CHAPTER TWO

PREDISPOSITIONS TO MOVEMENT INVOLVEMENT

5. A QUESTIONING OF TRADITIONAL MORAL VALUES

New religious movements are deviant by definition. To the extent that they postulate the potential operation of spiritual forces which are beyond, or operate through the material world, they give a religious account of existence and as such have claim to spiritual status. The belief system is a source of appeal, and yet for some, a feature of these groups which renders them less than palatable. The nature of the explanatory premises, particularly of Eastern monistic groups is not acceptable to everyone. The study of NRMs has forced researchers to undertake a reanalysis of the breadth of spiritual conceptions and endeavour. In addition, aspects of lifestyle, and worship practices of these groups challenge convention. For some people they may be seen as a threat to cherished values, to the nuclear family, to orthodox religion. It is perhaps only those who have already found reason to challenge features of a traditional way of life who would be drawn to NRMs in the first place.

There is evidence to suggest that there has been a general movement away from orthodox religious institutions (Needleman, 1975). Perhaps the movement has also been away from orthodox western belief systems. Stark and Glock (1970)'s data
concerning followers of the Christian Church certainly found that there was a reduced level of assent to certain beliefs and that this reduced level of assent was related to a corresponding decrease in ritual involvement in the church. They note:

> These data strongly testify that the institutional church, predicated as it is on traditional theological concepts, tends to lose its meaning and its ability to move men as these concepts become outmoded (p.217).

They note that a feature of the new theology is an emphasis "not on how one prepares for the next life - the reality of which the new theology does not seem to deny - but what one does to realize the kingdom of God on earth" (p.217). Needleman (1975) noted this disaffection with spiritual orthodoxy in the West, which he saw as a failure of traditional Christian beliefs to meet modern needs.

It seems from the literature that the present spiritual climate in the West is characterised by twin themes of a movement away from traditional western religious beliefs and a more individual and present-oriented spirituality, one more akin to emphases of traditional eastern religions. If these features of the new theology are permeating traditional Western theology, it is likely that those drawn to NRM's will be even more innovative with regard to spiritual practice and belief, and less traditional in this regard. Judah (1974, cited in Foss and Larkin, 1979) suggested that NRM's recruited those who still adhered to the values of the counter-culture of the 1960's in America, who endorsed spontaneity rather than control, an existential 'here and now' orientation rather than a postponement for the future, and promoted a positive valuation of non-possessive sexuality. Broadly speaking, these movements recruited those people whose beliefs were already at odds with conventional aspirations and
values. Given that NRMs have been portrayed as ‘encapsulated critiques of
convention’ (Beckford, 1979) and are often unorthodox in so far as they have
communal living arrangements, a pooling of labour and resources, and certain of them
have members labour without receiving individual monetary reward, they may be
expected to attract people who are less traditional than the general community. This
would be especially true of NRMs of an Eastern orientation rather than charismatic
offshoots of Western religions like Pentecostalism, where the doctrinal innovation
responsible for their new religious status leave foundational values (of respect for one’s
parents, and the integrity of the nuclear family) consonant with those of the wider
community. It is possible that they may be even more traditional than the general
population in these regards.

A good empirical index of the level of an individual’s traditionalism is provided by
Tellegen’s (1982) Traditionalism subscale of the Multidimensional Personality
Questionnaire [MPQ] which assesses the degree to which an individual endorses high
moral standards, supports traditional religious values and institutions, condemns selfish
disregard of others, deplores permissiveness, endorses strict child-rearing practices and
values propriety and a good reputation. A low scorer on the other hand, does not
belabour the importance of high morals, considers traditional religion outdated,
questions established authority, sees merit in selfishness, values rebelliousness and
freedom of expression, does not believe in punitive discipline and is not very prudish.

Given that less traditional people are in some sense marginal, in that they have points
of difference with the dominant culture, it is possible that they do not have the same
sense of belonging, of social integration and a sense of community, especially if their points of difference have not become a rallying point for group social activity. They may be less adequately socially contextualised, and have less access to people who sustain their sense of identity.

6. LONELINESS AND ALIENATION

For Zygmunt (1972), the readiness to be recruited is captured by the phrase "a general condition of alienation". This is supported by Downton's (1980) assessment of the members or premies of the Divine Light Mission who claimed that they felt, prior to NRM contact, a sense of alienation from others and society, a feeling of personal inadequacy and a sense of aimlessness and meaninglessness.

Alienation and anomie are generally associated with sociocultural disintegration and an attenuation of community relationships. On this societal level of analysis the breakdown of traditional structures and institutions has been linked with the emergence of cults, (Wallis, 1979; Glock and Stark, 1965; Stark and Bainbridge, 1981). The link between a sociological level of analysis and a psychological level is nicely captured by Henderson et al. (1981) who note that these "attributes of society in general" may address "the resources an individual has in his[her] personal network or primary group" (p.7). Seeman (1959) notes that isolation is an important feature of the general condition of alienation and is careful to note that this is not merely physical isolation. He takes individual preferences for solitude into account by defining isolation which is indicative of alienation in expectancy or reward terms as "what remains when sheer sociability is removed". This encompasses the unquestionable
individual differences, and differences over time, as to how objective social isolation is viewed.

6.1 Social Bonds: Their Importance and the Consequences of Their Absence.

Whether social bonds act as a buffer to stress or contribute independently and directly to well-being (effects which Thoits (1982) notes are confounded in the literature) they have been implicated in the maintenance of a sense of personal identity (Greil, 1977; Duck and Lea, 1983) and mental health (Henderson et al, 1981). The loss of social support has many ramifications, adumbrated above, (Greil, 1977; McHugh, 1972; Schein, 1957).

6.2 Support Systems as Mediators of Stress

A support system is not necessarily co-extensive with a social network. "Support comes when people’s engagement with one another extends to a level of involvement and concern." (Perlman and Peplau, 1981:340). That is, it is a characteristic of a quality of the relations one is able to find within a network. This goes some way towards an adequate operational definition of support, but not far enough. As Thoits (1982:146) notes, "...most investigators have not attempted to formulate a precise conceptual definition of social support, and few have attempted to develop valid or reliable indicators of the concept." Several researchers have noted that support is a multi-dimensional concept, constituted by such dimensions as the amount, types (socio-emotional and instrumental), sources (kin or colleagues etc.), and structure of
social support networks which are all important. It is important to attempt to systematically identify specific distress-relieving aspects of an individual’s support system. Thoits (1982) notes that some of measures used by contemporary researchers may be interpreted as measures of life strains rather than as types and/or sources of social support. She notes: "The conditions under which effective aid is obtained have yet to be determined" (p.147). A definition of social support is put forward by Kaplan et al., (1977), in Thoits, 1982:147), who suggest it entails: "the degree to which a person’s basic social needs are gratified through interaction with others". They define basic social needs as including: "affection, esteem or approval, belonging, identity and security. These needs may be met by either the provision of socioemotional aid (such as affection, sympathy, and understanding, acceptance and esteem from significant others) or the provision of instrumental aid (such as advice, information, help with family work or responsibilities, financial aid)", (in Thoits, 1982:147). The social support system [SSS] is defined by Thoits (1982) as: "That subset of persons in the individual’s total social network, upon whom he or she relies for socioemotional aid, instrumental aid or both. Note that this definition does not require that supportive relations be reciprocal or symmetric." So, to demarcate a person’s SSS one can operationalize a variety of dimensions:

1. The structural properties of the SSS:

   size, density, accessibility, kinship reliance, frequency of contact, stability etc. This dimension will be assessed only in terms of the availability of social support within the present study.
2. The *functional* properties:

the perceived amount and adequacy of socio-emotional and instrumental aid received from support system members. This dimension is referred to as the adequacy measures within the present study.

