taken by ideology. Even with her family's tragic history, she worked within the system, took part in its organizations and considered herself of Soviet nationality – and continues to do so to this day. Growing up with a non-religious family and learning anti-religious teachings at school, she developed a materialistic atheist world view. But she was an independent spirit.

I always felt a mystical presence next to me. I sensed that someone invisible who was leading me helped me, therefore, I was always sure of myself, although I never had fears and felt that the whole world was for me. It was that kind of uninhibited sensation. And at the same time I was a very active, independent person – socially active and I didn't believe in god. I didn't participate in the generally accepted parts of social life. In the comsomol and pioneer life I didn't participate at the level of formal leader, although I was an informal leader. I was in no way interested in healthy living. It was more the opposite. I led a completely unhealthy life style. I always was interested in biology so from age 13 I went on expeditions. We smoked there and drank and my sexual life began very early. That is, I was a rather, you could even say, difficult adolescent and conventions concerned me very little.

It was during this late Soviet period that she experienced her first spiritual vision and was baptized into the Orthodox Church. But she retained her independent spirit, and later she again distanced herself from the Church, although her interest in spiritual matters continued. With the influx of religious groups in 1988, she and her third husband began an intense period of spiritual experimentation. Spiritual unity became and has remained their guiding belief.

I realized that simply reading books wasn't enough. I understood that I needed a teacher. I read the book *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Yogananda. This was already around the year 1991. At that time my husband Sergei and I. This was my third marriage, we are each other's other half. That is, this is what I was searching for and what he was searching for and this manifested itself in such a way that our union led to a very strong spiritual step. That is, it was a jump forward, a spiritual jump forward. And then we already started moving forward together and we help one another. And we were very active in terms of a conscious search of all spiritual paths that lead to unity. At that time we read samizdat copies of *Rosa Mira*¹⁰⁷ and eastern movements, they all are tolerant and based on unity. And therefore historically a lot of movements speak about the unity of the world and the unity of god. And then Sergei found in the library a big directory of various religious and social organizations, and we literally studied it and wrote down all the addresses of the organizations that said they were directed towards unity – on harmony, unity and tselostnost [wholeness] of the world, the unity of god, etc. This was all in the Library of Foreign Literature.

Their experimentation led them to some groups with negative reputations and that are generally categorized as cults. While they did not remain with these organizations, Dasha says she only had good experiences with them.

Then, in 1988-1989, Gorbachev allowed various missionaries into our country. And all sorts of different religious organizations flowed into our country. And we were searchers, that is we searched for that. So we were some of the first to meet the Unification Church. All of their missionaries are very good people. I know that there is a lot of negative information about

¹⁰⁷ Andreev's work *Rose of the World*.

that movement, but the people who we met were very pure, light. We completely trusted them and there weren't any bad things. And truly they carried a love for god and a love for each other. Some of the theoretical and theosophical ideas we didn't accept, but as people they were people bringing light. And Bahai missionaries came to us and we visited with them. Different groups literally bloomed like flowers in May. All the organizations that were more or less open and didn't promote hostility towards others – we tried to get to know them and find them and be in contact with them. We began to actively read and practice. And then TM and Reiki. In other words, we tried everything. We also started a small circle with our friends to study various religions and spiritual movements – called the Center for Spiritual Unity. We studied holy writings very seriously and carefully. This influenced my life a lot. There was a greater understanding – about my children, about work. There was greater stability, understanding of the direction of movement, I started to work consciously on my inner state – emotions, etc., but we didn't have a concrete practice picked out.

Their eventual search for a spiritual teacher led them to a five year adventure through a large variety of practices, including yoga, breathing exercises, Sufi practices, and the development of psychic powers.

And 1990/1991 I read a book by Yogananda and realized that we needed a teacher, that I couldn't go further without a teacher. I had a really strong sleepless night where there were strong inner prayers when I literally screamed to the cosmos – give me a teacher! And interestingly, teachers started appearing one after another – from very diverse spheres – from esoterica, that is there were various different meetings and contacts where we were able to see many teachers – of different ranks. We didn't reject anything. First we would come and look and study and then after a time we'd feel that no one here is a teacher and that it's not our place. And this lasted several years, until 1995. We of course little by little practiced while we were studying various different schools. That is, we became familiar with various schools. Not just with books and not just with organizations, but already with practicing teachers. For a year we went to a certain Antonov. He was in Moscow, although his apartment was in Peter¹⁰⁸, but he had a group in Moscow. He worked very seriously with people. It was his own school based on a selection of approaches - work with the body, with energy, thought. That is, a sort of integral yoga. Not

