

The Gnostic Mystery

A Connection Between
Ancient and Modern Mysticism



Dr. Andrea Diem
Professor of Philosophy
Mt. San Antonio College

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To the late Charan Singh

Abstract

Comparative studies often reveal similarities between greatly different cultures, even if those cultures are geographically separated by thousands of miles or historically distinct by thousands of years. This has been especially true in religion, where similar ideas have been propounded by tribes or clans who have on the surface no contact--historically or geographically--with one another. For the phenomenologist this kind of transcultural link or synchronicity is important because it raises the question of how religious ideas emerge and develop over time. Are religious ideas part of an innate, biological, developmental sequence which manifest over the course of human evolution? Or are religious ideas simply the product of historical transfusion, played over the course in time where one tribe touches another tribe thereby transforming concepts in a very material and socially determinable way?

Although this thesis does not answer those profound questions, it does provide a remarkable example of religious synchronicity, where two diverse spiritual traditions Gnostic and

Sant--posit very similar ideas about salvation and the nature of God. In this thesis I demonstrate how Gnostic and Sant Mat ideas concerning ontology, cosmology, and soteriology are remarkably close, despite the fact that the Gnostic tradition arose in the Middle East in the first and second century C.E. and that Sant Mat emerged in North India in the 14th and 15th century. My main sources are the Nag Hammadi Library for the Gnostic tradition and the writings of Tulsi Sahib and Shiv Dayal Singh for the Sant tradition

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Introduction

Nearly two thousand years ago strong parallels between Gnostic thought and Indian thought had been recognized. When the heresiologist Hippolytus (died about 235 C.E.) wrote about his Gnostic opponents, he was quick to include Indian religious thought as a similar source of heresy. He asserted:

There is...among the Indians a heresy of those who philosophize among the Brahmins, who live a self-sufficient life, abstaining from eating living creatures and all cooked food ... They say that God is Light, not like the Light one sees, nor like the sun nor fire, but to them God is Discourse, not that which finds expression in articulate sounds, but that of knowledge, or gnosis, through which the secret mysteries of nature are perceived by the wise. [1]

This particular passage from Hippolytus, which mentions the ideas of "God is Light" and "God is Discourse" (or Sound), as well as vegetarianism, brought to my attention the remarkable similarities between aspects of the Gnostic traditions [2] and the Sant tradition of India. This Indian religious tradition underscores

several Gnostic themes, including cosmology, mystical ascent, and, in some cases, ethics.

Mysticism is an area that has provided scholars, both generalists and specialists, with significant possibilities for cross-cultural studies in the field of religious studies. [3] In this study I am comparing the mystical tradition of the Gnostics of the Greek world with the Sant tradition of India, concentrating on the "classical" precepts of each. My objective is not to reduce one religious tradition to the other, ignoring the intriguing idiosyncrasies of each. But rather I argue that by examining the Sant tradition, which offers a clearly elaborated process and technique for mystical experience, some light can be shed on the mysticism of the Gnostic tradition. While the historical origins [4] and the complex mythology of the two traditions may be distinct, for both the conception of the world, physical and spiritual, bear a great deal of resemblances. [5]

Ninian Smart has supplied a framework for comparative studies of religious traditions that will be quite helpful for this study. Each world religion, he argues, consists of seven essential features or dimensions. As Smart states, religion is "a six (now seven) dimensional organism,

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typically containing doctrines, myths, ethical teachings, rituals, and social institutions, and animated by religious experiences of various kinds." [6] [Sidebar: the seventh dimension Smart has added is known as the material dimension, consisting of temples, art, religious texts, etc.] Accordingly, since all religions contain the above characteristics, a scholar can compare, for instance, the experiential aspects of one religion with that of another, and so on. Suffice it to say here that both the Gnostic traditions [7] and the Sant traditions [8] can be classified as religions.

Instead of exploring all seven dimensions, I will be comparing the doctrinal, experiential and ethical dimensions of each tradition, precisely because these aspects more clearly match up. Our examination will unfold as follows:

- 1) A brief description of the development of the Gnostic tradition and some of its characteristic constructs.
- 2) An outline of the Sant tradition, which advocates surat shabd yoga as a methodology for mystical illumination.

3) A comparative analysis of both traditions, focusing on the following aspects: doctrines (i.e., theology, cosmology, anthropology, eschatology), experiential dimension, and ethics.

4) Concluding remarks highlighting the similarities and differences of each.

This comparative work involves substantial citing from both traditions (primarily in the fourth section of the study). Since some of the writings date back nearly two thousand years, deciphering the material is not an easy task. First, sections of the, texts are missing, and, secondly, there is a difference in the writing style from today. It is important not to read into the text our own cultural biases, particularly when the writing is vague. In view of this I shall limit my study to those writings that are relatively clear and non-controversial. My main sources will be the Nag Hammadi Library [9] for the Gnostic tradition and the writings of Tulsi Sahib [10] and Shiv Dayal Singh [11] for the Sant tradition.

Methodologically, I have taken a phenomenological stance in order to better understand both traditions from the "inside." [12] In the area of mysticism, which generally entails a trans-

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worldly encounter, it is important to take seriously the claims of mystics, describing them at face value. All too often scholars will read into records of mystical experiences their own interpretations, depending upon their theological position. A typical example of this is when a scholar assumes that a mystic is waxing metaphorically when she or he describes spiritual encounters. I will argue, rather, that to interpret cal visions (e.g., experiences of inner light and sound, etc.) as mere symbols is reductionistic and, hence, non-phenomenological. To the mystic, whether a Gnostic from the second century or a Sant from the twentieth century, these visions are not metaphorical or speculative, but, rather, a direct experiential encounter with a higher level of being. In this study, the phenomenological approach allows for a deeper grasp of the mystical, dimension of the two religions.

Notes

1. Hippolytus, *Refutation Omnium Haeresium* 1.24. Elaine Pagels briefly discusses the connection between this passage and Indian philosophy in her book *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. xxi.

2. Kurt Rudolph criticizes the use of the title "Gnosticism," a modern term coined in the eighteenth century for a general spiritual movement which embraced the concept of gnosis. He argues that there was no coherent religion, or "ism," and so referring to the Gnostic movement as such is incorrect. See Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. and ed. by R. Mc. Wilson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark/San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), p. 56. Birger Pearson, however, argues that "there are definite advantages in retaining the term because 'Gnosticism' (or the Gnostic religion) can then be usefully distinguished from the kinds of 'gnosis'...that do not share in the radical dualism or other essential features properly reserved for 'Gnosticism!'" See Birger Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), p.7. To avoid controversy, however, I will not be using "isms," since, as

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Gerald Larson has pointed out, "it suggests a substantive unity which is really not there." (Personal letter, October, 14, 1990). Hence in this study "Gnosticism" will be consistently referred to as "the Gnostic tradition" and its comparative counterpart "Santism" as "the Sant tradition."

3. W. T. Stace identified two related types of mysticism: the introversive and the extroversive; however, both forms, he says, share common criteria. These are: 1) a noetic quality, 2) ineffability, 3) a sense of holiness, 4) a positive affect, 5) and a paradoxical aspect (that which defies logic). Stace argues that since there are universal features comparative work on mysticism is possible. See W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1960).

4. Speculatively speaking, there may be a historical connection between the Gnostic tradition and the Sant tradition, possibly through Sufi mystics; yet, due to limited space, I will not be exploring this in the present study.

5. Several scholars have done comparative work on Gnostic mysticism and different forms of Indian mysticism; however, some of them have been suspect in their comparisons. For instance,

J. Kennedy argues that the Basilidian Gnostic worldview containing three parts (pneumatic region, ethereal region, and aerial region) is directly related to Buddhism's three gunas, i.e., satva (intellectual, light principle), rajas (emotional principle) and tamas (heavy, dark principle). See J. Kennedy, "Buddhist Gnosticism, the System of Basilides," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (London, 1902), 377-415. See also Edward Conze, "Buddhism and Gnosis," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966* (Leiden, 1967), 665. Kennedy's reference to Buddhism and its three gunas is incorrect, however, since Buddhism, unlike the Samkyha tradition, does not accept guna theory. Scholars must be careful not to inaccurately attribute the teachings of one philosophical system to another.

6. Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1984), p. 16. See also Smart's new book: *Worldviews: Cross Cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), pp. 7-8.

7. As for the Gnostic tradition, Birger Pearson captures this point when he says: "The Gnostic Religion might be a better term, for in effect the

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Gnostic tradition involves a radically new worldview and symbol system, and should be defined as a religion in its own right, with clearly recognizable historical parameters." See Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

8. The adherents of the Sant tradition vehemently deny that it is a "religion" and, I believe, this denial is possibly the result of the status of their religious leader--the fact that there is a living guru. Every initiate I have interviewed offered the same response: the Sant tradition is not a "religion." Religion to satsangis is an organization that manifests only after the guru has passed away (and no successor has been appointed), and her/his teachings become "empty dogmas in a ritualistic setting." My objective is not to argue that it is a "religion" despite adherents' prejudice against such a title, but to examine this tradition in light of what Smart says about religion. The Sant tradition, in spite of its denial of constituting a religion, seems to fulfill Smart's seven dimensions. Perhaps we are faced simply with a problem of definition. For instance, satsangis claim to be opposed to "rituals," but it is important to note here that when Smart uses the term "ritual," he is referring to a repeated activity within a religious tradition. As such, meditation or

attending satsang can then be considered a ritual. See Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, pp. 6-7.

9. A few decades ago most Gnostic literature was unknown to us. Most of it was burned by the heresiologists, and some of it was buried for safekeeping. Hence, for centuries scholars were somewhat in the dark about the nature and scope of the Gnostic movement. Fortunately, in 1945 an Arab peasant discovered near a cave in Upper Egypt an ancient jar containing 49 papyrus texts of different Gnostic documents. Today, with a variety of Gnostic texts in our hands, we are better able understand this tradition.

10. Tulsi Sahib (1763-1843), popularly known as the "Sage from the South," settled in Hathras (located near Agra) and attracted a large following to the path of shabd yoga. His written works include: *Ratan Sagar*, *Shabdavali*, and *Ghat Ramayana*.

11. Shiv Dayal Singh (1818-1878), otherwise known as Soami Ji, was born in Agra and is believed to have come into contact with Tulsi Sahib. After fifteen plus years in meditation, Shiv Dayal Singh began to give public dis-

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courses on shabd yoga and is considered the founder of a parampara of the Sant tradition known as the Radhasoami tradition. Shiv Dayal Singh's writings were published six years after his death under the title Sar Bachan Chhand Radhasoami.

12. Husserl appears to have been one of the first philosophers to have utilized the term "phenomenology" as a discipline of study. It deals with phenomena or essences and refers to what appears. Ideally, it is a descriptive approach in which the scholar has three main aims: 1) utilize the methods of epoche (bracketing out one's prejudices) and verstehen (empathy); 2) regard religious phenomena as unique for the believers; 3) and give an unbiased description (not explanation). Overall, this methodological approach seeks to objectively understand religious phenomena and refrains from making value judgments on what is ontologically true. According to Smart, "the description of religion and its history could be said in one sense to be a scientific undertaking, for it is necessary to look at the facts dispassionately and objectively." See Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, p. 4. On the other end, Robert Wuthnow critiques phenomenology as subjective and hence unscientific.