6.3 Social Support: A Buffering or a Direct Effect on Stress?

Several investigators have hypothesized that an individual's SSS may moderate or buffer the effects of life events on his or her psychological state. (Thoits, 1982, cites the following: Antonovsky, 1974, 1979; Caplan, 1974; Cassel, 1976; Cobb, 1976; Henderson *et al.*, 1978; Kaplan *et al.*, 1977; Liem & Liem, 1978). This has been termed the "buffering hypothesis" by Thoits (1982). It suggests that individuals with a strong SSS should be better able to cope with major life changes than those with little or no social support. "This hypothesis entails an interaction effect: the occurrence of events in the presence of social support should produce less distress than should the occurrence of events in the absence of social support", (Thoits, 1982:145). However the evidence for the buffering hypothesis has been called into question by the detection of a theoretical and methodological confounding of life events and social support measures. The direct effect of life events on support and the interactive (buffering) effect of life events with support may be seriously confounded.

While life events are defined as experiences that cause an individual to substantially readjust her or his behaviour patterns, (as mentioned above), an examination of life event scales reveals that many important events are interpreted as losses or gains of
supportive relationships e.g. the death of a spouse, divorce or a shift in residence. Further, not only may life events themselves be conceptually and operationally identical with changes in the SSS but they may produce changes in the SSS, e.g. a divorce (which tests the loyalties of friends), promotion, or hospitalization.

In summary, life events can be direct indicators of changes in social support, can cause additional changes in social support, or can have both of these effects. This confounding of variables has profound implications for research on the buffering role of social support. This is especially the case for studies that measure social support after life changes have occurred. The individual’s current support level is likely to be a product, at least in part, of prior life changes.

The systematic bias in the simultaneous classification of respondents by current support level and prior life change experience is revealed in the simple four-fold table drawn up by Thoits (1982).

**TABLE 1. Classification of Respondents by Current Support and Prior Life Change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIFE CHANGE</th>
<th>LOW SUPPORT</th>
<th>HIGH SUPPORT</th>
<th>ROW MEANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOW</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLUMN MEANS</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distress scores of respondents experiencing undesirable life changes and who (in part as a result) are currently unsupported, will be averaged into cell C. Distress scores of respondents who have experiences no stressful events or desirable changes,
and who as a result are currently supported will be averaged into cells B or D. As Thoits summarises:

the direct effects of prior events on support places respondents into cells of the table representing the interactive effects of events with support. (Thoits, 1982:149, original emphasis).

The substantial difference between cells C and D deemed indicative of a buffering effect may be due to this systematic misclassification of respondents.

6.4 Prior Estimation of Support

If support is assessed prior to examination of life events results may still be biased in favour of the buffer hypothesis, in that the presences of social support may reduce the likelihood of some events occurring, and Thoits (1982) presents some evidence to support this: (Bruhn et al, 1966; Langlie, 1977; Lin et al, 1979c, in Thoits, 1982:150).

As an example of this, an angry worker may receive advice from her friends so that a confrontation with the boss is averted preventing the worker’s loss of a job. An absence of social supports may increase the likelihood of such a negative event. If so, those initially lacking support will fall into cell C and those initially with it will fall into cells B and D. A direct effect, this time the preventative effect of support on the likelihood of an event’s occurrence will be confounded with the interactive or buffering effect. What is needed is detailed longitudinal data on an individual’s sources, types, and degrees of support obtained from their social support network. To remove the confounding effect of the influence of event occurrence on support availability, and the interactive effects of events with support, only data from those individuals whose support level did not change from time one to time two could be
analysed.

Thoits (1982) used the data from Myers et al., 1971, 1972, 1974 and found that

in the absence of confounding, and when support level was
measured before events had occurred, the buffering hypothesis
was unconfirmed (p.153).

Of primary interest is partialling out the direct causal, and the interactive influences of
life events and social support upon each other and upon distress. Thoits (1982)
provides such a model. She suggests that there are theoretical bases (Cooley, 1902;
Durkheim’s anomie theory) and a limited but suggestive empirical base to suggest that
social support does not merely moderate the impact of life events, but also (or
instead), has a direct main effect upon psychological well-being. Social support may
be an important etiological variable in its own right, (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Brown
et al, 1977; Henderson et al, 1978; Miller & Ingham, 1976; Morawakai, 1973; Roy,
1978; in Thoits, 1982). Within the present study it is not possible to identify so far in
advance those likely to contact NRMs such that is can be assessed whether social
supports have a buffering effect on stress, or main effect on wellbeing. The confound
is especially complex in this study as it is predicted that those drawn to NRMs will
not merely have experienced many recent life events, but that many of these events
will be concerned with social exits, that is, with the recent depletion of social
resources.

The research implications of such empirically confounded measurement procedures are
considerable. They are not swept aside by this study, but are adjacent to its main
concerns. Given the focus on the forces which have lead a person to a turning point
whereby it is suggested aversive life experiences endured with inadequate social support have in part lead to movement contact, there is a specific interest in the recent decline in social support networks as a life stressor. Thoits’ (1982, 1983) insightful analyses inform and support a suggestion made by Cohen (1988:22) regarding the importance of a qualitative analysis of the nature of the life events which have occurred, rather than mere indicators of the total incidence of life events, which (anyway) have a limited, though positive, relation to the experience of stress and the occurrence of symptomatology. An important concern in this study, is the loneliness of affiliates prior to movement contact.

6.5 Loneliness and Movement Contact

Snow et al (1980) and Lofland and Stark (1965) suggest an absence or ‘neutralisation’ of extra-movement attachments is conducive to movement participation. Exactly what is entailed in that absence bears closer attention. Perlman and Peplau (1981) define loneliness as "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person’s network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively" (p.31). Loneliness, then, is not synonymous with structural unavailability of social bonds. To assume it is would be to miscategorise ‘happy loners’ and those individuals who feel ‘lonely in a crowd’, (Henderson et al, 1981). Loneliness implies that social contacts are inadequate in some way; perhaps in level of intimacy and reliability of association, or due to an individual’s chronic or current level of need or because contacts in particular categories are lacking (e.g. there is no-one in whom one can frankly confide). It may be that those present fail to provide certain social ‘provisions’
(Weiss, 1973, cited in Henderson et al., 1981). The structural availability of social contacts does not address the psychological component of their adequacy.