¹⁰⁸ Slang for St. Petersburg.

like Aurobindo's yoga, but at its core it was an integral approach where he took from various areas – pranayama, Sufi dances, particular psi-techniques. So in that he gave me the experience of working with energy, and some exercises, mental exercises, but in a few months – well, while we were working with him and reading his books everything seemed very near to us, but when we started working on our own, we realized that he wasn't our teacher and we left. And then there was a vacuum. We thought that if he's not the one then probably all of the real teachers have already long died.

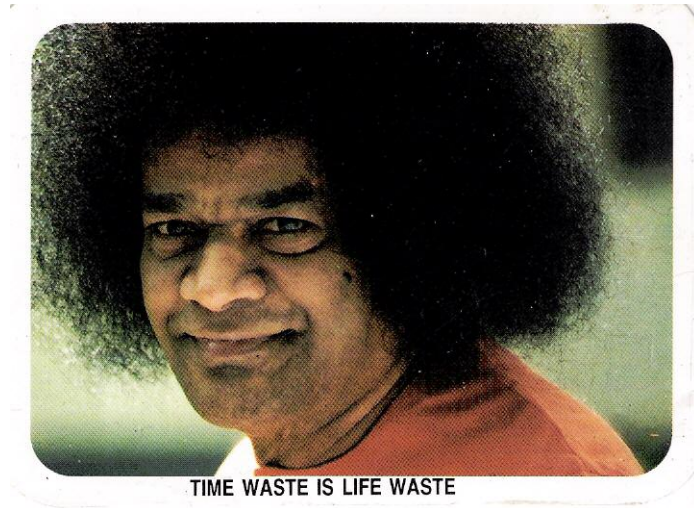


Fig. 17. Sai Baba Pocket Calendar.
Going away present from member of Voskhozhdenie.

Only in 1995 did they finally find a teacher they truly felt was theirs, Sai Baba. They became active in the Moscow branch of the International Sathya Sai Baba Organization and made a pilgrimage to his ashram in India where they were afforded a personal meeting with their guru. Although they eventually left the Moscow Center, Dasha and Sergei continue to live by his spiritual teachings and, according to Dasha, maintain spiritual contact with Sai Baba. Again, it is the spiritual unity that particularly draws them to this movement. Sai Baba believes in the unity of all religions, and like Voskhozhdenie's Temple of Peace emblem, his organization's logo contains symbols from many religions - in his case Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastroism, Islam, and Christianity.

And in 1995 a book about Sathya Sai Baba came to us. That's an Indian guru. From 1995 to 2000 we were with him. This was a very important stage in our life. Although I speak mostly about myself, we were there as a whole family. And our children were involved. This was a very serious, quality spiritual path. I related to that teacher like an Avatar. And now we've left that organization, but for me it's not all decided. It's a rather painful decision to leave. We just learned certain facts that for us made it impossible to be with that organization and with that guru on a person level. Although we were very active there. In fact, we were some of the organizers of the Moscow Center, even leaders. We were spiritual leaders of this movement here. This was the center of the international organization of Sathya Sai Baba.

In Russia there are many such centers, as there are throughout the world. The goals of the organization lie in three directions – one of the main directions is service – to people. That is, active work in the social sphere, helping those in need. The Moscow center worked and continues to work with houses for orphans and handicapped in Moscow and several orphanages in the Troitskaia oblast'. That was an area of continuous work where we helped with money and things and in human ways. This is very big work. That's our first direction. In others it may be help for orphanages or the homeless, or simply the sick or in hospitals – that is some sort of volunteer work. The second direction of the center is spiritual practice. This consists of individual practice, that is, daily meditation – twice a day – time for prayer, the practice of correct action – control of speech, mind, actions, no violence. These are all spiritual aspects that are part of any spiritual practice – purity, nonviolence, and control over your inner state. And then one of the specific practices of Sathya is the singing of spiritual Indian songs. They're not only Indian, we also sang in Russian and of course we wrote them and sang – this was a joint praise of god with the help of songs. It's like the songs that the Krishnaiti sing, only they praise Krishna and we praised them all – Krishna and Shiva and Jesus and Buddha, Allah, all gods.