According to Wuthnow, there is no "out there meaning" that scholars in consensus could agree upon since history changes with time and place. This is similar to C. J. Bleeker's critique of phenomenology that religion is dynamic and cannot be understood in moment's of stopped action. Wuthnow argues that when phenomenologists attempt to generalize across history, essentially they are denying history and demonstrating what others called "diachronic reliability." Hence, he believes that hermeneutics and phenomenology are crippled with respect to generalizing and predicting and, therefore, fall short of a truthful, scientific description. However, I disagree that phenomenology is scarred with the above critique. It is a descriptive procedure, albeit a very useful and powerful one, for allowing outsiders an inside glimpse of the inner workings and logic behind a religious faith. In order to understand a religion, a scholar must begin at the level of the believer, what it "means" to her or him. The scholar, then, takes off the academic robes and tries, in a sense, to experience what the believers themselves experience.

The Gnostic Movement

the first and second centuries of the Common Era numerous schools of thought refer to themselves as "Gnostic." There is no organized religion by the name of "Gnosticism" with specific doctrines to follow and creeds to believe; there are, rather, many different Gnostic systems, each with its own particular theological slant. Several sects are named after a founder, a specific place, a symbol (like the snake), or a group of people. Four of the most famous fall into the first camp, a school with a particular founder. These are the schools of Marcion, Basilides, Valentinus, and Mani. [1]

Although each Gnostic sect may emphasize one philosophical point over another, the fundamental aspiration always remains the same: the pursuit of gnosis [2]; this is the common thread among all the sects. Gnosis, which in Greek simply means knowledge, is not of the intellect, or matters dealing with the everyday world; rather, gnosis refers to knowledge of the spiritual world. The highest form of gnosis would be the knowledge of the Divine--direct, experiential knowledge of God which is not

taught or found in the Scriptures. There are really two adjacent forms of knowledge dealing with the spiritual world: knowledge of God (which we shall see is self-knowledge) and knowledge of special techniques, including passwords in order for the soul to ascend through various spiritual regions to the unknown Father.

The underlying goal is to raise one's consciousness beyond the physical world to the higher, spiritual worlds. It is as though the body was a cage in which the soul (as a bird) is entrapped. When the soul vacates the physical body it is said to ascend through various spiritual realms and its consciousness becomes purified. Finally, it reaches its primordial home, the Divine.

According to Gnostics, there is a substratum of reality, an Unknown, Nameless God who is unchanging and immeasurable, transcending any particularity or imposition one can attribute to It. In the Gnostic text *The Apocryphon of John* this Godhead is referred to as "the invisible One who is above everything," the "unnamable since there is no one prior to him to give him a name," and the "ineffable!" one beyond quantity and quality. [3] And in *Marsanes*, God is described as "the Silent One who

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is not known." [4] To Marcion, this Unknown Being is the "Alien God," symbolically signifying that the Divine is other to this world/creation. [5] Each soul or spirit entity is seen as essentially the same essence of God, a pure spark or atom of divine consciousness.

Hence, Gnostics are in some ways advocating a qualified non-dualism in which all souls are ontologically united in the Divine. In other ways, Gnostics are radical dualists, because they make a sharp distinction between the external, physical world and the internal, spiritual world.

The common misnomer is referring to all Gnostics as pessimists who de-value human beings. On the contrary, most Gnostics assign an exceptionally high value to the human soul. The analogy of Plato's cave illustrates this better. According to Plato, the prisoner mistakes shadows on a cave's wall to be reality. But, argues Plato, it is the source of those shadows, the Light, which is the true reality. In the Gnostic view, one has the potential to unshackle the chains of ignorance and turn from the shadows on the wall to look reality straight in the face. The world/creation is seen as evil only because it attracts one to the outside, to the external, and in the process the inner Self is

forgotten. This is the great "original sin" according to the Gnostics.

The sleeping spirit is made conscious by the Divine Man or the Redeemer who takes human form. He descends from the spiritual realms to reveal divine secrets and call souls back. Some Gnostics, especially the followers of a Gnostic named Mani, [6] assume that a Divine Man incarnates in different human forms throughout history to awaken people of all times and places. Accordingly, the Divine Man comes to restore the soul to its original purity and to lead it back to God. Several Gnostics argue that humans return to this earthly realm (reincarnate) until consciousness of the Divine is realized. Again, we see that Gnostics are not de-valuing the human soul but are ultimately suggesting an optimistic fate for it. [7]

The Gnostic movement as a whole draws upon many mystical philosophies, including neo-Platonism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and possibly Hinduism, [8] to name a few. With the spread of a Greek culture, there seems to be a tendency among philosophers to syncretize [9] waves of thought and to identify a common denominator. [10]

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The Gnostic tradition has often been associated with Christianity. Christian Gnostics claim to have the "true" teachings of Jesus. Many orthodox Christians argue that these esoteric interpretations were absurd and destructive to Christian faith. Nonetheless, in the early second century C.E. these Gnostics were not yet divorced from the greater part of the Christian community. [11]

Yet, between the third and fourth centuries C.E., the boundaries of Christianity are no longer as fluid, and groups are excluded as heretical. This is the age of the great heresiologists. Irenaeus, the first Church Father, is considered the greatest opponent of the Gnostic tradition. His five books establish systematic guidelines to reject Gnostics. Several anti-Gnostic writers follow Irenaeus, among which are Hippolytus, Clement, Origen, and Tertullian. In the third and fourth centuries C.E., in an attempt to establish a strong institutionalized Church, extremely sharp boundaries were drawn. The Gnostic movement is accused of trying to undermine the Church, and, consequently, all Gnostic thought is condemned as a heresy. Most Gnostic writings are destroyed at this time.

Despite the apparent historical connection between the Gnostic tradition and Christianity, the argument that the Gnostic tradition emerges from Christianity is tenuous. Contrary to popular understanding, the Gnostic tradition, in its formative stages, seems to have a "parasitical" [12] relationship with Judaism. Birger Pearson, an expert in Gnostic Studies, suggests that unfulfilled eschatology may have aroused spiritual rebellion in Jewish circles. Consequently, in revolt, a Gnostic hermeneutical program is employed, giving "birth to a radically new religious movement," [13] no longer recognizable as Jewish. Thus the Christian Gnostic tradition, argues Pearson, is an attempt on the part of Gnostics to gain entry into Christian communities, or to gain adherents to their communities, by means of equating their own gnosis with alleged secret teachings of Jesus. It is precisely this that causes so much difficulty for modern interpreters, some of whom continue to insist that Gnosticism, in its origins, was sparked by the appearance in history of a suitable savior figure, understood to be Jesus Christ. But this is an illusion. [14]

Part of the evidence supporting this theory is the Gnostic utilization of the Old Testament. It is interpreted, or more precisely re-interpreted,

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in a new light. Well-known biblical figures, such as Adam, are given a new role embodying basic Gnostic presuppositions. In a sense, it is a metaphorical teaching device, twisting the original story line to present their ideology. The Sethians, for example, speak of Adam as the figure who) transmits secrets to his son Seth, who then incarnates as "the great illuminator" [15] (e.g., Melchizedek, Zoroaster, Jesus) to reveal the eternal knowledge to the Gnostic (Sethian) race. [16] In fact, Gnostics go so far as to reverse the roles of good and evil to present the "deeper meaning." For instance, in the biblical creation story, the serpent (for some Gnostics) is not seen as an evil power but as a positive one, for the serpent urges Eve and Adam to wake up from the slumber and to realize their divine nature. Irenaeus elucidates this Gnostic view:

But their mother (wisdom) cunningly led Eve and Adam astray by the agency of the snake, so that they transgress the commandment of laldabaoth [lower demiurge]. And Eve was easily persuaded, as if she were listening to an offspring of god. And she persuaded Adam to eat from the tree from which god had said not to eat. Moreover--they saw--when they ate they became acquainted with the power which is superior to all, and they revolted from those who had made them. [17]

The serpent, then, begins to represent something completely different from what it does for the orthodox Jew or Christian. According to Irenaeus, the Gnostic sect of Ophites were among those who utilized this bold allegorization of the serpent in the creation story. [18]

A prime example of the Gnostic re-interpretation of the Old Testament is their view of the biblical god. [19] They contend that the god of the Old Testament is penultimate, that is, a lower deity and not the Godhead. They even go as far as to portray him as a demonic being, envious of the human race and striving to enslave souls in ignorance (i.e., through Jewish Law). [20] We can look at several examples in the Nag Hammadi Codices that describe this illegitimate lower demiurge. For instance, in Trimorphic Protennoia it says of this hostile power:

There appeared the great Demon who rules the lowest part of the underworld and Chaos. He has neither form nor perfection, but on the contrary possesses the form of the glory of those begotten in the darkness. Now he is called "Saklas," that is Samael, "Yaldabaoth," he who had taken power, who had snatched it away from the innocent one (Sophia)... [21]

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Another example is found in The Apocryphon of John which describes an ignorant, jealous god:

He is impious in his arrogance, which is in him. For he said, "I am God and there is no other God besides me," for he is ignorant of his strength, the place from which he had come." [22]

Since, according to most Gnostics, the creator god is of evil origin, so also is the creation. This anti-cosmic attitude has resulted in varying attitudes of ethics. We learn a great deal about the various Gnostic ethics in Clement of Alexandria's Stromateis (Book III). He writes:

Accordingly we may divide all the heresies into two groups in making answer to them. Either they teach that one ought to live on the principle that it is a matter of indifference whether one does right or wrong, or they set too ascetic a tone and proclaim the necessity of continence on the group of opinions which are godless and arise from hatred of what God has created. [23]

The ascetics contend that worldly pleasure impedes spiritual growth because it attracts one to the outside, to the external, and the inner spiritual Self is forgotten. To combat this problem strict ethics are employed. For some,

this included a vegetarian diet, extensive fasts, abstinence from intoxicants, and celibacy. Irenaeus places the Gnostic Saturnilus here. He explains:

Marriage and procreation, they maintain, are of *Satan*. Many of his followers abstain from animated things (i.e., meat), and through this feigned continence they lead many astray. [24]

According to Clement the Marcionite doctrine of ethics also falls into this camp. He remarks: By the Marcionites nature is regarded as evil because it was created out of evil matter and by a just Creator. On this ground, that they do not wish to fill the world made by the Creator-God, they decide to abstain from marriage. Thus they are in opposition to their Maker and hasten toward him who is called the good God, but not to the God, as they say, of the other kind ... they are continent, not of their own free choice, but from the hatred of the Creator. [25] He later adds:

Marcionites have interpreted them [children] in a godless sense and are ungrateful to their Creator. [26]

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On the other hand, libertines, like the Barbeliotes, supposedly engage in sexual cultic rituals, which begins with a feast of meat and wine and ends in an orgy. They justify their behavior as a means to transmit their sexual emission and the soul of the dead animal to the heavenly world. They are said to refuse giving birth to children because it again entraps a "seed of light" into an evil creation. [27] Nature is abused in the worst of ways as a fight against the creator god. Clement is especially infuriated with the "blasphemous immortality of Carpocrates" [28] who "can have pigs and goats as their associates." [29]

There is also a third Gnostic group, the moderate ascetics, that Clement fails to categorize. We find here the Valentinians. [30] Abuse of materials is abandoned; instead, the materials of the world are used with caution and limitation. Marriage and procreation are also rightfully condoned. The overall theme here is living a life of moderation, as well as indifference to worldly pleasure, but certainly not an aversion or sanctification of it. When Clement is rebuffing encratic behavior of the libertines, he draws upon the Valentinians as a potential model: [31]

If these people (i.e., the libertines) spoke of acts of spiritual union like the Valentinians, perhaps one could accept their view. But to suppose that the holy prophets spoke of carnal and wanton intercourse is the way of a man who has renounced salvation. [32]

Indeed, the Gnostic tradition is a complex religious tradition with many fascinating dimensions. Their theology entails a Transcendent God far surpassing the creator god who rules over this earthly plane. The human soul, a microcosm of this highest Being, remains imprisoned in the body since it is fooled by the inferior power and fails to realize its higher nature. The cosmos is viewed as a dark prison and this results in different attitudes of ethics, including asceticism, moderate asceticism, or libertinism. The overall objective of the Gnostic is to return to the Unknown God by awakening the human spiritual consciousness. But how does one awaken one's human spiritual consciousness? To answer this question we shall utilize the Nag Hammadi literature. But let us look at a comparable religious tradition known as the Sant tradition.