Loneliness seems to be a feature of the life situations of those drawn to NRMs (Balch and Taylor, 1977; Barker, 1981; Catton, 1957; Downton, 1980; Galanter et al., 1979; Galanter, 1980; Lofland and Stark, 1965; Snow and Phillips, 1980). The appeal of NRMs may relate as much to the 'horizontal' relationships provided by a religious community as to the 'vertical' relation to the 'divine'. Loneliness may mean one can be influenced by a new acquaintance who endorses beliefs moderately discrepant from one's own, and may mean one changes one's own beliefs rather than risk rejection. This may influence differential recruitment, and, in part account for the fact that not everyone with existing movement contacts gets involved, and not everyone approached by a group member participates further. The quality of existing social bonds relative to those offered by a movement seems to determine continued involvement. Galanter (1980) found that those electing to stay on after a weekend workshop rated bonds outside the NRM as less adequate than those available within the workshop. The reverse was true for those electing to leave. Residential workshops require complete, thought temporary departure from existing social relations, and may not even be undertaken by those with a full social calendar. While Barker (1981) does not address the psychological significance of isolation for the affiliates contacted in her three nation comparative study of the Unification Church, isolation emerged as a significant feature of their pre-contact experience. Specifically she notes a decline in access to social networks and an absence of a close relationship. She notes that:
While most in the control group who were not living with their parents were living either with their spouses or a group of friends of the same sex, those in the British UC group were most frequently living alone. (p.84)

Prior to joining, those contacting the group were more likely to live alone, compared with the general population (and for this to have been a recent change) and were more likely to have no enduring relationship (many with no expectations of ever achieving one). Those contacting the group (at a workshop) tended to be single, with only a quarter enjoying a satisfactory non-marital relationship, 7% having just ended one, and 39% saying they had no prospects of developing such a relationship. This accounted for 78% of the workshop group who went on to join as full-time members. While the majority of NRM respondents surveyed had acknowledged that prior to joining they had spent time with a few close friends rather than large groups, "those in both the UC and the workshop groups were quite likely to have changed from having a few close friends to spending time by themselves in the period immediately before meeting the UC" (p.85, original emphasis). Only 4% of the control group compared to 28% of the workshop group and 37% of the British UC (33% of the total UC response) spent their leisure time alone during the six months before contact. Barker's survey data suggest that in addition to isolation, many held enduring pessimistic beliefs about the likelihood of close, satisfying social contacts.

It seems clear that those drawn to NRM involvement have not only experienced an untypically high level of stress in the recent past, but have done so in a state of relative loneliness. The loneliness is compounded in some cases by pessimistic extrapolations to the future of the likelihood of ever having emotionally satisfying
human involvements. This is a frustrating, saddening, and vulnerable condition, but it is not self-evident why this would lead to spiritual involvement rather than any other remedial social course of action.

A number of studies allude to an absence of supportive networks in the pre-recruitment phase for those who subsequently make contact with NRMs (Galanter, 1980; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen, 1980; Balch & Taylor, 1977; Catton, 1957; Downton, 1980; Barker, 1981). Barker’s (1981) study is interesting from a *rite de passage* point of view, in that it suggests that this ‘absence’ is a recent change in life circumstances. Greil (1977:119) notes that such an absence may discredit a person’s problem-solving perspective when "significant others upon whom the individual depended for maintenance of his perspective become unavailable". The effect of a decline in social and personal coping resources may mean that problems which were previously shared and expediently resolved may now endure and be felt more acutely when they are faced alone. Less effective problem-solving may be a function of an increase in problematic life events prior to movement encounter. This is the sort of ordinary-life disruption which may be the beginning of a *rite de passage* of personal change.

**7. A SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF LIFE EVENTS AS COGNITIVE COPING STYLE**

The role of social supports as mediators of stress, or as independent contributors to a person’s wellbeing and mental health, are likely to influence how stressful life events are experienced. There are other possible mediator variables which may account for
the lower distress levels experienced by some individuals who may have a similar frequency of life events to others but who are nonetheless not so afflicted. These variables include personality characteristics, constitutional predisposition, health practices and coping techniques. Personality dispositions have both cognitive and behavioural components. Kobasa et al. (1982) point out that at the level of cognitive appraisal:

personality dispositions constitute bases for experiencing stimuli in a particular fashion and as having a particular meaning. (p169)

They suggest that at the 'action level' personality dispositions "energize a particular set of activities" believed to be appropriate. Lazarus (1966) subsumes cognitive appraisal and related actions under his term 'coping'. He details the features and phases of the process of coping, focussing on the nature of the event which instigates the coping process. Kobasa et al. (1982) emphasize the influence of personality dispositions on coping processes as a mechanism whereby 'personality' has a buffering effect on the impact of stressful events. They suggest that personality dispositions which mitigate the effects of stressful life events are those which render events more meaningful, less overwhelming, less undesirable and more amenable to active control or transformation, rather than as events to be avoided. Such dispositions are valuable in avoiding illness-provoking biological states such as adaptational exhaustion (cf. Seyle, 1956 in Kobasa et al., 1982) or depressed immunological surveillance (cf. Schwartz, 1975, in Kobasa et al., 1982). Rendering suffering and disruptive life events more meaningful and even as a positive sign of change is one of the functions which this account of NRM's suggests is provided by the movement ideology, and in
charismatic groups, by the leader(s) timely interpretation of it.

Integrating various theoretical and empirical discoveries leads Kobasa (1979) to propose that: "hardiness is a constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resistance resource in the encounter with stressful life events." (in Kobasa et al, 1982:169). Hardy persons, Kobasa et al, (1981) suggest, have curiosity and tend to find their experiences interesting and meaningful. Further, they believe they can be influential through what they imagine, do and say. They expect change to be the norm and regard it as an important stimulus to development. So they make optimistic appraisals, and perceive changes as natural meaningful and interesting in spite of their stressfulness, (pp. 368-369). For such people, actions are taken to find out more about the changes, to incorporate them into an ongoing life plan and to learn from their occurrence whatever may be valuable for the future. It is in this way Kobasa et al., (1981) suggest "hardy persons transform stressful events into less stressful forms." (p. 369) The features making up the ‘hardiness’ constellation are:

• Commitment

• Control

• Challenge

These have immediate intuitive appeal, but present difficulties for operationalisation for empirical research. They define commitment as consisting in: "the tendency to involve oneself in, (rather than experience alienation from) whatever one is doing" (Kobasa et al., 1982:169). Commitment allows people to have a generalized sense of
purpose "which allows them to identify with and find meaningful the events and persons in their environment." In short, their relationship to themselves and to their environment is characterized by "activity and approach rather than passivity and avoidance."

Control, (as contrasted with powerlessness), entails the belief in one's ability to influence the course of events, (Averill, 1973; Phares, 1976; Seligman, 1975, in Kobasa et al, 1982). This is not a naive expectation of one's having complete determination of events, but of oneself as having definite influence through the exercise of imagination, knowledge and skill. Events, for such a person, would be experienced as the outcome of one's decisions and actions, and not as unexpected or overwhelming.

Challenge (as opposed to threat), entails "the expectation that it is normal for life to change, and for development to be stimulated thereby." (Berlyne, 1964; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Maddi et al, 1965 in Kobasa et al, 1982). Changes are seen as incentives to growth rather than as threats to security. So challenge affects the appraisal of events and also is suggested as leading to attempts to "transform oneself" and grow rather than conserve and protect a former lifestyle.

Kobasa et al., (1979) suggest that as challenge fosters openness and flexibility it should allow "the integration and effective appraisal of even exceedingly incongruent events", (in Kobasa et al., 1982:170). They found that executives high in stressful events but low in illness showed greater commitment, control and challenge than executives in
whom similar life event frequency was associated with illness.

However, a number of studies in this area are retrospective studies:

1. The Kobasa study (1979).

2. Johnson and Sarason, (1978) which showed a relationship between having an internal locus of control and a lower correlation between stressful life events and illness.

3. Smith, Johnson and Sarason, (1978) showed the effectiveness of challenge in that; "Only subjects low in sensation-seeking showed a significant relationship between negative life change and discomfort".

The retrospective nature of these studies means that the personality data could be a result of illness and stress, rather than explanatory causal variables. Kobasa et al., (1982) in a prospective study, controlling for prior illness level, showed that a tendency toward commitment, control and challenge functions prospectively as a resistance effect and that this is especially so when stressful life events mount.