In Sai Baba they found a teacher who united all religions and incorporated a variety of spiritual methods – prayer, meditation, song. They worked on controlling their inner state and becoming better people inside as they worked to better the world outside. The work that Dasha and Sergei did at the Sai Baba Center was all voluntary. They make their income as teachers in a somewhat

alternative private school. She teaches biology and Sergei teaches English. Although the pedagogy of the school is alternative and the relationships with the children democratic, Dasha faces a lot of frustration at the school because its administration is Orthodox and will not allow her to teach the spiritual education course she and Sergei developed while at the Sai Baba Center.

This school is very different from a regular school in spirit, but it's worked out in such a way that most of the administration of the school is Orthodox. They are very good people. They are quite deep people. And smart. But for me personally Orthodoxy is a limiting factor – they don't accept other paths. And they try to bring everyone to Orthodoxy. They argue with the parents and try to convince them that they should become familiar with the culture of the country. And that's of course important. But in fact their inner motivation is to save the children, save their souls, and therefore they need by any means possible to convince them to accept Orthodox religion as the only true religion. But in reality we have atheist families, we have many Muslims, we have children who are interested in the spiritual world. But here we feel that we are somewhat alienated – Sergei and I – and there are some inner tensions between us and the administration. When we just started we of course accepted like-minded families. We talked with the parents so that we knew we had similar positions on the world, about education, about children – based on love, nonviolence, etc. But over the last twelve years a lot has changed. We started charging money. Before it was easier to find like-minded people. Now we have to accept money for our teachings/lessons and unfortunately although for a private school we're not expensive even the amount that we charge for a lot of people it's too much. That is we – living on our income – wouldn't be able to send our children for such an amount of money.

While unable to teach a specific course on religion, Dasha and Sergei incorporate their educational and spiritual philosophies into their classroom teaching.

Of course it's important that there's a very good education, but we don't limit ourselves to that. We have a very home-like school. Children speak to teachers informally – (na ty) - and we call each other by first names. That says a lot. We have very democratic

relationships. We don't have a democratic structure – I'm frustrated – I've been trying to change that, but unfortunately our administration is not democratic, but the relationships are democratic. So we are all on a first name basis and the child feels free, accepted. We don't have a special teaching methodology. We took a lot from Steiner. We took a lot from, well from Montessori not too much – just for the beginning levels. We took a lot from, well not exactly “took”. We read a lot. We haven't taken a whole system. Because some of Steiner, Waldorf, we like and other parts we don't like. We chose intuitively, based on our own experience, on creativity and we had a whole lot of achievements and there were some minuses, there were mistakes. Now in terms of pedagogy and educational methods we are a rather normal school. We have grades, lessons, subjects – all just like a regular school. What is unusual is just the relationship with adults. There are spiritual classes, but they are Orthodox. We can't offer anything else. Sergei and I are literally in the opposition. Of course in our own classes we talk with the children as we consider necessary.

They would like someday to be able to teach a religion class at their school based on their experiences with the Sai Baba Center. They would like to have a course where students could read original works from different religions and that taught about each religion from the point of view of its proponents. Too many texts on religion, according to Dasha, are written through the prism of Orthodoxy. Even the Orthodox writer Alexander Men', whose works discuss notions of reincarnation and mention Daniil Andreev and who is widely read in the New Age community, wrote about other religious ideas with a bias towards Orthodox Christianity, Dasha explains.

But the course that Sergei and I have developed, the spiritual education course where we teach about all religions and work with one's “I” and work with one's consciousness of oneself – our school doesn't allow us to teach this course. We taught that course at the Center Sathya Sai – we organized classes, we have a book – a book for adolescents. We had a very valuable experience there in the teaching of spirituality. We taught about all different kinds of religions in an unbiased manner. For example, there's

Alexander Men'. He's an Orthodox priest. He's very loyal to other religions, but he shows them from the point of view of Orthodoxy. So although he didn't criticize them per se and he emphasized some positive positions, it was still from the point of view of Orthodox Christianity. We think a person should get to know religious traditions maximally unbiased. It's best if it's through original sources, so that a person could really feel the spirit of that tradition.

In the spiritual education textbook she and Sergei wrote at the Sai Baba Center, they elaborate on many religions and try to present each in as unbiased a manner as possible. They include excerpts from original texts along with their own descriptions and explanations of important figures and concepts.