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Notes

1. The first three are Christocentric, influenced by the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul; Mani is mostly influenced by Asian philosophy. Some argue Marcion is not a Gnostic because he did not accept the Gnostic tenet that souls are divine by nature or that it is gnosis that saves. Rather, he adopts the Pauline view that one is essentially corrupt and saved only through faith. For further discussion of Marcion, see Kurt Rudolph, *op cit.*, p. 316.

2. The Greek term gnosis is cognate with Sanskrit jnana. Whether gnosis as such is comparable with jnana-yoga (the causal path of knowledge), however, is debatable.

3. James M. Robinson (ed.), "The Apocryphon of John H," in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988, third edition), p106. Hereafter cited as NHL.

4. Marsanes (X,1), in NHL, p. 463.

5. See Kurt Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p. 62. Marcion and Valentinus apparently were excommuni-

cated from the Roman Church for their philosophical position.

6. Mani's alternative church (i.e., the Manichean tradition) eventually died out in the seventeenth century in China. The three principles stressed were: 1) A Divine Man incarnated in different forms (e.g., Buddha, Jesus); 2) Outward observances like sacraments were totally unnecessary; 3) Evil did not originate from God (the world of Light) but had its own principle source--that is, the world of darkness. It is this world of darkness that overwhelmed archetypal Man, contaminating sparks of Light with material form. Mani's dualism of light and darkness, the realm of good and the realm of evil, seems to be directly influenced by Iranian Zoroastrianism. See Rudolph, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-35.

7. This may not apply to Basilides, who, according to Hippolytus, believes that once God has pulled ready souls back to It a "great unconsciousness" will descend upon the rest of humankind. See H. L. Mansel, D.D., *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries* (London: AMS Press, 1875), p. 156. Yet, it is important to note that there are two irreconcilable accounts of the doctrines of Basilides: one is presented by Hippolytus and

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the other by Irenaeus. Which account renders a more accurate depiction of Basilides remains uncertain at this time.

8. For an interesting discussion on the philosophical connection between Gnostic ideas and Hindu thought see Geo Widengren, *The Gnostic Attitude* (Santa Barbara: Institute of Religious Studies, 1973).

9. I hesitate to describe the Gnostic tradition as a syncretistic religion. This label, although a seemingly neutral description, is often coupled with pejorative connotations, generally suggesting that the tradition is simply a subgroup which defiled its parent religion(s).

10. Today, we see this same spirit in the New Age Movement which tries to syncretize religions of the East and West, transpersonal psychology, and modern physics.

11. There is some indication that Gnostic ideas affect many of the writings of the New Testament (especially the Gospel of John). A debatable example is Colossians, which appears to deal with the problem of false teachers and reacts against varying concepts of the soteriology of the soul. Rules of food and drink and ascetical

principles, often observances of Gnostics, are scoffed at. Moreover, 2 Thessalonians is in part written in reaction against advocates of a newly emerging philosophy, which, in this letter, are condemned as the lawless one, those "who exalt himself above every so-called god and object of worship, so as to seat himself in the Temple of God, claiming that he is god." Ephesians also warns against "teaching arising from human trickery," but this letter incorporates several attitudes similar to Gnostics. It discusses Jesus' descent from the inner regions and petitions the "Sleeper to Awake and arise from the dead." The letter of Jude, the second letter of Peter, and the Pastoral letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) clearly attack false teachers who make reference to "what is falsely called knowledge." Several scholars suggest, however, that during the composition of the New Testament the Gnostic tradition was at such an early stage of development that the writers may have been reacting to another tradition other than the Gnostic tradition.

12. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 125. For further discussion of the relationship between Judaism and the develop-

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ment of the Gnostic tradition see chapter three of Pearson's book, pp. 39-51.

14. Ibid., p. 9.

15. The Apolcalypse of Adam (V. 5), in NHL, p. 285.

16. For an insightful analysis of Seth, see Pearson, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-83.

17. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, I.30.8; I.30.9; I.30.15. Hereafter cited as *Adv. haer.*

18. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, I.30.7.

19. God spelled with a lower case 'g' is not meant to be disrespectful in any way to the Judaic/Christian religion. It represents the Gnostic understanding of an inferior demiurge, while God with an upper case 'G' refers to the Gnostic Transcendent God.

20. The three Christian Gnostics (Marcion, Basilides and Valentinus) supported this theology, and both Marcion and Valentinus were excommunicated from the Roman Church for their philosophical position.

21. Trimorphic Protennoia (XHI,I), in NHL, p. 515.
22. The Apocryphon of John, in NHL, p. 111.
23. Henry Chadwick, B.D. and John Ernest Leonard, D.D., translators, "Stromata" (Bk. III), The Library of Christian Classics Vol. II. Alexandrian Christianity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 58.
24. Irenaeus, Adv. haer., 1.24.2.
25. Stromata, Bk. III, p. 46.
26. Ibid., p. 50.
27. Epiphanius, Pararion, 26.9.4.
28. Stromata, Bk. III, p. 52.
29. Ibid., p. 53.
30. James E. Davidson, "Structural Similarities and Dissimilarities in the Thought of Clement of Alexandria and the Valentinians," The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian

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Studies, Vol. III, No. IV (Georgia: Mercer University Press, Winter 1983), pp. 214-15.

31. Clement's own ethics clearly fall into this third camp. He takes the motto, "It is better to marry than to bum." See *Stromata*, Bk. III, p. 53. "Burning" here simply means desire and suppression of such only intensifies it. Celibacy is acceptable if "chosen according to sound rule with godly reasons, provided that the person gives thanks for the grace God has granted, and does not hate the creation or reckon married people to be of no account." (p. 85) He continues to add that "both celibacy and marriage have their own different forms of service and ministry to the Lord." (p. 90) In regards to dietary ethics, Clement again stands in the moderate camp. Ideally, he promotes a meatless, alcohol free diet, but, according to Clement, "if one partakes of them, he does not sin." See *Stromata*, Bk. VII, p. 532..

32. *Stromata*, Bk. III, p. 53.

The Sant Tradition

The most comparable strand of Indian spirituality to the Gnostic tradition is the medieval and modern Sant tradition, an eclectic philosophy concerned with traversing spiritual realms to reach God. Resembling Gnostic metaphysics, there is a God beyond all gods, and this God invites the soul to know It. One achieves God-Realization by turning within one's own consciousness, realizing the microcosm-macrocosm relationship with the Divine.[1] A Sant is one who has accomplished this--an enlightened soul.

For a Westerner the term "saint" usually connotes a holy person, one who has sacrificed one's life to serve humankind in some way. In India, these attributes are likewise inherent in a Sant, but, more importantly, a Sant has merged the spirit entity (jiva [2]) into the Highest Reality, losing all identity. Having reached the highest state of consciousness, one is no longer subject to any form of illusion (maya) or ego (ahamkara). Such a person is considered, in effect, the embodiment of the Divine. This ineffable being, also called the satguru (the true

guru), is believed to appear/return in every age to awaken souls from ignorance. Thus, unlike Christianity, salvation is not a onetime event in which the Son of God incarnates once and for all for the salvation of humankind. In other words, the salvific process in the Sant tradition is a continuous one, and a Sant is born in every age to enlighten/free human beings from their ignorance.

While this tradition can clearly be traced back to the North Indian mystic Kabir in the fifteenth century C.E. (as well as Guru Nanak [3] and Dadu), some speculate that it has even earlier roots, manifesting in the twelfth or thirteenth century in Maharashtra under the non-sectarian Vaishnava poet-Sants Namdev and Jnaneshvar (otherwise known as Jnanadeva), and later spread under the influence of Eknath (1548-1600) and Tukaram (1598-1649).

Recent scholarship suggests that there are really two distinct yet related strands of the "tradition of the Sants": The first, the Maharashtra poet-Sants who flourished from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, are devotees of the god Vitthala or Vithoba of Pandharpur and contemplate his form (svarupa). Saguna bhakti, worship of a manifestation of the Divine,

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characterizes the attitude of the Maharashtrian Sants. Vaishnava Hinduism, which was based upon Bhagavata Purana and promoted bhakti (or devotion), plays an extremely important role in shaping this movement; in fact, early in their history, these Sants did not set themselves apart from it. Yet, this group of poet-Sants appear as more or less heterodox, since they pride themselves in being advocates of "true" Vaishnavism, challenging many of the practices and beliefs of the orthodox Vaishnava bhakti tradition. For instance, the Sants, often belonging to the lower strata of the Hindu and the Muslim society, emphasize egalitarian social values, believing in essence that salvation was not the exclusive rite of the "twice-born." Along with the rejection of the caste system, they emphatically insist that ethical behavior is a basic requirement for every devotee, not just the priestly caste. And perhaps what sets this religious tradition apart the most from orthodox Hinduism is the claim that devotion to the Divine Name of God is the only means to attain salvation. Altogether, however, the Maharashtrian Sants are generally placed within the Hindu milieu, primarily because they do not openly reject the authority of the Vedas.

The second branch of the Sant tradition spans the area of the Punjab and Rajasthan as well as eastern Uttar Pradesh and has been active from the fifteenth century up until today. Like the Maharashtrian Sants, the northern Sants rebuff orthodox Hinduism for the value it places on rituals, holy books, and idol worship, and they ridicule the caste system, which presents moksha as the privilege of the Brahmin pandit. But, even more extremely, they vehemently reject the authority of the Vedas. Such a severe anti-Brahminical attitude places the northern Sants outside the Hindu fold.

While the Maharashtra poet-Sants attribute anthropomorphic characteristics to God by referring to It as "father and mother," the North India Sants generally do not. They seem to reject a saguna God, and, instead, direct their efforts towards a nirguna one. Nirguna bhakti suggests that God cannot be captured in an icon or temple, since God is beyond all attributes and distinctions. Yet, several scholars have pointed out that while the northern Sants may conceptually conceive of a Supreme Being beyond qualities (nirguna brahman), there are also strong elements of saguna bhakti, especially in relation to the satguru [4]. The dual structure between the devotee and the object of devotion

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(the guru) allows for an intense emotional experience (anubhava), which is said to pull the devotee towards (but not into) the nirguna God. This religious quest (based both upon separation and union) certainly presents contradictions that are not easily reconcilable (and perhaps not meant to be). [5] Also, repeating the name of God, their primary meditative practice, inherently concedes some form to God by suggesting a quality of saguna bhakti.