7.1 Differential Appeal - Why New Religious Movements?

Our region is so full of ever-present divinities that it is easier to find a god than a man. *Quartilla, in Petronius’ Satyricon*

As mentioned above, Greil (1972:708) suggests that disruption produces "a fission of values making new fusions possible, not inevitable". Given that stress and disruption may lead a person to seek explanation and/or consolation from any of a number of
sources what influences the nature of the solution adopted must be addressed, i.e. what determines differential involvement in one social option rather than another. It is suggested that it is a person’s beliefs which determine which type of solution appeals from the vast array of ideologies present in his or her "opportunity structure" (Richardson and Stewart, 1977) provided by media and social network avenues. Disruption, then, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for change.

One aspect of problem-solving perspectives that is likely to influence how much they appeal to someone, is whether they address problems and doubts that the person is currently, or perennially experiencing, and, how well they do it. Zygmunt (1972) suggests that one source of the appeal of an ideology is its relative ‘plausibility’. Plausibility may concern the manner of portrayal of a belief system, the emotional welcomingness of its message, or the extent to which it extends basic beliefs already deemed possibly true by an individual. Just how much cognitive change is required for conversion to occur is a moot point. Researchers differ with regard to the elements they specify as changing at conversion, e.g. beliefs, values, universes of discourse, interpretive schemata (as Snow and Machalek (1984) in a thorough review of conceptions of conversion note). It is the fact that change occurs in elements central to a person’s belief system that makes it conversion, and that those new or previously peripheral elements are of a spiritual nature that makes it a religious conversion. William James also portrays conversion as the moment when "religious ideas, previously peripheral in [his] consciousness now take central place and...religious aims form the centre of...energy" (1960:20). So, in these terms, when a person acculturated
into a religion of a western theistic orientation affiliates with one of the many religions of an eastern orientation, it is an example of conversion. What leads to such a change in belief structure has been addressed from a number of perspectives.

7.2 The Role of an Individual’s Worldview: Conversion or Adhesion

Conversion is a generic name for change, ‘a drastic alteration of a former state’ (Salzman, 1966:10). In an editorial comment to a collection of papers on the subject, J.T. Richardson (1977) noted the lack of "a thorough conceptual analysis of the terms conversion and commitment" (p.802). This brief outline is merely to explore whether, by suggesting that an affiliate already endorses basic religious tenets as true prior to involvement with a specific movement, this study has radically altered the accepted meaning of conversion.

The conceptual issues implicit in conversion are:

- How rapid and extensive must a change be before it can be called conversion?
- What changes at conversion?
- Does conversion necessarily entail the acquisition of new beliefs?
- Does conversion necessarily entail renouncing former beliefs?

7.3 The Suddenness of Conversion

A sudden conversion agrees well with classical examples like St. Augustine, St. Theresa of Avila, and Paul of Tarsus. The notion of a ‘crisis’ at conversion is frequently emphasized (James, 1960; Salzman, 1954, 1966; Sargant, 1957). However,
as a defining criterion, the abruptness of conversion is fraught with difficulties. As Salzman (1954) notes:

Most change, possibly all, is gradual in its development, but since it culminates in a specific moment of alteration or conversion, it may seem to the observer to be an instantaneous, unexplained, mysterious event. (p.63)

An important distinction may be made between conversion as process and conversion as outcome. The conversion ‘process’ has been broken down into recruitment, commitment and conversion phases, though at what phase of NRM contact cognitive and emotional change characteristic of ‘outcome conversion’ occurs cannot be assumed. Snow and Machalek (1983) note that conversion cannot be equated with membership, nor even with ritual joining (where such ceremony exists). One must look elsewhere for the defining features of ‘outcome conversion’. Outcome conversion concerns a change in beliefs and values which may be expressed in different actions and affiliative patterns. Its nature underscores the importance of taking individual beliefs, and their consonance with the NRM into account.

7.4 What Changes at Conversion?

Snow and Machalek (1984) note that the literature provides quite an array of elements considered as those which change at conversion. Adding some of the recently discussed papers to their list results in the following array: ‘identities’ and ‘basic perspectives’ (Travisano, 1970; Richardson and Stewart, 1977), the ‘habitual centre of energy’ (James, 1960), central values (Lang & Lang, 1961), values, beliefs and attitudes (Turner & Killian, 1972). To this can be added ‘behaviour patterns’ (Shibutani, 1961:523) ‘life’ (Gordon, 1974) one’s paradigm (Jones, 1978) ‘one’s
ultimate sense of grounding' or 'root reality' (Heirich, 1977, pp. 553, 674-676) one's
'universe of discourse' (Berger, 1963; Travisano, 1970; Snow and Machalek, 1983)
or one's 'informing aspect of consciousness' (Snow & Phillips, 1980).

Travisano (1970) uses 'identity' not as a substitute for 'self' but in symbolic
interactionist terms as a product of participation or membership in social relations". 'Identity' in this sense, along with 'patterns of behaviour' may well change at
conversion, but may equally change with any membership of a new group, not
necessarily equatable with conversion (Greil, 1977; Snow and Machalek, 1983). These
changes may facilitate or derive from conversion but they are too global to be indices
of it. Goffman (1959) describes how, one frequently dramaturgically changes 'roles',
changes which do not capture the deep commitment associated with conversion.

It is by now a catch phrase in psychology that behavioural compliance is not
synonymous with private acceptance. Jones' (1978) suggestion that conversion "is not
simply (or even need be at all) some specific 'internal' experience, but a
reorganization of the 'world' in a transformative manner", is the basis by which he
hopes to distinguish conversion from mere compliance. However, in contrast to Jones'
assertion, it is suggested that conversion (at least) involves cognitive change, and is
therefore necessarily at least in part an 'internal' experience. Jones (1978) refers to
conversion as the transformation of the 'world' of shared meanings, but, for such
meanings to be inter-subjectively shared, they must exist intrasubjectively as values,
attitudes and beliefs. And if such cognitions change, then such change has
repercussions for the experience of the subject, and as such in anchored by individual
epistemology.

Snow and Machalek (1983) outline four descriptive indices of a more central change at conversion, which they view, in keeping with Meads' terminology, as a change in one's 'universe of discourse'. Mead's (1934) definition of a universe of discourse not only includes the idea of a system of shared meanings, but also the notion of its being a "broad interpretive framework" (pp. 88-89). So if conversion consists in such a change, exactly what this entails must be assessed. There are (at least) two ways in which a system of framework of beliefs, values and attitudes may change;

- A change in the constituent elements

- A restructuring of pre-existing elements such that there is a change in those holding central position.

In psychology, the centrality of belief is a widely used spatial metaphor for beliefs which (like the beliefs Rokeach terms 'primitive' beliefs) if changed would have wide repercussions for the rest of the belief system. Central beliefs, as operationally defined for research purposes, are those which are held with greater intensity (as assessed by a higher numerical score). This does not capture the degree of logical entailment, or constraint which seems to exist between these beliefs and more peripheral beliefs. Such central beliefs are those which are held with greater intensity than peripheral beliefs, and, if changed, would have widespread repercussions for the rest of the belief system. These central elements are seen as important to the nature of the belief system, in much the same way as are the 'superordinate value' or 'posture' which Converse (1964) in his analysis of belief systems, suggested organized more specific
attitudes and beliefs.