Still, some of their own biases became apparent in a presentation I saw the two of them give about their textbook. This was the weekend of Orthodox Easter and a group of people from Voskhozhdenie had gathered at one of the member's dacha in the countryside. In addition to giving each other holodynamics processes and enjoying the fresh air, we made trips to the local church nearby, and Dasha and Sergei offered an Easter discussion of one of their favorite figures from Orthodox Christianity, Serafim Sarovsky. This is the same saint who aided Andreev in his mystical conversion and who Sveta evoked to explain the exponential growth of spiritual energy when individuals join together in prayer or meditation. As we sat outside in a wooden gazebo, Dasha and Sergei set out before us traditional Orthodox ritualistic objects. There was a thin church candle in the center of the table, a bible and an icon of Serafim Sarovsky himself. They also had a tape of Easter canons playing in the background. Dasha and Sergei clearly held this Orthodox figure in high esteem.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Recall the significance of Sarovsky to Andreev and Sveta Prival'sky, as we saw in Chapter 4.

They began by reading to us a little from his biography, which included years of suffering and silence. He lived from 1759-1833 and was a devoted hesychast, a representative of those who emphasize the inner, mystical and hidden nature of Orthodoxy. His philosophy and approach attracted secularized intellectuals to the new monestary communities he established, including one south of Moscow that was later frequented by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Vladimir Solov'ev (Billington 1970: 205). In 1792 he became an ascetic and went into the forest to live. In 1807 he took a vow of silence. In 1810 he was called back to the monastery and in 1815 he started accepting visitors. In 1825 he started having visions of the mother of god and began healing people. According to Dasha and Sergei, Serafim Sarovsky taught, through the example of his life, that the core of Christian life is that the proof of god is inside ourselves. We learn about god through our experiences. Life is to gain the spirit of the light. Everything else just serves to help one accomplish this. Without this good, everything else is meaningless. Finally, Dasha explained, Sarafim died at 73, contradicting a prophet who had said he would live to 100. According to Dasha, this discrepancy means Sarafim will come back to live out the rest of his years at a later time. I was struck in particular by this last line, but the entire lecture was closely aligned with the New Age perspective on Christianity. Dasha and Sergei taught that God is inside of each of us and promoted the notion of reincarnation through the symbols and figures of Orthodoxy, interpreting Orthodoxy in ways that fit their own visions of religious unity.

The Regulation of Tensions

The tensions that exist between Orthodox Christianity and movements that blend practices and aim to unite religious belief systems into a united whole are exemplified by Sveta Prival'skaya's Temple of Peace project and the conflicts she has faced trying to register Voskhozhdenie. She has found opposition to her project from both Orthodox and scientific circles. And new state regulations that favor Orthodox Christianity have caused bureaucratic hassles for her organization, although thus far it has been able to remain active. More recently, Voskhozhdenie is facing problems with its meeting space, partly, Sveta suspects, because of negative reactions by some of the scientific community they rent the space from. Still, Sveta's world view welcomes crisis and struggle. She understands that such moments are what instigate change and transformation. And she has strong faith that ultimately the transformation is moving in the direction of greater cooperation and understanding between religions as well as between the religious and scientific communities.

It's very unfortunate that there are groups that don't accept this idea – certain scientists and Orthodox believers. But apparently, it wouldn't have been possible without it. We understand that the old world won't give in without a struggle. But this struggle should not be bloody and I hope that, well it won't happen, it's not the time. But we know that no illness, even the physical illness of one person, will give up without a struggle. That's why we have the notion of crisis. Right now Russia is in a state of crisis. I hope that through our common work, our meditations and the prayers of many, many groups we will overcome this period, although right now things are quite difficult. There is a lot of persecution. I think that our problems with our meeting space are connected with this. But I believe absolutely in God and I know that for us it's just a test to see if we will stay in a state of harmony and continue to believe in God in difficult times. But I know that God will help and there will be a new place. There's a similar struggle going on with scientists. Because they've written dissertations and their whole lives have maintained that there is only an electromagnetic

field, etc. and so they refute everything. But it's understandable. People can be very arrogant. And for a long time we've tried to establish a dialogue with Orthodoxy, but I want to repeat that in any case a few things are starting to be cleared up. But the government has long tried to have more control over things. They try but they aren't very successful. It's strange because it seems strong, like it can do anything. But it can no longer go the way of Stalin. Although maybe it would like to, as it seems to me. A few years ago the re-registration of all social organizations was declared. And we weren't accepted. They returned our documents and there were completely laughable issues. And they didn't register us. So we worked without registration for several years. Thank God we were able to do that. But now we've re-registered, under a slightly different name, still Voskhozhdenie, but still. But we don't care what sort of words are there. We still work and I know that our government is not the one in command. God is still in command and through us does what is needed.