On ethical issues, there is little differentiation between the northern and southern Sants. [6] While frowning upon rigid asceticism, both greatly stress living a moral life that entails three basic requirements: 1) ahimsa (non-violence), which implies maintaining a strict vegetarian diet, free of meat, fish, chicken, and eggs; 2) no intoxicants, such as alcohol; and 3) a moral life in society, including sexual restraint (i.e., no illicit sex).

If we look at the Sant tradition as a whole, it seems to be a mixture of Vaishnava bhakti and the esoteric Tantric tradition of the Nath yogis: the Maharashtrian Sants present a "purified" Vaishnavism and the northern group, led by Kabir, advocate a form of Tantric Buddhism in which there is an ineffable Reality transcending

all attributes (i.e., sunya). According to Charlotte Vaudeville, a renowned scholar of this movement, "the Sant sadhana or the Sant ideal of sanctity therefore may be viewed as a subtle blending of two main traditions of Hindu mysticism, apparently antagonistic to each other: Vaishnava bhakti and an esoteric Tantric tradition, whose most popular representatives are Gorakhnath and the Nath Yogis, often referred to by Kabir and his followers." [7]

Additionally, several scholars argue that there is a great deal of Sufi influence on the Sants. As Bruce Lawrence points out, there is an apparent affinity between Sant poetry and the Sufi worldview--namely, the repudiation of scriptural authority, the inner vision of a Transcendent God, the emphasis on the pangs of separation of a bereaved soul and God (viraha), and intense love and devotion to God (prema-bhakti). [8]

Arguably, though the Maharashtian Sants and the northern Sants may differ somewhat in their theological approach there are certain underlying characteristics that both share which marks them as a distinctive group. Each stresses the necessity of devotion to and the practice of the Divine Name as the means to achieve salvation,

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along with three cardinal principles: satsang, satguru, shad [9]. The following is an explanation of these three immanent foci: 1) Satsang: satsang to the fellowship of the true believers who have congregated to hear the spiritual discourse of the satguru. Also, internally satsang refers to the union of the soul with God. 2) Satguru: The satguru is, employing Max Weber's terminology, the charismatic leader (both of the exemplary and ethical type). Initiates generally refer to the guru as the physical embodiment of the Divine/Numinous, and, as such, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. [10] What we are confronted with in the guru is a classic hierophany: a profane object which manifests the sacred. Yet, this hierophany has a penultimate theological twist: the human guru not only manifests God, acting as a conduit between the Transmundane and the mundane (axis mundi or tirtha--cross place from profane to sacred), but is, in point of spiritual fact, God Itself. [11] Ideally, this is exactly how the guru is to be regarded. [12]

According to the Sant tradition, as exemplified by Tulsi Sahib, one must follow a living guru. It is said that past Sants cannot take the soul back to the God. This is due to two main reasons: 1) the original message of the Sants is believed to

be misconstrued after the Sant passes away, while the teachings of a living Sant are pure and charged; 2) and guru-bhakti (devotion to one's guru) aids one's spiritual progress, simply because it is believed to be easier to love someone alive and tangible than someone who has been dead for centuries. At all times, contends this philosophy, at least one God-realized soul ("Son of God") walks the face of the earth imparting divine secrets for those spiritually searching souls. [13] 3) Shabd: And lastly, the Sants, emerging as heirs to a mixed tradition, can be distinguished from other followers of Indian spirituality by the emphasis they give to a practice known as surat shabd yoga, [14] perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Sant tradition. Surat simply means spirit entity or soul, shabd refers to the sound-current, and yoga, in this context, [15] means union. Hence, it is the ancient science of joining the soul with the sound-current. This sound-current is believed to be the manifestation of the Divine that resounds in every being in creation and upholds all creation. It is also known as the "Audible Life Stream," "Music of the Spheres," "Nad," "Logos," "Akash Bani," "Divine Melody/Harmony," "Word," "Light and Sound," etc. One who seeks liberation (moksa) from the unending cycle of birth and

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death (samsara) must sit in meditation, withdraw one's consciousness from the body, contact this divine melody within, and attach oneself to it.

For nearly two thousand years, Indian mystics have written devotional poems and hymns about this mystical sound. For instance, presumed traditionally to have been written between the second century B.C.E. and the second century C.E., the Maitri Upanishad and the Nadabindu Upanishad contain significant portions dedicated to shabd and to elaborating a technique of auditory mediation (surat shabd yoga). These are advocating an experiential methodology for spiritual ascent. At each stage of ascent a particular sound is heard, like those proceeding from the ocean, the thunder of the clouds, the kettle drum, and as tinkling bells, the conch, the flute, and the vina (a stringed instrument). The writer of the Nadabindu Upanishad expounds:

The yogin...should always hear the internal Sound through the right ear...When he comes to that stage when the great kettle-drum is being heard, he should try to distinguish only sounds more and more subtle. [16]

The Maitri Upanishad further explains that surat shabd yoga is the "most secret doctrine" [17] to be disclosed to no one. The following passage illustrates the importance of this spiritual practice for attaining moksha:

By closing the ears with the thumbs they hear the sound of the space within the hearts. There is the sevenfold comparison of it, like the rivers, bells, a brass vessel, a wheel, the croaking of frogs, the rain ... Having passed beyond this variously characterized sound, they disappear (become merged) in the Supreme, the non-sound, the unmanifest Brahman.. There are two Brahman to be known, the sound Brahman and what is higher. Those who know the sound Brahman get to the higher Brahman ... [18]

While surat shabd yoga presumably remains alive in India for centuries, we encounter the clearest articulation of auditory meditation in the Sant tradition. Nam Dev evidently practiced this ancient spiritual method of surat shabd yoga and initiated others into it. Many of the basic tenets of the Sant tradition were then further laid down by Kabir.

As with the Gnostic tradition, there is no fixed institution or set boundaries of the Sant tradition, and, in fact, there exists some diversity

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among the individual Sants. A multiplicity of sects exists for several reasons. First of all, as we have stated, Sants are found throughout history, and each of them usually appoint a successor(s), who is likewise a Sant, to continue the philosophy. But historically at the time of a Sant's death there often appears a multitude of adherents each claiming to have been condoned the rightful successor, and, consequently, numerous factions occur. [19]

The proliferation of spiritual sects, each following a particular Sant lineage, perplexes scholars as to whether we can consider this movement as a distinct religious tradition, as we do with Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc. Simply, is there a "Santism"? According to Daniel Gold, a scholar of the Sant tradition, we can regard it as a religion in its own right comparable to and separate from Hinduism. [20] What lends evidence to a positive affirmation of a larger field of the Sants and not simply disconnected lineages is the intriguing relationship between the earlier Sants and those in the modern, movement. Later Sants give allegiance to earlier ones by citing their verses and drawing upon their theological expressions, bridging the gap between the pioneers of the Sant tradition and the contemporary poet-Sants. Kabir, Dadu,

Nanak, Ravidas, Tulsi Sahib, Namdev would be among the many Sants to whom the tradition pays homage.

As an example, Shiv Dayal Singh (1818-1878; also known as Soami Ji), the founder of a modern lineage of the Sant tradition known as the Radhasoami Movement, [21] contends that his path and the path of the previous Sants is the same. Shiv Dayal Singh openly remarks:

Kabir Sahib and Tulsi Sahib came into the world, and started the path of Dayal (the Absolute Lord). Openly doth Radha Swami say: "I, too, am one of them, teaching the same Path..." If thy mind believeth not my word, then see thou the writings of Kabir and Guru Nanak. The path of Tulsi Sahib is the same, and so to Paltu and Jagjivan state. Quote I the authority of these Sants; their utterances do I state as witness to my teachings. [22]

Tulsi Sahib, a Sant of Hathras from the nineteenth century, recognized that Sants drew upon the teachings of other Sant figures as spiritual resources. Pointing out the common spiritual roots, he identified this movement as a coherent religious tradition, which he called Sant Mat, simply meaning a "Sant faith." [23] Tulsi Sahib comments:

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The principles and tenets of Sant Mat are one and the same, only there is a difference in terminology. Since the same principles have been stated using different names, you become confused and do not understand them ... Kabir explained Sant Mat in his way, other Sants in other ways. The religion of all those who have gained access within is one and the same. [24]

Since most world religions traditionally revere only one particular saint from the past, such as Jesus, Buddha or Zoroaster, the recognition of more than one Son of God, or enlightened being, may seem strange. The Sant tradition argues, however, that the original message of all genuine or perfect Sants is the same. Still there are others (those outside of the Sant tradition) who twist the perennial teachings and construct formal religions, with elaborate rituals, symbols, sanctified books, holy places, and outward observances, whether consciously or, most likely, unconsciously, to accommodate social, emotional and perhaps intellectual needs. Thus, the theologically unique stance of each religion results from a creative interpretation of the primal message. According to Lekh Raj Puri, a devotee in this tradition, no Sant comes into the world to create a religion; this is all the workings of their followers. Puri asserts:

Sants have no religious bias; they are free people not bound by the dogma and ties of any religion. They are above all religions. Neither do they try to destroy old religions, nor do they start any new one ... The sole object of the life of a Saint in this world is to lift people from here, and take them back Home, to our true Heavenly Father, Satnam. Saints do not set themselves to reforming this world by changing or altering the existing social, moral and religious practices, nor are they interested in the ritual and ceremonial aspect of life. [25]

It should be noted here that the Sant tradition is not against conventional religion. Indeed, it recognizes that one's religious affiliation is in many ways synonymous with one's culture, often serving as a social institution. However, this spiritual tradition claims that conventional religion is like a picture frame, outwardly adorning but ultimately unnecessary, while the Sant's teaching is the picture, the heart or inner message. It questions the value of a picture frame with no picture.

If this is the case, as the Sant tradition contends, what is the picture or the spiritual inner message that has been consistently overlooked? The objective in this study is not to unravel "hidden

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truths" (certainly this is not the task of a phenomenologist), but simply to compare the portrait painted by the Sants with that of the Gnostics.

Notes

1. To illustrate this microcosm and macrocosm relationship with the Divine a simple analogy is employed. As an individual one is a bubble floating on the Ocean going through life outwardly looking through a bubble shell, assuming one's existence is unique and divisible. The Sants of this tradition petition humans to turn their attention inward, to look within themselves, and realize that the bubble is not separate from the Ocean but is part of the Ocean. This is true gnosis, according to the Sants. Hence, from the ultimate viewpoint, as with the Gnostics, there is non-duality. But until that realization, until that bubble bursts, one remains misled in a world of dualism.

2. With respect to Indian terms, I will try to be consistent with the forms used in Sant literature. Since a large number of books have been published in English, there is some consensus on how to spell key theological terms. For instance, the English Sant Mat and Radhasoami books usually refer to divine sound as shabd, and not the Sanskrit form sabd.

3. W. H. McLeod argues that the origins of the Sikh tradition came from the teachings of the

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Sants. He says, "Nanak did not found Sikhism, for this would have meant founding something which already existed." See W. H. McLeod, "The Sikhs: History, Religion and Society (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 16. Also see McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 6-7, and Daniel Gold, *The Lord as Guru: Hindi Sants in North Indian Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 14.