It is a change in the central elements of a belief system which constitutes conversion. A religious conversion is where the central elements come to include beliefs related to the operation of sacred forces, attitudes as to the importance of ascendant masters or emissary prophets, and values relating to the desirability of 'enlightenment' or some related 'vision of man' (Wach, 1958). This is how the present author distinguishes conversion from more minor changes. In attempting to make this distinction Turner and Killian (1972:338) suggest that conversion, as opposed to more minor changes is a kind of reversal, while Lang and Lang (1961:153) specify a "complete turnabout in central values". Snow and Phillips (1980) suggest that "conversion involves the adoption and use of a new or formerly peripheral universe of discourse" (p.431) and that it "effects a significant change in problem-solving perspective" (p.436). The literature supports the contention that the sine qua non of conversion is that it entails a change in the central elements of a person's belief system, a definition which resolves the seemingly conflicting specifications as to the extent of the change involved. Travisano (1970) suggests "that complete disruption signals conversion, while anything less signals alternation (sic)" (p.598). He seemingly excludes conversion as outlined by James (1960) where "religious ideas, previously peripheral in [his] consciousness now take central place and ... religious aims form the centre of ... energy".

In short it is the change in central elements which makes a change conversion, and the content of those elements which makes it a religious conversion. The suddenness of conversion, its direction (be it spiritually regenerative as James (1902) emphasised or a
'reverse conversion' as Freud (1927) documented) and the behavioural changes attendant on conversion are descriptive adjuncts to the conceptual core.

The concept of conversion has relevance to the *rite de passage* model addressed in this study, in that it is suggested that the likelihood of an individual's recruitment and conversion is powerfully influenced by the degree of consonance between beliefs endorsed at point of first contact with a group, and the orientation of the group's belief system. Despite the unconventional nature of some beliefs central to NRM belief systems, they are not necessarily dissonant beliefs for a person making contact with the movement, as Balch and Taylor (1977) have established. Lofland and Stark (1965) were expecting too much in presuming the existence of a fully structured religious Problem Solving Perspective in pre-converts. While it is unlikely that a preconvert would have a detailed overlap in specific details of a NRM's belief system, and knowledge of and competence in their explanatory application, some consonance of orientation is likely to exist. New affiliates are likely to have a history of religious involvement (some specifically in modern NRMs) to endorse generally religious postulates, but reject specific orthodox faiths. This consonance of orientation is likely to be an influential feature of differential openness to recruitment, if the 'relative meaningfulness of the diagnosis' is a feature of NRM appeal as Zygmunt (1972) suggests.

As I have attempted to show, a person may experience conversion even if no new elements are added to his/her belief system. What is viewed as conversion in our culture, may be more akin to Nock's (1933) conception of the *adhesion* which was
characteristic of religious involvement in pre-Christian times, that is the syncretistic addition of new beliefs and involvements to an already engage' religious life. For example, in becoming an adherent of an eastern NRM, one may acquire new applications of beliefs which were already endorsed, visibly new affiliative patterns, garb or name, while retaining certain beliefs from the religion into which one was born. Whether former beliefs are retained with equivalent intensity to the beliefs consonant with new affiliative patterns, is an empirical question.

7.5 Religious Problem-Solving Perspective or Spiritual Orientation?

Lofland and Stark (1965) establish the concept of a religious Problem Solving Perspective [PSP] which they contrast with more secular political or psychiatric perspectives. A perspective is seen as having its own 'rhetoric' and as serving to delineate the origin of a problem and the type of solution possible. Richardson and Stewart (1977) suggest that Lofland and Stark posited too few perspectives which were not adequately developed conceptually. They derived two additional perspectives: the physiological and the 'muddle through' or conventional perspective from Lofland & Stark's initial formulation. It is the existence of competing explanatory perspectives which suggested to Lofland and Stark why so few take the 'deviant route' of NRM affiliation to resolve enduring life problems and concerns (1977:86).

Lofland and Stark (1965) suggest that their subjects endorsed basic religious tenets, but present insufficient evidence to suggest that they were already au fait with their explanatory application. The subjects' pre-existing religious orientation perhaps
delimited the range of perspectives to which an individual was likely to convert.

7.6 Problem-Solving Perspectives: The Linking of Belief Elements, and their Explanatory Application

There are a number of points of criticism which suggest possible modifications of Lofland & Stark's model. Since they assume that a person already has a religious PSP it is hard to see what conversion might consist in. Unlike classic accounts of conversion which include the case of an individual for whom religious beliefs were previously peripheral to his/her life, who now has them as central to belief and action, Lofland & Stark (1965) assume an individual has no need of instruction as to how general religious beliefs can be brought to bear as a specific PSP with everyday relevance. They exclude from consideration what this study suggests is perhaps the most frequent instance of conversion, where an individual who endorses basic religious tenets is 'converted' whereby those tenets become central to his/her belief system and take on the explanatory and consolatory function of a PSP. Neither do they detail the nature of the concept 'perspective' to which they frequently refer. Greil (1977:115) uses 'perspective' to denote "that facet of an individual's worldview that can be brought to bear on any aspect of the social world that is of topical concern to the individual." It seems evident that a perspective entails some structuring of the content elements. The explanatory generality of the NRM belief systems derive from a limited number of general postulates, so the belief systems can be said to have economy. Converse (1964) defines economy of belief systems as; "the degree to which there are adequate overarching dimensions on which large arrays of events may
be simply understood" which "is a critical part of synthetic description" (p.214).

However, studies regarding the nature of NRM belief systems suggest that they are robust to refutation due to their lack of interrelatedness. Snow and Machalek (1983: 20) suggest that along with a "lack of empirical relevance", one of the features which "protects the overall integrity of the system" of belief of the Nichiren Shoshu of America [NSA] is "the lack of internal relatedness of the belief elements". Converse (1964) would term this a lack of logical 'constraint'. He suggests that some degree of such functional interdependence is required for a configuration of ideas or attitudes to be termed a belief system. He notes that in a static case, constraint involves the success one would have in predicting from initial knowledge that an individual holds a given attitude or belief that s/he holds certain further ideas and attitudes. In the dynamic case it refers to "the probability that a change in the perceived status (truth, desirability, and so forth) of one idea-element would psychologically require...some compensating change(s) in the status of idea elements elsewhere in the configuration." (p.208) He notes that such constraint need not be logical, but may be psychological, and due to the conviction inspired by the personality of the originator of the beliefs, and cites as examples of this, systems of thought such as Marxism and the belief configurations of the Shakers. An emphasis on logical constraint may be the reason why Snow and Machalek (1983a) suggest there is no interrelatedness of the belief items in the NSA. Converse (1964) remarks on the absence of any strict logical constraints, suggesting that:

What is important is that the elites familiar with the total shapes of these beliefs have experienced them as logically
The 'glue to bind together' many more specific attitudes and beliefs, he suggests, may take the form of a 'quasi-logical argument' on the basis of "some superordinate value or posture toward man and society, involving premises about the nature of social justice, social change, 'natural law'..." which are of prime centrality to the belief system as a whole. So the 'lack of relatedness' apparent to the researchers does not necessarily hold true for the converts. It does imply however, that even if a person endorses basic tenets of a belief system, s/he will not necessarily understand their relation to each other, nor immediately comprehend their descriptive scope and explanatory relevance.

The significance of this for the model under consideration is, that by suggesting that pre-converts already endorse religious postulates, it is likely that some demonstration of their potential application to everyday life is still required for total conversion. It is suggested that Lofland and Stark (1965) are expecting too much of their pre-converts. All that might be expected as a predisposing feature of NRM involvement is a general consonance of orientation of beliefs. Understanding the specific details of the NRM’s explanatory heuristics is likely to result from sustained contact and conversion.