Sveta's faith in positive spiritual transformation is not only a result of her faith in God. Of a scientific bent herself, she bases much of her optimism on her own experience and the changes she has witnessed in the spiritual movement in Russia. Not only has she seen a tremendous growth in alternative spiritual practices and believers, she has noted of late that even some members of the Orthodox clergy are warming up to her Temple of Peace idea.

Experience shows me that - in 2002 ten times compared with 1984 - and even in 1992 - the spiritual movement in Russia has grown tens of times larger. Given that I've been participating in it since 1984 and I live by it in essence, I see that it has strengthened ten times and I would even say that it's become purer. A good example of this is the retreats by various spiritual movements that have taken place outside of Moscow for 19 years now. And if earlier, every spiritual movement, every school - healing, health, psychological - went along its own path and insisted very harshly on their own way - only our path is the way. They behaved how religions are primarily behaving now. And of course there have also been steps forward in religions. For example, five years ago when we spoke about the Temple of Peace with Orthodox priests we were met only with aggression, complete rejection. Already last year we spoke with the same priests and their views on that have become significantly gentler. They say, 'you know, let each

go along their own path and respect others, for god's sake go ahead.' That is, there's already been movement forward.

A curious event happened at my last Temple of Peace meeting at Sveta and David's that seems to add weight to Sveta's optimistic outlook. Two new women showed up that night. They had heard of Voskhozhdenie and the Temple of Peace from the unlikeliest of sources, an Orthodox priest. This priest had read Sveta and David's books and, of all things, was using their methods in his own healing practice. And now these Orthodox women had shown up at their doorstep to learn more.

Conclusion

And so the boundaries keep blurring, the exchange of ideas and practices keeps taking place, and the spiritual landscape of Moscow continues to be a much more blended and plural space than some would lead us to believe. While tensions exist and regulations have caused some difficulties within the New Age sphere, practitioners freely incorporate Orthodox religion into their own practices. They revere particular Orthodox personages and attribute great power to the Orthodox community, and Christianity makes a significant appearance in their individual spiritual journeys. Christ, the Mother of God and the entire Orthodox Christian egregore figure strongly in their spiritual stories. And as we have seen this inclusion of Christian elements has been a highly conscious decision. The women of the New Age who we have met here do not identify as Orthodox simply because of tradition, although that long tradition, as they understand it, is what makes the Orthodox spirit so powerful in Russia. These women have consciously added Orthodoxy into their spiritual repertoires, greeting

it much as they have other spiritual practices, with a spirit of creativity and independence. Orthodoxy is just one element of their spiritual health identities, one path toward spiritual development, one way of realizing and expressing the plurality of voices and experiences in their world today. Joined together, these women have created spaces in Orthodoxy and the New Age where communities of support help guide them in their individual paths to self-transformation, a transformation which in turn helps them work to better the world about them.

Chapter Eight Conclusion

During my final days in Moscow forest fires burned steadily to the east. The scent of burning embers hung in the air, hot and dense with smog. The entire city had become a space for meditation, filled with incense, the senses lulled into another world. A friend of mine had recently returned from a trip to the countryside and upon her return was struck by the sensation that she had returned not to Moscow but Calcutta. The city it seemed was being physically enveloped by the spiritual ruminations and activities taking place within. As we pondered on the significance of these physical emanations, I wondered at all the transformations I had witnessed and experienced the previous six months. The women I had encountered in the New Age, particularly in Voskhozhdenie, had shared with me an entirely different Moscow than I had experienced before. They introduced me to a new way of conceptualizing the world and acting within it. Their spiritual health journeys offered vivid testimony to the transformative power of their practices and understandings of both the spiritual and physical worlds.