4. See John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues: Comparative Studies of Religion and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

5. Frits Staal asserts that pure nirguna bhakti in the Sant tradition is a logical impossibility. He questions how can one have a relationship with that which is ineffable or without qualities. See Frits Staal, "The Ineffable Nirguna Brahman," in Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 41-46.

6. See Charlotte Vaudeville, "Sant Mat: Santism as the Universal Path to Sanctity," in Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod (eds.), *The Sants* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 38-39.

7. Ibid., p. 36.

8. Bruce Lawrence, "The Sant Movement and the Indian Sufis", in Karine Schomer and W. H. McLeod, *The Sants* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), pp. 360-373.

9. Vaudeville refers to these as "the three pillars of the Sant sadhana (i.e., the means to achieve moksa). See Vaudeville, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

10. Charlotte Vaudeville posits that in the Sant tradition the satguru may possibly be viewed in two ways: 1) a guru in human form, 2) or an interiorized one. While most Sants refer to a satguru or "Perfect Guru", it is ambiguous whether all Sants, from both medieval and modern times, agree that the guru must assume a human form. That is, can the satguru be in fact an inward manifestation of shabd which leads the soul through the inner realms to the Highest God and not necessarily a human figure? For instance, when Kabir proclaims that "the satguru is the true hero, who loosed off a single shabd," it is uncertain if he is alluding to a particular religious figure since he is reluctant to name her/him. (Kabir, *Sakhi*, 1.9.) Vaudeville claims that earlier traditions may possibly have relied upon an interior form of a guru, while

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later traditions identify with a particular religious figure. See Vaudeville, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-35.

11. Daniel Gold has captured this important point with the title of his 1987 book on the subject, *The Lord as Guru*.

12. My research of the Radhasoamis, adherents of a modern manifestation of the Sant tradition, seems to indicate a spiritual and emotional tension concerning the paradox of the guru. The paradox is the following: teachings which state unequivocally that the guru is God (replete with all the attributes that such a claim entails) coupled with the day to day humanness of the guru, suffering from physical ailments, memory lapses and the like. Moreover, the guru seldom, if ever, displays miracles to her/his devotees. And it seems ironic that (s)he emphasizes that the guru is God, but denies this title for herself/himself. What is the neophyte to do? That is, how do satsangis respond to the paradox of the divine master and the human one? How does such a belief system translate into the day to day lives of the believers? For some it is a paradox which is never satisfactorily resolved and may affect the way they act within the community. This is a theoretical question that intrigues me as a scholar. For more on this

subject see Andrea Diem, *A Phenomenological Approach to Field Research: A Look at the Radhasoami Group of Santa Barbara and San Diego* (UCSB archives, 1989).

13. In this tradition, Jesus is revered as a past Sant. In the Gospel of John (9:5), when Jesus says, "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world," the Sants interpret this quote to suggest that Jesus was not the Light of the world for all people and all time.

14. It is interesting to note that. shabd yoga can go either of two ways: 1) If shabd yoga takes on primary importance for a group then this usually includes an adjacent philosophical superstructure or a moral framework (such as emphasis on a particular diet, a living master, etc.). 2) However, if shabd yoga is secondary or minor for a group, then the superstructure seems to be much less emphasized. This is usually the case in s. For instance, Swami Muktananda's group, Siddha Yoga, stress more on kundalini/sakti and is clearly more physically oriented.

15. In classical yoga (Samkhya Yoga), the term yoga does not mean union, but the disentangling of buddhi (awareness, a sense of I-ness) and consciousness (Purusa). See Gerald Larson,

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Classical S27mkhya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979), pp. 156-192..

16. K. Narayanasvami Aiyar, trans., *Thirty Minor Upanishads* (Privately Published: Madras, 1914), p. 257.

17. S. Radhakrishna, trans., *The Principal Upanishads*, "Maitri Upanishad, Chapter VI, 22" (Great Britain: George Allen & Unwil LTD, 1953), p. 839.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 833.

19. A will signed by the Sant directly indicating the rightful successor has in some cases reduced this problem but not entirely. Sawan Singh of the Radhasoami Movement (a modern manifestation of the Sant tradition) signed a will indicating that his successor at Dera Baba Jaimal Singh would be Jagat Singh. However, several different disciples claimed they were also duly appointed (Kirpal Singh being the prime example) and a proliferation of branches resulted. For more information on the dynamics of guru succession, see David Lane's *The Politics of Guru Successorship* (La Jolla: U.C.S.D Ph.D. dissertation, 1991).

20. Gold, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-9.

21. The movement Radhasoami was not named out of any reverence to Radha, the consort of Krishna. Rather, Soami Ji utilized the analogy of Radha's love for Krishna when describing to his disciples the love the Lord has for the soul, and the love the soul has for the Lord. Hence, the name Radhasoami in this context simply means the Lord of the Soul.

22. Lekh Raj Puri, *The Radha Swami Teachings* (New Delhi: Privately Published, 1968), p. 16.

23. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *Tulsi Sahib: Saint of Hathras* (New Delhi: Rekha Printers Pvt. Ltd., 1981 second edition), p. 18.

24. S. D. Maheshwari, *Param Sant Tulsi Saheb* (Agra: S.D. Maheshwari/Soami Bagh, 1979), p. 99.

25. L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

A Comparative Study

The Doctrinal Dimension

There are various doctrinal parallels in the Gnostic tradition and the Sant tradition. For instance, inherent to both traditions is the notion of a Transcendent God. Gnostics envision a God similar in many ways to nirguna Brahman of the northern Sants, described as "ineffable," "immeasurable," and unnamable." [1] In the Gnostic tractate The Apocryphon of John, the writer proclaims:

He [God] is [illimitable] since there is no one [prior to him] to set limits to him. He is unsearchable [since there] exists no one prior to him to [examine him. He is] immeasurable since there [was] no one [prior to him to measure,] him. [He is invisible since no] one saw [him. He is eternal] since he [exists] eternally. He is [ineffable since] no one was able to comprehend him to speak [about him]. He is unnamable since [there is no one prior to him] to give [him] a name ... He is ineffable...He is neither large [nor] small. [Mere is no] way to say, 'What is his quantity?' or, 'What [is his quality?]', for no one can [know him]. [2]

The Indian mystic Tulsi Sahib gives a similar rendition of God:

There is a Being who is inaccessible, unfathomable and nameless, and who has no locality, location, and address, and is not confined to space. No question of.. manifested or unmanifested arises about His Abode ... That Immovable Being is all by Himself and has no form or name ... He is above all and nameless, in whom Sants merge... [3]

Gnostic theogony also includes an illegitimate lower demiurge, the creator god, responsible for entrapping souls in material existence. As we have seen, this pernicious power is, according to the Gnostics, the god of the Old Testament, who claims to be the Highest Being and thus demands worship. The creator god, known as Ialdabaoth (a name probably derived from Judaic mysticism), became arrogant and boasted to "the multitude of angels around him... 'I am a jealous God and there is no other God beside me'. [4] Gnostics argue that others assume Ialdabaoth as the Highest Being and so fail to recognize the Transcendent God, their true spiritual source. Their lack of spiritual knowledge, so to say, is due to this one simple, but devastating mistake: in a phrase, they believe the demiurge to be God and thus are deceived.

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The teachings of the Sants have a similar binary theological makeup: a Transcendent God and a lower demiurge. As with the Gnostics, they argue that there is a lower deity, named either Brahm [5] or kal, [6] who "created the material universe but could not create souls." [7] This negative power, says the Sants, seeks personal veneration and so captures the jiva (spiritual being) in a realm of material darkness by attracting it to the "pleasures" of the world; consequently, the inner spiritual self is forgotten. Acting as a prison keeper,

Kal tries to prevent souls from going out of his domain into higher spiritual stages, because he does not want the population of his own kingdom reduced or thinned. [8]

Tricking people into thinking he is the Highest Lord, while in fact he is only the ruler of the lower worlds, Kal obstructs souls from returning to God, wherefrom they originally came. Thus those who "took the deity hereof to be the lord of all were duped." [9] Tulsi Sahib elucidates:

From Sat Nam [the Highest Being] has emanated Brahm ... Not knowing the reality, people have thus described Brahm: The one without

attributes, formless and infinite; Also, the dispenser of justice and free from delusion. These qualities the ignorant attribute to Brahm. And him the world worships with all devotion. The ten incarnations come from Brahm, the world looks Upon him as Nirgun. [10] He, in turn, has created the worlds physical and astral ... [11] Thus the world hails Brahm as the Supreme Lord. It recognizes not the path leading to the Ultimate. [12]

Only the "elect," [13] or the "rare one(s)," [14] are aware of the distinction between the lower deity (Ialdabaoth / Brahm) and the Highest Reality and thus will escape the prison house of creation. Those who "have no knowledge of the higher regions and have confused the lower regions with the higher regions and the Goal" [15] are metaphorically depicted in Gnostic and Sant sources as "blind," "asleep," "drunk..... unconscious," "ignorant," etc. According to Tulsi Sahib, one must "wake up! wake up!" for he declares that "whosoever sleeps, loses all; whosoever wakes is blessed with great good fortune." [16] The more spiritually advanced souls, explains The Gospel of Truth, have finally

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cast ignorance aside from them like sleep...they leave (it) behind like a dream in the night. The knowledge of the Father they value as the dawn. This is the way each one has acted, as though asleep at the time when he was ignorant. And this is the way he has <come to knowledge>, as if he had awakened. (and) Good for the man who will return and awaken. And blessed is he who has opened the eyes of the blind. [17]

For the Gnostics there are two versions of the salvation scheme: 1) the "elect" alone will be saved, and 2) all souls eventually will return to the "Realm of Light." The Gnostic Valentinus seems to support the former. He argues that there are three types of people: 1) the material (hylic), 2) animal (psychic), and 3) the spiritual (pneumatic). Information of the Valentinian tripartition of souls is supplied by Clement of Alexandria:

The spiritual are saved by nature; the psychic, being possessed of free will, has an inclination towards faith and towards incorruptibility, but also towards unbelief and destruction, according to his own choice; but the material perishes by nature. [18]

There is yet another version to the Gnostic elect theme. Instead of a superior class "saved by nature" versus those whose fate is doomed from the start, all souls will eventually be saved. Souls who possess knowledge (gnosis) can immediately return to God and those who do not will be sent "back again into the world according to the form of the sins that it may have committed," [19] until a time comes when they too shall be perfected.