There are theoretical and empirical reasons to suggest a number of modifications of Lofland and Stark’s (1965) model, regarding the predisposing features it specifies. They make much use of the concept of a PSP but do not define it. They suggest a PSP congruent with the movement approached exists for an individual prior to movement involvement, but establish only that subjects had a broadly consonant
cognitive orientation, endorsing central religious notions. They merely specify the existence of enduring and acutely-felt tensions, without providing data, and do not explore why they might endure (e.g. an absence of a primary supportive network, relevant personality features). The notion of a seeker is problematic in that the relevance of the self-reflexive awareness of one’s status as seeker is not apparent.

7.7 Seekership: More Than a Consonant Worldview?

Lofland and Stark define seekership as:

a floundering among religious alternatives, an openness to a variety of religious views, frequently esoteric, combined with a failure to embrace the specific ideology and fellowship of some set of believers. (p.870)

As such, they suggest it provides the "minimal points of ideological congruence to make these people available for [UC] conversion" (p.870). The definition of a person as a religious seeker as "a person searching for some explanatory system of meaning to interpret and resolve his[her] discontent" (p.868) does not necessarily entail such 'active agent' strategies as those outlined by Straus (1976, 1979) in order to effect contact with religious groups. The theoretical and empirical relevance of Lofland and Stark's suggestion that for conversion a person must "come to define himself as a religious seeker " is elusive. It is unlikely that one must be self-reflexive about one’s status for it to be a precipitant of NRM contact. Indeed the avowal of seekership seems to relate to "the extent to which the seekership rôle is socially sanctioned; encouraged or discouraged" (Barker, 1981:87). Barker suggests that seekership and "the public discussion of questions of ultimate concern" was only de rigeur in California. "Someone asking for directions in Fisherman’s Wharf is more likely to be
seeking the way to Nirvana than to Union Square” (p.87). In support of the notion that local norms might influence how conspicuous seekership is sanctioned, Hardin and Kehrer (1978) note that active seekership is not prominent in Germany. So Straus’ work may be somewhat culturally specific. The major indices of seekership outlined by Lofland and Stark (1965) and Lofland (1966) include:

- Experimentation with religious alternatives, i.e. past affiliations or contact.
- Interest in literature concerning the ‘strange, the mystical, the spiritual’ (Lofland, 1966:45)

These indices reveal the importance of behavioural and cognitive components of a definition of seekership: past involvement in NRM’s and current openness to the worldview of the movements.

The strengths of Lofland and Stark’s model appear to lie in the way it captures the importance of disruption preceding movement contact, and the directing function of a consonant cognitive orientation in promoting movement contact. It thus addresses the motivational/arousal and directional/belief issues inherent in explanation of differential openness to movement involvement.

If it can be asserted that religious beliefs may at times function as a religious PSP, some account must be given of what distinguishes new religious belief systems, how they differ from secular explanatory perspectives, and from orthodox religious accounts. After a brief consideration of the defining features of religion viewed from psychological accounts, an exegesis will be attempted to show how new religious

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belief systems differ in their form, application, and appeal.

8. DEFINING A SPIRITUAL WORLDVIEW

...it is normal to prefer divination to indecision
Robin Lane Fox (1986)

8.1 The Sine Qua Non of a Spiritual Worldview

William James (1960) defined religion as:

The feelings, acts and experiences of individual [wo]men in their solitude, as far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider divine". (p.50)

In noting at the turn of the century that "there are systems of thought which the world calls religious, and yet do not positively assume a God" (p.50), James (1960) anticipated a difficulty in evidence in modern psychological research, that of taking 'divine' to refer uniquely to the personalised god of Western orthodox faiths. By taking religion to be synonymous with western theistic tradition, research neglects those not endorsing "the manifest church" (Dittes, 1969) or as Clayton and Gladden refer to it, religion with a capital R" (cited in Caird and Law, 1983:153). Religion defined in this way excludes from consideration many "spiritually intense but institutionally alienated" people (Catton, 1957) and people endorsing beliefs eastern in orientation may erroneously be categorised as "religious nones" (Vernon, 1968). As Dittes (1969) notes, being religious may refer to assent to publicly formalised doctrines or...may refer to more generalized, diffused expectations or set as to whether the fundamental environment is basically hostile or benign.
While religion may entail assenting to certain beliefs and attitudes, and may centre on activities elucidating, as Kishimoto (1961) suggests, "the ultimate meaning of life and...the ultimate solution of its problems", it is not merely a system of beliefs and attitudes. The devotion and love which characterise the believer's relation to the divine (Pruyser, 1977) has its equivalent on the horizontal plane in the community of believers. For some, this community may be more important than the belief system. However, gregariousness characterizes a number of communal activities centred on shared beliefs. A religious community shares a worldview and what differentiates a religious belief system from all others is (in part) the nature of the causal forces believed to be operative.

While the social sciences study religion as though God had nothing to do with it, and 'his' existence would doubtless only contribute to the error variance, the belief in sacred forces being potentially or actually operative in one's life is the *sine qua non* of a religious world view (Levin & Zegans, 1974; Anthony *et al.*, 1979; Balch & Taylor, 1977; Richardson & Stewart, 1977; Stark & Bainbridge, 1979, 1980a; Lofland & Skonovd, 1981; Stark, 1981).

Before detailing the differences between religious and non-religious worldviews and among belief systems differently religious from each other, the extent and nature of the change a person's belief system must undergo during conversion will be critically examined. The has implications for the nature and detail of cognitive predispositions to movement involvement which might distinguish joiners from non-joiners. It is suggested that many people might endorse, as possibly true, basic tenets of religious
belief systems. However, a greater intensity of belief is expected in those approaching NRM, and additionally, it is expected that such people will also have beliefs consonant with the orientation of the movement they approach.

8.2 Believers, Unbelievers: What’s the Difference?

the statues of the gods seemed to whisper philosophy  
Robin Lane Fox (1986)

Despite the notion implicit in the co-ercive persuasion account of NRM involvement, that anyone can be drawn into new religious movements, the differences between a believer and an unbeliever, or between a person with a western spiritual orientation and an eastern one, are not trivial. To move from being an unbeliever to a believer is a significant change, unlikely to be undertaken lightly or to be of uniform probability for everyone. The believer and the unbeliever do not share certain general spiritual assumptions and differ on mere details, as (say) two differently religious people might, but, as Donovan (1979) suggests, "are divided in their view of what further facts there are" (p.81). The person with a religious worldview lives with the possibility that in addition to ordinary occurrences "there may also be the activity and manifestations of God". The verification of a belief in the sacred does not derive from a discrete set of uniquely sacred events but from an interpretation placed on natural events, from a certain 'quality of experience' (Pruyser, 1977). As Donovan (1979:77) notes, the sense of reality of God which arises in the course of the believer’s experience of the world (within his[her] religious world-view and accompanying belief system) is not simply an accompanying feeling but becomes part of the evidence itself, and is open to interpretation by the very belief system that evokes it.
Understandably, there are serious problems regarding the ontology of such belief, its falsifiability, and the lack of independence of the evidence which supports the interpretive belief system. Support for the spiritual nature of these forces derives from an interpretation. This means that these events are only spiritual if one accepts the interpretation and can only support the veridicality of that interpretation if already interpreted. This is a logically vicious circle, and places the proof for the postulates beyond empirical investigation. This is a dividing line between believers and unbelievers. Some of us stay with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Others make a leap and suggest, as Lucien Goldman does, that 'he' truly is a 'hidden God', and that we can only see the effects of 'his' working. Donovan's quotation has further relevance here, in that it suggests that a 'religious' person may believe in sacred forces, which are not discrete from, but operate through natural forces. Religious causation does not necessarily entail a separate and super-empirical genre of occurrence, as Lofland and Stark's model suggests, though it will be shown that in fact many belief systems do.