And yet as I gathered together my belongings, all strewn about the room I had so often occupied on my visits to Russia over the years, I knew that Moscow and the universe, just as certainly as this small rectangular room, could not really have changed so much in six months. At least not those six months. Despite participating in their practices and lives, finding my own higher potential and spending more time meditating and discussing spiritual topics than I had in my entire lifetime, I never fully entered into the world of the New Age. And I knew

that I would soon be returning to my previous life in academia and trying to re-acclimate myself to a world completely void of subtle bodies, egregores and holodynes. It had been nice to temporarily attempt to escape the bounds of natural science and imagine a world of infinite possibilities, where merely a thought could transform the world. Their concepts intrigued me, and I could see the practical use of their methods. I felt welcomed and appreciated the sanctuary they provided. But realism, agnosticism, skepticism, and, yes, sarcasm always remained just below the surface in my mind. And so I wondered at all of these transformations I was seeing. Why did the world seem different? Was a spiritual transformation taking place? Was Russia on the cusp of a New Era?

After returning home I tried to make sense of all that had happened, tried to fit the pieces together of what I had missed in the field. I wanted to understand. And it was only then, after months and months of reliving these experiences and stories that I realized that this was precisely the lesson. I was seeing differently. No, I would never fully accept or understand their ideas, and Moscow was likely the same place it had been months earlier, but for the addition of new stores and malls and billboards. What had changed was my perception. In sharing their lives and experiences with me, the women of the New Age in Moscow helped adjust my perspectives, shattering old assumptions and preconceptions about Russia and the New Age. Their lives helped to illuminate the misconceptions that so often underlie assumptions, and they helped bring to life the dangers posed by such thinking, particularly when promoted by the hegemonic discourses of politically powerful entities and states. The discordance of their practices and

beliefs with my own helped me to see afresh and look beyond the limitations of the prevailing discourses that had guided my perspective of Russia and the New Age.

To a striking extent, my experiences with the Russian New Age were a living example of the Russian Formalist artistic concept “defamiliarization,” particularly as expressed by Yuri Olesha in his 1927 novella *Envy*, a work that has fascinated me since I first read it some ten years ago. Olesha hoped through his attention to odd metaphors, optical illusions and individualizing details to re-humanize a world dehumanized by habitualized and automatized perceptions. Like the members of Voskhozhdenie, the heroes of his most well-known work see invisible worlds that those caught up in the mechanization of modern industrial society cannot see. They are confronted by images so unusual and vivid they cannot help but stop and look again. They are brought out of their zombified existence, to use Sveta’s language, and transformed into what Olesha hoped would be “fully conscious and perceptive individualities” (Beaujour 1970: 10).

Perhaps the seeming strangeness of their methods and cosmic worlds was what was needed to jolt me out of my ordinary way of thinking. If I had not been so intrigued or confused by them, I might not have given them any account, and my perceptions might have remained unchanged. Perhaps I would not have taken the time to see their individuality underneath the overarching category New Age. It is a pragmatic interpretation, but given the underlying pragmatism of their world views, I doubt the members of Voskhozhdenie would be displeased with this assessment. Particularly since their aim was never to convert me to their

particular way of thinking. They simply believe that fully evolved people will want to be conscious of their own thoughts and lives. Their particular means of attaining such consciousness, as they often repeat, are not the only or even best way for everyone.

And so, perhaps ironically, it comes back to the power of thought, although my understanding of the mechanics involved differs considerably from that of the New Age, and I am critical of their social implications, if taken to the extreme. Ultimately the end goals are not so far apart. But thought forms and energy and egregores are not a part of my understanding of thoughts, and I'm highly dubious of group meditation as a means of social change. In fact, some of their beliefs and practices seem entirely counterproductive. Although their meditation is active and creative, it is only active within the mind. At the physical level it is a passive, unengaged stance that could deflect from opportunities to work for structural or political change. The same critique can be made of their attitude of reconciliation with the outside world. If all focus is placed on changing one's inner perceptions and inner state of mind, this could lead to a mass disengagement with real world problems. It could result in a great opportunity for those interested in exploitation and domination. It is a coup for the status quo. If individuals are solely responsible for their own well being and happiness, then why does the state need interfere or provide? How does social responsibility fit in? And when are injustices great enough to merit interference rather than acceptance?