The doctrine of reincarnation is found throughout Gnostic literature. For instance, in The Apocryphon of John the Gnostic (in the voice of John) "plains that if souls at the time of death "have not known to whom they belong" these souls will be cast down into the prison house of creation, overpowered again with "forgetfulness...until it is liberated from the forgetfulness and acquires knowledge. And if it becomes perfect, it is saved." [20] The issue of karmic propensities (the principle that karma sways one away from the Divine at death, if one is not attached to It beforehand) and reincarnation is accepted by many Gnostics, including Mani and Basilides. According to the Christian philosopher Origen of Alexandria, Basilides supports reincarnation when he says:

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Before I came into this body, I lived in the kind of body that is not subject to the law: the body of a domestic animal or a bird. [21]

Basilides presents human suffering as a punishment for sins that were committed in a previous life. The suffering of a newborn baby, for instance, is believed to be the result of some past offense(s). For Basilides, even the suffering of Jesus is related to a "sinfulness"-- that is, the human inclination to sin, but not necessarily sinful acts themselves. Clement remarks on Basilides' view of karma and reincarnation:

Actually, Basilides' presupposition is that the soul previously sinned in another life and undergoes its punishment in the present one. Excellent souls are punished honorably, by martyrdom; other kinds are purified by some other appropriate punishment. [22]

Of these two Gnostic versions of the salvific process--salvation only for the elect with no mention of reincarnation or salvation for all souls via reincarnation--the teachings of the Saints coincide with the latter. Eventually, perhaps after millions of life times, the soul is believed to merge back into its Primordial Home. It is an arduous journey homeward in

which the soul is led astray many times before it is released from the grips of Kal. Tulsi Sahib affirms:

For countless lives the mind had been under the sway of passions; from moment to moment it has been a captive of the wave of cravings. The pursuit of desire makes one take abode in the body; the endless chain of karmas throws him into the cycle of birth and death...When the soul leaves the body and the mortal frame decays, it goes into the cycle of eighty-four... In the form of don keys, dogs, swine and the like, it is crushed and chewed in the laws of Kal. Ceaselessly revolves the individual in the whirlwind of transmigation...[23]

But once one has obtained a human form, one can "break all the shackles and get deliverance from the ceaseless cycle of births and deaths." [24] Human birth is considered invaluable, because only in the human form does one have the potential to return the body, the mind, and the spirit (the three components of all living beings) each to their proper place: the body will return to the earth; the mind will return to the region between the mundane and supermundane; and the spirit will soar up to the subtle realm of the transcendent God. Salvation is the completion of this process. While few are said to accomplish this in their present life-time,

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Simon Magus explains that every human being has within them "an infinite power ... the root of the universe" which "exists in a latent condition ... potentially, not actually..." [25]

The Experiential Dimension

Gnostic literature is filled with descriptions of mystical experiences beyond the simple waking state. For instance, the Gnostic text *Zostrianos* explains that the one "who can be saved is the one who seeks after him and his mind, and who finds each am of, them ... he withdraws to himself alone, for he can become divine." [26] The writer continues to explain that there is often pain in returning to the world of the physical, for although he possesses an eternal, immortal power, he is bound within the [movement] of the body. He is [made] alive and is bound always] within cruel, cutting bonds by every evil breath, until he [acts] again...[27]

Werner Foerster suggests that the Gnostic tradition might be set along side mysticism but that there is a fundamental difference between the two. He argues that the mystic is trying to foretaste death, while the Gnostic is not interested in experience but in cognitive learning. [28] I disagree with Foerster on this point.

Experience for the Gnostic is inherent to learning; to experience death (or practice the process of death) plays a key role in learning about the higher regions. The tractate *Zostrianos* petitions:

Awaken your divine part to God ... Behold death [my italics] here and seek the immutable ingenerateness, the Father of everything. [29]

The purpose of withdrawing from the physical body is twofold: 1) first of all, it is a means to purify the soul to heighten consciousness of God. As the soul ascends to higher levels, its awareness of God sharpens. In essence, self-knowledge is knowledge of God. 2) Also, it entails the act of dying while living. Step by step one enacts the actual process of death so that at the time of death the soul is not lost but knows the path of ascent to the Unknown Father.

The soul, when pulled from the physical body, is said to rise upward experiencing higher states of consciousness. It is here that visions of light and sound are described. According to the mystics of these traditions, such manifestations are believed to be guides for the wayward soul, leading the soul through various higher states of

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consciousness. The author of the Pistis Sophia comments:

Man's soul shall become, when it leaveth the body, a great flood of light, so as to traverse all the regions until it cometh into the kingdom of mystery. [30]

Contacting this light and sound is said to be transforming. The writer of the treatise Allogenes purports:

[I] turned to myself [and] saw light that [surrounded] me and the Good that was in me, I became divine. [31]

In Trimorphic Protennoia the gnostic writer (in the voice of God) describes how this transformation takes place:

I cast [voiced] Speech [or Sound] into the ears of those who know me. And I am inviting you into the exalted, perfect Light. Moreover (as for) this (Light), when you enter it you will be glorified ... you will become gloriously glorious, the way you first were when you were <Light>. And I hid myself in everyone and revealed [myself] within them, and every mind seeking me longed for me, for it is I who gave shape to the All when it had no form. And I transformed their forms into (other) forms until the time when a form will be given to the All. It is

through me that the Voice originated ... And it is a Word, by virtue of a Sound; it was sent to illumine those who dwell in darkness...[I] am a Light that illuminates the All. I am the Light that rejoices [in my] brethren, for I came down to the world [of] mortals...[32]

Also, this same Gnostic suggests that the appearance of light within is constructed in a particular pattern as a guide that helps to uplift the soul through various spiritual realms to knowledge of the Divine. The Gnostic asserts:

I [God] went down [to those who were mine] from the first and I [reached them and broke] the first strands that [enslaved them. Then] everyone [of those] within me shone, and I prepared [a pattern] for those ineffable Lights that are ineffably within me. [33]

The Sant tradition embraces a comparable mystical motif. Only by "ascending within himself by his soul" [34] can one be united with God. Tulsi Sahib encourages:

Seek not thy Beloved in the world outside; within thine own self, behold the splendor of thy Beloved. In the pupil of thine eye is a mole, wherein is hidden the entire mystery; peep within and behold thou what lieth beyond this dark curtain. [35]

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The teachings of the Sants are also based on this light and sound. These manifestations, argue the Sants, appear to the soul once it has withdrawn from the physical body. Tulsi Sahib describes this spiritual experience:

Whose soul is attached to the Word [shabd] revels ever in cosmic flight... In the lamp of the inaccessible he [the jiva] keeps beholding a flood of light... In the region of the firmament, glitters flashes of light...which the rare brave one beholds...Vacate thy body....[36]

It is said that the light attracts one's attention while the sound pulls it upward, leading the wayward soul to its Primordial Home. Shiv Dayal Singh elucidates:

By practicing shabd according to the rules [i.e., following the light and sound], the mind and the surat [soul] become pure and by holding unto shabd the surat spreads beyond the heavens in the astral body, [and] will climb ... In Trikuti [the second spiritual region] the surat will arrive and from there it will go forth having separated from the mind ... and its true place will be obtained. From this place in the beginning the surat originated and having come into the three worlds engrossed in time, the surat went and will eventually return back to its origin ... [37] [My translation]

As with the Gnostic tradition, the light and sound are described in particular patterns. Once withdrawal has commenced, the darkness within is said to gradually be illuminated with shifting points of light that eventually "cease flickering and develop into a single radiating point." [38] As the soul continues its journey variations of a beautiful white light and of a melodious sound occur. Describing this inner light and sound exactly is said to be an impossible task, for, claims Shiv Dayal Singh, "how can I describe the melody, when nothing like it is to be found in the world." [39] The sound current is not a sound one hears with the physical ears, but only with the inner self, the spirit entity. Accordingly, this "heavenly music that plays interminably" [40] is, in essence, God manifest and it upholds all of creation.

When describing the philosophical nature of the cosmos, Gnostic writers emphasize this sound current, variously referred to as Word, Voice, Logos, Speech, or simply Sound. Also, throughout Gnostic texts reference is made to the manifestation of a mystical light, known as Treasury of Light, Immeasurable Light, etc. In the Trimorphic Protennoia it is described in the following way:

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I am [the Word] who dwells [in the] ineffable [Silence]. I dwell in undefiled [Light] and a Thought [revealed itself] perceptibly through [the great] Sound ... And it [the Sound] exists from the beginning in the foundations of the All. But there is a Light [that] swells hidden in Silence and it was the first to [come] forth...I alone am the Word, ineffable, incorruptible, immeasurable, inconceivable. It (the Word?) is a hidden Light ... being unreproducible, an immeasurable Light, the source of All...It is foundation that supports every movement of the Aeons that belong to the mighty glory. It is the founding of every foundation. It is the breath of the powers. It is the eye of the three permanences, which exist as a Voice by virtue of a Thought. And it is a Word by virtue of the Sound ... I (the Word) became a foundation for the All ... [41]

In the Sant tradition this inner sound current, as has been explained, is titled shabd which is the manifestation of the Divine. This shabd is said to emanate from the Highest Being, or God, and it upholds all of creation. Shiv Dayal Singh expounds:

O! know thou, Shabd is the beginning of all creation; and the end of all too do thou know as Shabd. The three worlds and the Fourth Realm (Dimension). all these things hath Shabd created...Save Shabd there is no other Reality." [42]

Hence, both traditions proclaim the existence of an Unknown God, beyond reason and speech, that allows Itself to be known through a transcendental manifestation of light and sound. Upon withdrawal, this light and sound appears, illumines the darkness within and the soul ascends. But where does the soul ascend to? Several Gnostics have attempted to delineate a specific spiritual cosmology. It is difficult, however, to ascertain from such old texts, with missing material and obscure language syntax, exactly what these transcendental realms consist of. Nevertheless, several things do remain clear: the spiritual map entails ascending to various heavenly regions, encountering various sounds and lights, and facing the aeons or powers of that region. Some Gnostics contend that the soul is washed or baptized each time it passes through a heavenly realm. In other words, one's consciousness becomes more purified, until one attains God-realization. "Concerning the path...to the self-begotten ones," writes a Gnostic, "those in which you have now been baptized each time ... it serves as knowledge of the All ... (which) you acquire when you pass through the all-perfect aeons." [43] So unless one withdraws one's consciousness from the physical body and washes the soul, or attains

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higher consciousness, one will forever remain ignorant of the Divine.