The difference between political and religious genres is more than a matter of detail, it is almost a difference in kind. It has been argued that conversion is not necessarily the addition of new beliefs to a belief system, but peripheral beliefs made central, tacit made explicit, unconscious conscious, or the firmly held now ubiquitously applied. This is not at odds with historical and contemporary definitions of conversion, just an unexpected emphasis. It brings the possibility that many people have the latent possibility of becoming believers in some superordinate explanatory system. The literature suggests that even seemingly abrupt conversions have a long prehistory.
Perhaps everyone could be converted in the long term, but it would require an inordinate amount of institutional person-hours when others tumble ripe. Beliefs of a spiritual nature may be tacitly held by many people, without being of central importance, at times perhaps irrelevant to or displaced by beliefs more salient to current endeavour. Change of belief in the face of crisis is commonly accepted, e.g. deathbed conversions, the ‘religion of the trenches’ (Sargant, 1957), or the plausible example where a scientist whose mother died suddenly voices a belief in reincarnation. This may be a newly acquired belief, or a peripheral belief, suddenly of central concern to her in the face of the finality of separation from someone dear.

Having lightly sketched the difference between religious believers and non-believers, how believers might be differently religious from each other is considered.

9. DIFFERING SPIRITUAL CONCEPTIONS: EAST AND WEST

The following discussion of broad parameters of difference between Eastern and Western religious orientations is necessarily simplistic and inaccurate as it divides a plethora of world religions into two groups. To subsume under the rubric Eastern Hindu, Jain, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions, and under Western Pentecostal, Baptist and Jewish traditions, for some may not be justifiable from any perspective. However, the psychological focus of this study concerns the compensatory function of religion, and addresses how spiritual parameters make sense of inequalities, suffering and mortality, attempts to explain life’s vicissitudes and to provide a sense of being protected and guided in overcoming and adapting to them. Salient to this account are points of difference regarding the way two broadly defined traditions address suffering
(its origins and resolution), ethical existence, and eschatology. Differences in belief and practice important to the historian or religious believer are necessarily blurred. The account anticipates the form of the Spiritual Orientation Scale [SOS], developed as part of this study to empirically assess beliefs characteristic of a person with no prolonged active involvement with a NRM they have recently approached. The SOS was developed with prospective empirical assessment of a general spiritual orientation with these two broad groupings in mind. Three clearly demarcated factors emerged: Eastern, Western and General religious orientations. For conceptual consistency, the outline of east-west differences is therefore only as sophisticated as the instrument which operationalises these concepts.

Religious belief systems surpass political and psychiatric systems in the nature and scope of the explanation they provide, addressing daily and ultimate concerns (Stark, 1981). Further, in providing explanation and consolation, religion meets both cognitive and emotional requirements, and has been termed a "generalised compensator" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1980a). The flourishing of NRMs is testimony to the fact that for some there is relevance to modern existence of an all-encompassing belief system, based on an economy of premises, interpreted and applied by a living 'enlightened' leader. Notions which are termed 'general religious tenets' for the purpose of this study address such issues as the finality of death, the nature of suffering, and how as finite humans we are to come to terms with them. These issues are an inseparable part of 'the human condition'.

There has been much research on the extrinsic or intrinsic nature of religious affiliation.
in the West. It has been suggested that the institutionalized churches of that tradition place more emphasis on the rational features of belief rather than the devotional features of faith and a mystical relationship with the sacred (Clarke, 1964). NRMs provide something of a contrast. *Culture* means 'to worship' in Latin and, as systems of belief and devotion, NRMs may be characterized as "pattern-setters" where, James (1960) suggests, religion exists "not as a dull habit, but a fever rather".

The East-West division has implications for the social acceptability of NRMs. As a Western charismatic offshoot, Pentecostalism is now widely accepted by the orthodoxy, and is not considered unconventional, while NRMs of Eastern origin retain their marginal status. I will spend some time outlining the parameters of new religious movements of an eastern nature, since it is not readily apparent why these belief systems might be legitimately considered as a source of appeal of the movements. Apart from the 'exotic' nature of these beliefs to a person educated in a western spiritual tradition, they hinge on quite different philosophical assumptions which have implications for the effects and potential manner of remediation of life mistakes. Since a major hypothesis of this study is that these innovative (some would say deviant) belief systems offer a message that may provide for a believer both explanation of and consolation for a painful life situation, the tenets of these systems of beliefs will be outlined with their potential appeal paramount.

Depending on the Eastern or Western orientation of the religion, and the particular history of any group developing within those two broad groupings, details of belief and practice differ. Broadly speaking, a Western religion postulates the existence of a
deity to whom we are accountable after death. Being omniscient and omnipotent such a deity is not bound by space or time, nor by the the natural laws of the material universe. A believer within this tradition therefore endorses the potential operation of super-empirical forces upon her or his life history, and sees that history as having a purpose, perhaps as being part of God's plan. For such a believer the natural world is only a part of existence. There is another system; a system of demand and response, supplication and atonement. From this perspective one can minimise one's suffering by living according to the word of God, praying for guidance, and repenting for one's sins.

Eastern conceptions of spirituality are less likely to posit a single personification of a supreme deity. Within non-dualist traditions a god or a buddha-nature is postulated to exist within each person, and there is an emphasis on the immanence of the divine, a "direct experience of the sacred", or a "personal experience of transcendence" (Stone, 1978:123). Needleman (1970:16), cited in Robbins et al, 1978:105) suggests that a weakness in modern western religion lies "in the absence in them of practical technique, method and discipline". In contrast, the conception of the sacred as an immanent power located within each individual which characterizes the somewhat mystically-oriented groups (Robbins et al, 1978) exists in concert with practical techniques for experiencing it (e.g. meditation and chanting). The techniques are integral to the belief systems, and their efficacy in providing a shared understanding of and solution to problems is constantly affirmed by witnessing and shared practice. For example, the central tenet of the Nichiren Shoshu of America is that the key to
personal and social transformation is through the repetitive chanting of a mantra to a small sacred scroll. The mantra is translated by most core members as "Devotion to the mystical universal law of cause and effect through sound" (Snow and Phillips, 1980:432), and the chanting of it is the key to unlock the power of the sacred scroll. Meetings where chanting is performed also include ‘witnessing’ where members testify to the beneficial transforming effects of such chanting, and personal experiences.

Further, in monist doctrines, there is no belief in super-empirical forces: the spiritual operates through the natural, the sublime inhabits the everyday for those who have stilled their desires and potentiated their awareness sufficiently to see, hear, touch, smell and taste it. The concept of advaita or non-duality pertains, where there is believed to be an ultimate unity or ‘ground of all being’ which "dissolves polarities and imparts an ultimately illusory or epiphenomenal quality (maya) to the material world" (Robbins et al., 1978:102). Exceptions to this epiphenomenal character of the material world exist, as not every tradition (for example, Patanjali Yoga) conflates transience with a non-causal, metaphysical status. The doctrine of advaita implies that one must recognize the "illusory nature of human contingency" (agency) which renders possible "detachment from the ups and downs of ordinary social experience". In other words, one can accept responsibility, but cannot aspire to control. If one can ‘drop the ego’ the illusory sense of separateness from an essential unity of the universe goes too. So, the general postulates of these belief systems have highly practical and salutary application. These belief systems embrace notions of cause and effect but add the important adjunct of the function of awareness as enabling us to achieve liberation and
transcendence of the cycle of suffering and rebirth, in the long term, and to avoid the repetition of self-damaging actions and thoughts in the short term. From this perspective it is via awareness that one can come to live within the natural flux with minimal suffering. Mistakes have a karmic residue; one is responsible, but terms such as blame, guilt, or sin have little or no relevance. Sin may mean retarded spiritual growth, but there is no deity’s judgement to fear, merely the inevitable consequences of a given action. Stone (1978:130) notes that "Karmic interpretations of fate assign responsibility without blame or guilt". An extended version of his observation is:

Karmic psychohistory is congruent with Freudian notions of complexes based on past acts and decisions. And as in psychoanalysis, Karmic interpretations of fate assign responsibility without blame or guilt (1978:130).