But here is where defamiliarization, where life's details awaken senses dulled by monotony and habit, where we see life as it is actually lived, in other words, where the important role of ethnography comes to light. Because it is by stopping and taking note of individualities, that we see how much variation exists even within a group united by a common philosophy and approach to life. Even here, where there is an active search for common ground, there is also a diversity of views and beliefs, and it is in this diversity that we can find the possibilities for positive social change. For most certainly, there are those within the New Age who call for complete disengagement. But this is but one perspective, an extreme perspective, and it is balanced out by a full range of others.

Of all the people I met, David perhaps most adheres to this more extreme perspective of disengagement. Sveta holds a more pro-active stance, illustrating how even at the micro-level of a married couple, co-directors of one New Age organization, there is space for diversity of viewpoints. This point was clearly demonstrated during my final evening at Voskhozhdenie. Towards the end of the evening we got into a discussion about how much one should get involved with outside events. The discussion began when David commented that people need to avoid the emotion "protest" and accept everything as harmonious in and of itself. Things are the way they are because they are meant to be, he said. Sveta did not fully agree. She said that there is a book that explains what a person should do. The *Baghavad Gita*, she said, states that one should not just accept one's fate if one is being oppressed. She noted that Krishna clearly states that one must stand up to oppressors. What if one passes a man beating up a woman on

the street, she asked? David's reply was that one should do whatever is part of one's mission: "Be harmonious with your mission, but don't engage in a situation out of a sense of protest." To which Sveta countered, "If God did not want you to intervene he would not have placed you at the scene or in a position where you could help." Both agreed, however, that we should not feel protest, that we should love even those who do great evil because somewhere inside them is a higher self that needs love.

In the end, however, even David takes an active part in the world. His call is not to disengage, but to follow one's mission, and his mission appears to involve a certain amount of engagement. He develops methods, writes books, attends scientific conferences, offers workshops and lessons. He lives a healthy lifestyle, taking care of his physical body. And along with Sveta he is involved with charity work at an orphanage and senior citizens center. Sveta and David do not have the answers to the world's problems. Even in their joint efforts to develop the Temple of Peace, they do not have a singular plan or outlook. The same holds true of the entire New Age scene. But the varied lives and peculiar practices and views of Russian members of the New Age do provide important lessons about the power of thoughts. By that I do not mean the power of egregores or meditations but the power of perceptions, assumptions, and stereotyped thinking, and the power of discourses to shape and limit these views. We learn that there are multiple ways. Life is not a set of either or situations, and if we can get through the oppositions, somewhere in the messiness of life we might be able to find common ground.

In their search for common ground, they demonstrate the great capacity that exists for misunderstanding. In fact, as we have seen, much of their energy is devoted to overcoming this very state, overcoming misunderstandings and the ensuing conflicts that arise. Beginning most often at the personal level, the level of relationships within the family, members of the New Age work instead to find the true intention, the positive common goal underneath all the wrappings and facades and complications that divide and aggravate tensions. And it is here, in this drive to discover the common bond, that we find the key to their pluralistic visions. In their searchings for this commonality and strivings to understand and to transform and open their thinking, we see the value they place on difference. They celebrate the exploration of worlds near and far, delving deep into philosophies, religions and scientific discoveries from around the globe, and searching for linkages within these widely disparate spheres. Rather than calling for a singular way of life, a singular vision for society, they seek out the common links between many voices. As such, they offer an alternative vision of the world. A world not defined by mutually exclusive oppositions, either/or definitions and prescriptions for living. They do not deny that oppositions and differences exist. But they see them not as fundamentally opposed or different. Oppositions are not cause for separation and rejection but are in fact a moment for creativity, a moment to seek out and explore the qualities that in fact could unite and allow disparate views and entities to coexist.

And so in their search for unifying moments, they do in fact work to shake up and shatter rigid, stultified, or simply habitualized thinking and visions. Doing

so is perhaps their greatest threat to institutions, powers or even individuals who benefit from such ways of thinking. Perhaps the fear expressed by such entities is in fact well-founded. New Age methods call on each of us to reflect on our own roles and contributions and responsibilities. They offer no simple answers, no singular path, no opportunities for passive obedience. Working through their methods requires intensive work on oneself, deep reflection on one's life, and active consideration of how one influences the lives of others. Perhaps threatening to a world structured around complacency and the ease of routinization, the lives and methods we have explored here offer up visions with lessons for many spheres of life.