It appears from various Gnostic sources that there are a variety of inner realms, each with a specific ruling power. According to one Gnostic writer, there are five basic realms, the fifth being the realm of the Divine encompassing all the others. This Gnostic explains that he withdrew into himself and ascended through various regions, being baptized in each, until finally he reached the fifth aeon. Here he announces:

The Autogenes is the chief archon of his aeons and angels as his parts, for those who are the four individuals belong to him; they belong to the fifth aeon together. The fifth exists in one; the four [are] the fifth part by part. But these four are complete individually ... perfect parts ... He stands within an aeon because there are within him four different self-begotten aeons ... [When I was] baptized the fifth [time] in the name of the Autogenes by each of these powers, I became divine. [44]

It is difficult to arrive at a conclusion concerning the importance of the number of inner realms, since there is some degree of inconsistency among the Gnostics on this point. Some Gnostics, such as the writer(s) of the Gnostic

text Pistis Sophia, may be referring to the notion of five heavenly realms when discussing "Five Trees," [45] each of which are associated with a divine being. The one who knows "Five Trees" is believed to attain salvation. Yet, others (e.g., Basilides) delineate a more expansive cosmology, including 365 heavens. [46]

As the soul ascends through the various heavenly planes, it is said to encounter "powers," gods of the lower regions, who are ignorant of the Ultimate God. Gnostic theogony discussed in the Trimorphic Protennoia demonstrates the mystery of this Highest Aeon in relation to the other lower aeons. This Aeon produces a divine sound that shakes all creation and disconcerts the inhabitants and the rulers of the lower realms. Seeking solace, they gather and approach some form of a creator god, named the Archigenetor, who is also ignorant of the source of this sound. The theme of a God beyond all gods is evident. The Gnostic writes:

For I shall tell you the mystery [of] this Aeon that is, and tell you the forces that are in it ... the foundations of the underworld and the ceilings of Chaos shook and a great fire shone within their midst, and the rocks and the earth were like a reed shaken by the wind ... domiciles were greatly disturbed over a great thunder. And the

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thrones of the Powers were disturbed since they were overturned and their King was afraid...they [the inhabitants of the realm] said to the Powers, "What is this disturbance and this shaking that has come upon us through a Voice <belonging> to the exalted Sound? And our entire habitation has been shaken..." Then the Powers answered saying, "We too are at loss about it since we did not know what was responsible for it. But arise, let us go up to the Archigenetor and ask him. And the Powers all gathered and went up to the Archigenetor. [They said to] him, "Where is your boasting in which [you boast]? Did we not [hear you say], "I am God ... and it is I who begot you and there is no [other] besides me? Now behold, there has appeared a Voice belonging to that invisible Sound of [the Aeon] that we know not. And we ourselves did not recognize to whom we belong, for that Voice which we heard is foreign to us, and we did not recognize it; we did not know whence it was. It came and put fear in our midst and weakening in the members of our arms. So let us now weep and mourn most bitterly! As for the future, let us make our entire flight before we are imprisoned and taken down to the bosom of the underworld. For already the slackening of our bondage has approached...ignorant Chaos became for us a dwelling place. For behold, even the Archigenetor of our birth, about which we boast, even he did not know this Sound." [47]

The Highest Aeon explains to them the hidden mystery of this sound. Also, comments the Aeon, it is from Itself that the light manifests. It states:

Become worthy of the mystery hidden from (the beginning of) the Aeons, so that [you might receive] it. And the consummation of this [particular] Aeon...which [has no change forever]. I am androgynous. [I am Mother (and) I am] Father since [I copulate] with myself. I [copulate] with myself [and with those who love] me, [and] it is through me alone that the All [stands firm]. I am the Womb [that gives shape] to the All by giving birth to the Light that [shines in] splendor. I am the Aeon to [come. I am] the fulfillment of the All ... I cast [voiced] Speech [or Sound] into the ears of those who know me. [48]

Throughout Gnostic literature names of specific lights of the different realms are described: Armozel of the first region, Oroiael of the second, Daveithe of the third, and Elethe of the fourth. The fifth aeon, the Divine, is the all-encompassing light. A specific description of these lights is absent, although they are referred to as "eternal Lights, perfect because they were perfected individually." [49] The author of Trimorphic Protennoia expounds that "each Aeon gave myriads of glories within great

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unsearchable lights and they all together blessed the Perfect Son, the God who was begotten."
[50]

The Sant tradition presents a strikingly similar spiritual topography. It consists of four basic regions the soul traverses until it reaches the fifth region, the highest state of consciousness. [51] Again, as with the Gnostics, each realm is controlled by a ruling power or aeon. Here, the light and sound of each region are described. In the first region, Sahans Dal Kanwal, the soul is pulled out of the body and enters a new dimension, encountering for the first time beautiful light and sound. The light is described as a thousand candles, and the sound like bells. The second region is called Trikuti, and here the mind is shed from the soul. The light is referred to as a red sun, and the sound as thunder or drums.. Daswan Dwar is the third spiritual realm, a realm pure spirit where one attains self-realization. Magnificent white light is seen and one hears a harmonious stringed instrument. The fourth region is titled Bhanwar Gupha, where the soul approaches the infinite God, envisioning a splendid white light and hearing a soft flute. Finally, the soul reaches Sach Khand and merges into the infinite ocean, attaining God-realization. Here, the light radiates to

infinity and the sound is compared to that of a vina. Shiv Dayal Singh praises this region as the "the Throne of the Lord; know Him thou as thy true King." [52]

Clearly, both traditions describe similar cosmologies, but the parallel continues. As previously stated, each spiritual realm is ruled by an aeon or power. To know the names of these demiurges is very important. It is only through some form of initiation, that these names are revealed; prior to initiation, the names remain secret.

In the Gnostic tradition, these names may be what the Gnostics refer to as "the imperishable names which are in the Treasury of Light." [53] In order for the soul to traverse through a region it must know the name of the ruling power; in a sense, these names are passwords. Upon name call, the power falls down and cannot hinder the soul's ascent. Thus, knowing the name of the aeon makes one superior to it. These secret names are the esoteric element of the tradition. The Pistis Sophia discusses these "angelic powers" or rulers, and the prayers to be addressed to them in order for the soul to pass through their gate. One who has received the tokens [54] (or passwords) has the "Mark of the

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kingdom" which "all the regions fear." [55] The writer explains:

The soul is on the road that leadeth on high, and before it is far distant therefrom, it uttereth the mystery for the breaking of all the seals (i.e., the formula) and all the bonds of the counterfeit of the spirit wherewith the Archons have bound it unto the soul. And it having uttered these words, the bonds of the counterfeit of the spirit are loosened so that it ceaseth to persecute the soul, and lets it go according to the commandment given unto it by the Archons of the Great Fate, who said unto it: Let not the soul go free, unless it shall utter unto thee the mystery for the breaking of the bonds wherewith we have bound thee unto it. Thereupon the soul, thus set free, leaves fate behind unto the Archons of the way of the Middle-space, and destroys the counterfeit of the spirit leaving it for the Archons in the place wherein they had found it (at first) unto the soul; and in that moment it becometh a great flood of light, shining exceedingly; and the Receivers who had fetched it out of the body are afraid of that light, so they fall down upon their faces, and the soul is made as it were a wing of light, and the courses of the Light, until it entereth into the place of its own kingdom for which it hath received the mystery... And when they come before the Archons in the Middle-space, the Archons depart out of the way of that soul, in a word being in great fear unto which there is no measure. And in that moment the soul utters the mystery

of its defense before them; and they fall upon their faces out of fear of the mystery and of the defense which it hath uttered ... [56]

Basilides, according to Irenaeus, also taught to his disciples esoteric divine names. Irenaeus reports in a suspicious tone:

And they [the Basilidians] also concoct certain names, as it were, of angels. They report that some reside in the first heaven, others in the second, and thus they strain to relate in full the names ... that they have fabricated. And thus, they say, the name under which the savior descended and ascended was Kaulakaua. So whoever learns these things and becomes acquainted with all the angels and the causes of their existence--such a person becomes invisible and incomprehensible to all angels and authorities, just as Kaulakaua was. And just as the child was unrecognizable by all, so too, those people shall not be recognized by any; but rather, whereas they know all and pass through all, they themselves are invisible and unrecognized by all. For they say, "Recognize them all, but let none recognize you!"...And few people can know these things--only one in a thousand, and two in ten thousand. [57]

Gnostic literature is full of allusions to seals of the different aeons or powers. One can only wonder if these seals are prayers addressed by

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the soul to each god whose gate it has to traverse on its way to its final Abode. Once one is given the "five seals ... death might not have power over him from this time on." [58] For instance, in the Trimorphic Protennoia, the writer mentions five seals and each seal seems to correspond with a different aeon, so the fifth seal would therefore be the name of all-encompassing Aeon. Naming the five seals and pursuing the source of light and sound may be what enables a soul to continue spiritual ascent. The author asserts:

I [God] hid myself within them all [humans] until I revealed myself among my members, which are mine, and I taught them about the ineffable ordinances...But they are inexpressible to every Sovereignty and every ruling Power except to the Sons of Light [Gnostics] alone ... These are the glories that are higher than every glory, that is, [the Five] Seals complete by every virtue of Intellect. He who possess the Five Seals of these particular names has stripped off <the> garments of ignorance and put on a shining Light. And nothing will appear to him that belongs to the Powers of the Archons. Within those of this sorted darkness will dissolve and [ignorance] will die ... I proclaim to them the ineffable [Five Seals in that order that I might] abide in them and they also abide in me. [59]

In The Gospel of the Egyptians reference to the five seals appears at least six times. The writer announces:

The five seals...the Father brought forth from his bosom, and she [the soul] passed [through] all the aeons ... They who are worthy of (the) invocation, the renunciations of the five seals ... these will know their receivers as they are instructed about them. and the will know them (or: be known) by them. These will be no means taste death.
[60]

In the Sant tradition, these names of the aeons are referred to as Panch Nam (the five names) or Varnatmak Nam, [61] and told to the disciple only at the time of initiation. Silently repeating these names during meditation is said to calm the mind from running out into the world of the senses, in order that one's consciousness might withdraw from the body. Once consciousness has withdrawn and the soul commences ascent, these names of the aeons serve the same purpose as for the Gnostic. [62] Step by step, or region by region, the soul travels upward announcing the name of the inner ruling powers, until it reaches its Home. Proclaiming these five names and following the sound and the light allow for the soul's ascent.

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Shiv Dayal Singh implores his disciples "of the five Names do thou the repetition." [63] He explains that if they:

do not possess even detailed theoretical knowledge of these regions and the intermediate stages through which they must pass on the way, such persons are always confused because they do not know the presiding deity of (each) region...But the Sants first teach Their disciples the distinctive marks of each region and then fix the Highest Region...as their goal, and give practical instructions for traversing the Path. In this way the devotee can reach his goal and also know all about the conditions prevailing in the various stages. If he does not get the knowledge and proper understanding (of these mysteries), the disciple will ... not be able to make steady progress. He will not have strength enough to reach the final goal, and will very likely be deceived at some place or other on the way and stop there. [64]

The "mysteries of the Kingdom" (i.e., the names of the heavenly powers, etc.) are revealed, according to the Gnostics, by the Son, who has descended the inner realms and taken human form to explain these divine secrets. The adherents or initiates are named Sons of Light and alone are taught the path of light and sound and the "imperishable names." As one Gnostic puts it:

The Son who is perfect in every respect--that is, the Word who originated through that Voice...who was within him the Name; who is Light--he [the Son] revealed the everlasting things and all the unknowns were known. And those things difficult to interpret and secret, he revealed, and as for those who dwell in Silence...he preached to them. And he revealed himself to those who dwell in darkness, and he showed himself to those who dwell in the abyss, and to those who dwell in the hidden treasuries he told ineffable mysteries, and he taught unrepeatable doctrines to all those who became Sons of the Light.[65]

In the Sant tradition this Savior figure is called the satguru, who has come to "showeth the Reality within thy body." [66] Likewise, the satguru has traversed the inner regions and alone can explain its mysteries. Shiv Dayal Singh says:

Of the Five Melodies doth he [the satguru] tell thee the secret; and the way of the soul doth he show thee. The names ... doth he reveal to thee; and their forms and stages doth he explain...[67]

Unless one has been initiated by a Sant, it is believed that one will remain steeped in worldly delusions caught in Kal's transmigratory snare.