To Russia they offer a vision of pluralism where freedom of conscience flourishes and different viewpoints and practices co-exist. They are not working to destroy other value systems or attempting to erase Russian traditions through the spread of foreign ideas and practices. Instead, as we have seen, they incorporate and transform outside ideas into their own practices, bringing to them a specifically Russian flavor. They value and respect Russian spiritual traditions and identify closely with them. Their call is in no way for the destruction of the Orthodox Church and even less so for the decline of the Russian population. But they serve as a strong reminder to the Church hierarchy that Russia is a society with many voices and many beliefs. While certainly this may encroach upon the Church's vision, at least that proposed by its extreme factions, it does not deny or threaten the Church's right to exist. Instead women from within the Russian New Age sphere call on the Church to join them in their quest for that inner positive

intention that unites rather than divides. As Russian spiritual searchers, they see an essential role for Orthodoxy in this quest as well as in their own personal journeys.

Similarly, to the West they again offer this very vision, a vision that runs counter to the prevailing western discourse on Russia, a vision marked by individual strivings, diverse and varied, working towards personal development and responsibility. But as Sveta reminds us, it is also a vision set on overcoming injustice and oppression. For many in the New Age this responsibility extends beyond the individual into the wider social sphere. Members of Voskhozhdenie continue to value and expect the provision of social guarantees. They intertwine their practices with the diagnostic technology afforded by the state health sector. They believe in education for all. And work towards improving the lives of those less fortunate around them. They provide the West with the lesson that individual responsibility and the provision of a basic level of social security are not mutually exclusive ideals. Instead they allow us to imagine a world where the security of basic needs in fact allows the individual to develop and flourish. It does not necessarily lead to passive mentalities estranged from the workings of democratic society.

While their actual methodologies are unlikely to bring about the global transformations they seek, their meditations unlikely to solve the problems of world hunger, oppression, poverty and war, they contribute to the break down of binary thinking. The diversity of their practices, beliefs and approaches help us in our analyses see beyond polarizing oppositions and thinking about the New Age

that sees it as either good or bad, empowering or paralyzing, higher consciousness or crackpot delusionism. Looking beyond such binary categories, we can see that their micro-practices may indeed influence the larger world. Not a solution in itself, they are part of a collection of activities in Russia that is a force against the authoritatarian turn.

As women, the members of the Russian New Age also offer a blended vision that breaks down the opposition of feminism and traditionalism. The women I met in the New Age were highly educated professional women, strong and independent. But they did not reject traditional gender norms out of hand. Perhaps unwittingly influenced by discourses on gender within their own society, they nevertheless have found ways to turn their gender roles into sources of strength and enjoyment. They confound simple binaries that automatically link certain behaviors with notions of oppression or passivity or blind adherence to tradition. They find strength in their roles as mothers, and, when joined with a partner of equal spiritual development, as wives, expending tremendous energy and time to the betterment of their family.

And as intellectuals, many with scientific backgrounds, they call on us within the academy to open our minds to notions outside the traditional confines of academic disciplines. They ask us to explore the many possibilities, to join people of disparate view points rather than dismiss them out of hand. While seemingly fanciful, their methods promote practical solutions aimed at real change at the interpersonal level, helping individuals overcome conflicts and stresses in their lives. Their ultimate goals offer a point of convergence with

others interested in issues of social justice, as they work for ways to improve lives, promote ecological health, overcome oppression and establish global peace. The oddities of their methods and views remind us to remain vigilant in our openmindedness, to presuppose the possibility of variation, change, and unforeseen interpretations, and to interrogate and explore categories rather than relying on the ease of preset parameters.

In this shattering of categories and boundaries and constant call to see anew and look below the surface, we find in their lives a strong support for the ethnographic experience itself. By turning to such methods that follow life on the ground, as it is actually lived, we see how far removed from stereotypes they truly are, how diverse and difficult to categorize. In effect, the anthropological method helps to humanize. By seeing individual people rather than categories, we can learn to relate and understand in ways that bring out our common human qualities. We learn that the women in the New Age in Russia are not saints and not disconnected from reality. They have not been brainwashed into following voices from outer space and they are not amoral individualists attempting to become their own gods, although they may incorporate elements of such stereotypes into their lives. They are ordinary women with concerns about their families, careers and futures, they struggle day by day to make their lives better. And in the end, the tools they turn to, their methods and conceptual understandings of the world, reveal a practical dedication to this struggle that is easy to understand.

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