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Tulsi Sahib enumerates the necessity of a spiritual guide:

Without the guidance of a Master the way cannot ever be found. He will take thy soul to regions celestial, and reveal the firmament within. If thou desirest to revel in realms spiritual within thine own self, none will help thee expect the Sants. In a short moment wilt thou depart, and thy body be reduced to dust. Thy Master alone, O Tulsi, will show the entrance back to thy Home.[68]

While both the Gnostic tradition and the Sant tradition agree that a spiritual guide unravels insoluble mysteries of the universe and awakens the soul from ignorance, there is a possible difference between these two religions in respect to this incarnate divine being. First of all, it is unclear whether all Gnostic initiates had a particular spiritual guide. And for those that did, it is uncertain whether (s)he was recognized as an, enlightened being or simply a fellow seeker. The adherents of Mani did believe that Mani died fully aware of his transcendental Self, but whether he was revered while living as a Christ or a Buddha is not clear. If Gnostics did not acknowledge their present, living leader as an enlightened being, then one could conclude that generally they relied upon a, past Redeemer(s) to aid their spiritual journey. This

appears to be the case with Basilides, who argued that Jesus alone was the prototype of all spiritual men. However, in the Sant tradition, as elucidated by Tulsi Sahib, in order for a soul to return to God one must be initiated by a living Sant.

The Ethical Dimension

While both traditions appear to underline very similar themes: an inner sound current, a spiritual journey, divine secret names, and a redeemer who reveals all of this, in the area of ethics there are some distinctive differences. First of all, while the Sant tradition may consist of a proliferation of different branches, each branch seems to stress basically the same vows. All Sants, says Tulsi Sahib, require their followers to be vegetarian, to abstain from intoxicants, to live a moral life (including no premarital sex), and to daily meditate. Yet, in the Gnostic tradition there are clearly wide differences with respect to ethics. As explained earlier, Gnostics fall into three main camps: the libertines, the moderate ascetics, and the ascetics. Each group reacts against creation either by abuse, moderation or renunciation.

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Only the moderate group fits well with the Sants. Similar to the moderate Gnostics, Sants are not hermits but value marriage and family life. Renunciation and libertism are scoffed and, instead, a kind of detachment based on moderation is embraced. Only through maintaining a balance between these can one disentangle oneself from the mire of the world. Tulsi Sahib explains:

Saints know not renunciation, nor acquisition. The two throw the mind into the web of delusion. What one renounces, he gets in the next life; again and again he comes to the world for gratification. In acquisition the entire world is enslaved. In these two the entire world remains entangled. Sant Mat is quite distinct from both. Renunciation and acquisition are for it delusion. [69]

With respect to dietary restrictions, there are only a few Gnostic leaders, such as Mani and Saturnilus, who quite clearly implemented a vegetarian diet. As for the Sants, however, abstinence from meat-eating is considered essential for spiritual growth. In the following poem, Tulsi Sahib vehemently denounces those who do not maintain a meat-free diet:

Whoever has eaten flesh and fish in this life is bound in captivity by the butcher, Kal. Nothing good will come out of such conduct...[70]

In summation, some schools were obviously more similar to the ethics of the Sant tradition than others. Hence, to say simply that the Gnostic movement is alive in India in the Sant tradition must be qualified. While most of the Nag Hammadi literature illustrates a profound parallel between the two traditions, the parallel becomes somewhat vague when reviewing the specific ethical stance of each Gnostic school.

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Notes

1. The Apocryphon of John, in NBL, p. 106.
2. Ibid.
3. Maheshwari, op. cit., pp. 41-42.
4. The Apocryphon of John, in NHL, p. 112.
5. Brahm should not be confused with the Hindu notion of Brahman, the Absolute or Highest Reality. Brahm here refers to the lord which has jurisdiction only over the phenomenal world. Moreover, the Sant's conception of the Transcendent God is not equivalent with Brahman.
6. Kala in Sanskritic speculation is usually time. In this specific context it refers to an entrapping power which rules over the whole universe.
7. L. R. Puri, op. cit., p. 199.
8. L. R. Puri, op. cit., p. 200.

9. Shiv Dayal Singh, trans. by S.D. Maheshwari, Sar Bachan Poetry Part One (Agra: S.D. Maheshwari, 1970), p. 522.

10. Nirgun refers to the Lord of the third spiritual region, beyond the three gunas or attributes.

11. The four main divisions of the universe, according to the Sants, are: 1) the material universe; 2) the astral region; 3) the causal region; 4) the highest region of pure spirit. The first three are under the domain of KM.

12. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

13. Basilides (as well as other Gnostics) refers to the Gnostics as "the elect (who) are alien to the world, as if they were transcendent by nature." See Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I.24.4.

14. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *op. cit.*, p. 42. Tulsi Sahib describes one who has awakened as a "rare one."

15. See L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

16. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

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17. The Gospel of Truth, (I,3 and XH,2), in NHL, p. 45.

18. Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts ex Theodoto, 55.3.

19. Pistis Sophia, 263. All citations from Pistis Sophia are taken from Charles William King, *Gnostics and Their Remains* (Minneapolis: Wizards Bookshelf, 1973); see also, Carl Schmidt's translation of Pistis Sophia (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

20. The Apocryphon of John, in NHL, p. 120.

21. Bentley Layton (trans.), *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1987), p. 439.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 443.

23. In the Hindu tradition it is believed that there are eighty-four hundred thousand different species that the soul can incarnate into. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

25. Hippolytus, REF 6.9.
26. Zostrianos (VIII,I), in NHL, p. 415.
27. Ibid.
28. See Werner Forester, "Introduction," *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts* (Great Britain: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 2.
29. Zostrianos, in NHL, p. 430.
30. Pistis Sophia, 235.
31. Allogenes (XI,3), in NHL, p. 494.
32. Trimorphic Protennoia, in NHL, pp. 519-20
33. Ibid., p. 517.
34. L. R. Puri, op. cit., p. 173.
35. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, op. cit., pp. 92-93.
36. Ibid., p. 128-31.
37. Shiv Dayal Singh, Sar Bachan Radhasoami Poetry (*Armitsar: Radha Soami Beas*, n.d.), p. 3.

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38. Kirpal Singh, *Crown of Life: A Study of Yoga* (Delhi: Sawan Kirpal Publishing, 1961), p. 156.
39. L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
40. Kirpal Singh, *Naam or Word* (New Delhi: Sawan Kirpal Publishing, 1960), pp. 183-84.
41. Trimorphic Protennoia, in NHL, p. 519.
42. L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
43. Zostrianos, in NHL, p. 410.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 409, 417, 429.
45. Pistis Sophia, 230.
46. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* I.24.3.
47. Trimorphic Protennoia, in NHL, pp. 517-18.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 518-19.
49. Zostrianos, in NHL, p. 377.

50. Trimorphic Protennoia, in NHL, p. 515.
51. In the Sant tradition there are eight regions in all: Sahans Dal Kanwal, Trikuti, Daswan Dwar, Bhanwar Gupha, Sach Khand, Alakh Lok, Agam Lok, and Anami Lok. Sach Khand is believed to be the "imperishable region," and the three that follow are higher manifestations of it. For simplicity sake adherents generally refer to the "five inner region," since the last three are higher divisions of the fifth.
52. L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
53. 2 Jeu, ch. 46, Schmidt-MacDermot, pp. 110-11.
54. Pistis Sophia, 234.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
56. Pistis Sophia, 282.
57. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, I.24.5, I.24.6.
58. The Apocryphon of John, in NHL, p. 122.

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59. Trimorphic Protennoia, in NHL, p. 521.
60. The Gospel of the Egyptians (III,2 and IV,2), in NHL, pp. 211, 217.
61. There are two forms of Shabd: Varnatmak Nam (refers to that which can be spoken) and Dhuniatmak Nam (perceivable as inner spiritual Sound). The former deals with the mantra one is given at initiation (i.e., the names of the aeons).
62. Charles King makes an intimate connection between the "ineffable names" of the Hindu tradition and the Gnostic tradition. See C.W. King, *The Gnostics and Their Remains* (Minneapolis: Wizzards Bookshelf, 1973), pp. 266-73. Indeed, repeating holy names is an idea to be found fully developed in the practice of the Brahmins; yet, the Sant tradition offers a more exact comparison with the Gnostics.
63. L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

64. Shiv Dayal Singh, *The Sar Bachan Radha-soami Prose* (Punjab: Radha Soami Beas, 1974), pp. 52-53.
65. Trimorphic Protенnoia, in NHL, p. 514.
66. L. R. Puri, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
68. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *op. cit.*, pp. 40.
69. J. R. Puri and V. K. Sethi, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-71.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Conclusion

comparing the Gnostic tradition with the Sant tradition, we have discovered several remarkable similarities, including the idea of a transcendent Father, intermediate beings, secret passwords, enlightened sons of God, and visions of inner light and sound. Although it would be inaccurate to claim that Sant Mat is simply India's version of the Greek Gnostic tradition, we should not overlook the historical and theological consequences of such a transcultural interlink. Historically, it would be useful to determine to what extent the Gnostic tradition, as a historical movement, influenced early and medieval Indian thought, particularly the views of such nirguna bhakti poets as Namdev, Kabir, and Nanak. There may well be a sociological pipeline--via such religions as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and/or trade and commerce established by conquering empires--which has channeled early Jewish/Christian/Greek thought to India and/or channeled early Indian thought to the Judeo-Christian world. [1] To gauge accurately when, where and how this cultural pipeline through time operated would be of great interest and

value to sociology in general and religious studies in particular, since then we could have some inkling of how theological ideas and spiritual practices evolve.

Arguably, however, there may be no clearly defined historical link between the early Gnostic tradition and the medieval/modern Sant tradition. It may well be, as Huston Smith, Ken Wilber, and other perennialists argue, that the similarities between the Gnostic tradition and the Sant tradition are structural. That is, the commonality of ideas between two different geographical religious movements arises precisely because they both have tapped into an inherent, even biological (but not culturally variable), stage of human development. Framed in this way, Gnostic and Sant ideas reflect certain psychosocial stages of humankind's religious consciousness, and thus are similar to each other not because they are linked progressively through history, but because they are linked inherently through the natural evolution of human awareness. Here one can turn to the studies done on near-death experiences by Ring, Sabom, and Grof, where individuals from around the world report similar experiences at the time of clinical death even though they come from diverse cultural backgrounds, as

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indicative of how certain religious ideas may indeed be similar because of a non-historical connection--a connection grounded in human consciousness or neuro-anatomy.

These two lines of inquiry--historical and psychological--are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, the interplay of religious ideas may, in fact, ferment from, both arenas, as Mircea Eliade has tried to demonstrate in his studies on yoga and shamanism. What I would suggest for future research in this area is to start first with the historical connection, attempting to map out--genealogically or otherwise--the ways in which the Gnostic tradition may have interfaced with early Indian culture and vice versa. Although the exact link may be impossible to make, we can at least have some clear outline on when, where, and how the religious transfusion took place.

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Notes

1. It would be of special interest, I believe, to examine Manichaeism and Islamic esoteric traditions, which may have had a direct influence on the Sant tradition.

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About the Author

Andrea Diem is a Professor of Philosophy at Mt. San Antonio College. She received her Ph.D. and M.A. in Religious Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she studied under Professor Ninian Smart. Dr. Diem received her B.A. from the University of California, San Diego, in Psychology where she served as a Research Assistant to Professor Ramachandran on visual perception and brain function.

Professor Diem is the author of several books, including *The Gnostic Mystery* and *When Scholars Study the Sacred*. Dr. Diem is married to Dr. David Lane, with whom she has two sons, Shaun-Michael and Kelly-Joseph. Professor Diem is an avid surfer and is currently working on a new book entitled, *Plato's DNA: A Brief Introduction to Evolutionary Philosophy*.