Hence Karma is a deterministic law involving beliefs as to the outcome expected from certain actions, and inevitably following from them. It is not an ethically prescriptive law which lends itself to justifying religious attitudes. That these systems of thought assume determinism is evident from the observation by Robbins et al., (1978:102) that monistic ideologies use the vocabulary of cognition and perception (viz realization, enlightenment) in contrast to the vocabulary of volition associated with dualist movements (for example, accepting Christ as Saviour, the ‘will’ of God). Also, there is an absence of fixed moral codes in NRM's from the East (the exception being a principled abstinance from eating meat in some cases). In general, moral norms emerge which are viewed as "useful in promoting spiritual awakening but not possessing the status of metaphysical absolutes" (Robbins et al., 1978:103).

It is suggested that such a spiritual worldview would have powerful ramifications in
the way that suffering and the perennial forms of human error are viewed. There is no ethical basis for prolonged guilt and brooding over past indiscretions, as these would run counter to awareness of the moment necessary to prevent repetitions of mistaken actions out of harmony with present circumstances. Suffering would not be seen as something produced by sin, but by error, and avoidable in the future. Neither would suffering be seen as meaningless, but as events or thoughts with portent, if one has the wisdom to decipher their implications. The doctrine of *advaita*, or oneness with all things, might have repercussions for how involved and committed one might feel with life events. In other words, there is responsibility in the sense in which Kobasa *et al.*, (1982) used the notion control, integration and union with all things in the sense which Kobasa *et al.*, (1982) used commitment, and an acceptance of the inevitability of change, and the events which herald it having something to teach those attentive to their import, akin to Kobasa’s notion of challenge. In short, an eastern worldview may be seen as promoting a cognitive coping style which has the potential to transform one’s experience of stress. The veridicality of the new perceptions of those events is perhaps not so important as the consolation and guidance provided by the principled interpretation of events made possible.

While Eastern and Western traditions both address the human condition, they have obviously different assumptions from each other, and from a thorough-going scientific account of the life in a material universe. It is possible that the recent emergence of the popularity of eastern conceptions of the spiritual is not merely an expression of a fascination with the foreign and novel, but is due in part to its consonance on certain
axioms (like determinism, and monism) with a philosophical and scientific account of events and its absence of moral absolutes. Perhaps as Needleman (1975) suggests modern wo/man is caught between two dreams, dreams of science and religion. Perhaps, too, there is currently a revival of what Goldmann (1964) termed "the tragic mind", which he outlines, capturing elements pertinent to NRM and the following they attract:

The nature of the tragic mind in seventeenth-century France can be characterised by two factors: the complete and exact understanding of the new world created by rationalistic individualism, together with all the invaluable and scientifically valid acquisitions which this offered to the human intellect; and, at the same time, the complete refusal to accept this world as the only one in which man could live, move and have his being (p.32).

9.1 Living Gods: The Significance of the Guru

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God

_Hebrews 10:31_

A prominent aspect of Eastern NRMs perhaps not directly related to the content of the beliefs, but to the articulation of them, is the important rôle played by the guru or enlightened leader. Perhaps the guru has richer influence on the appeal of the movement via personal charisma, and his/her being a figure of identification, than through his or her contribution to the belief system. However, gurus seem to be great simplifiers and story-tellers, and the importance of this emissary contribution is worthy of consideration before considering their charisma and identificatory appeal. S/he is responsible for the articulation of beliefs in a number of senses: after the manner of an oral tradition, in explicating conceptual linkages and relating belief to practical
applications.

For modern NRMs (such as the former Rajneesh Foundation, the Divine Light Mission, the Nichiren Shoshu, the Hare Krishna, and the Unification Church) an important belief is in the 'enlightenment' of the master which is accompanied by extreme devotion to him. Stoner and Parke (1979) make what they term "excessive devotion" one of the defining features of a cult, which they term

a minority religious group regarded as spurious or unorthodox [in which there is] great or excessive devotion to some person, idea or thing, (cited in Goldberg, 1983:170).

The status of enlightenment is accompanied by apocryphal notions of the leader's powers, which s/he may allude to in her/his lectures, and in an abiding faith in the efficacy and uniqueness of the techniques s/he suggests (e.g. the meditation techniques of Rajneesh, and the four techniques of the Guru Maharaji which together constitute the Knowledge).

The importance of a living guru for the belief system and devotional practices of a NRM has received little explicit attention. Robbins et al., (1978) note that he has exemplary rather than merely emissary status. Enlightenment can be achieved in monist charismatic movements "through veneration and emulation of leaders who are regarded as exemplars of advanced consciousness" (p.105).

Sometimes the 'enlightenment' of the leader is tantamount to divinity\(^19\). Difference from his (or her) followers may be established by his/her timing of having achieved enlightenment at a very early age (as Guru Maharaji claims) or without the guidance
of a master (as Bhagwan Rajneesh claimed). The guru or master is often viewed as a source of energy (Kempton, 1976:36, cited in Robbins et al., 1978:105). As Robbins et al., (1978) note:

Such masters are generally perceived by the devotees as personifications of the enlightened ‘loving’ or liberated values revered by their followers" (p.105 original emphasis, citing in support: Anthony & Robbins, 1974; Zaehner, 1974, Foss & Larkin, 1978).

As Pruyser (1968) notes, god is "always a love object to the devout person" (cited in Maloney, 1977:70). In fact attraction to and involvement with a NRM may often be characterized by the follower as "falling in love", surrendering or being drawn to the guru (Wach, 1962). The total approval and acceptance offered by the guru is a powerful affiliative mechanism. Halperin (1982) notes:

To give total approval without any type of qualification is to deny the existence of the observing ego on the part of either participant within the dialogue. Total approval can only occur within contexts which implicitly promote or explicitly celebrate merger and fusion....It promotes regression by promising a return to the very early symbiotic level of the mother’s unqualified approval and love. (cited in Halperin, 1983:225)

Given that the guru is ‘enlightened’, and from the perspective of his/her devotees in direct contact with the sacred, then a personal relationship with him or a sense of being in direct relationship with him (as in the ritual satsang) is a relationship to the sacred.

Beliefs as to his special status may render commitment more differentiated and remove other belief systems from consideration as possible alternatives; producing a kind of ‘brand loyalty’. Despite the fact that most NRM belief systems share a belief in the
operation of sacred forces, the details of their operation, and the specific interpretive heuristics vary greatly from movement to movement. As Snow and Machalek (1983a) note from their participant observation of the NSA, the opposition to the use of metaphor (their guru could not merely be termed a charismatic leader) "allows converts to assign incomparable value to their worldview" (p.275).

Shearmur (1980) notes that institutional and affective arrangements of sects may influence the 'handling of ideas' and so have epistemological consequences. He gives the example of sects having 'rules of conduct' which influence the growth of knowledge. The opposition to metaphor Snow and Machalek (1983a) note may remove all other belief systems from the status of competition.

Aspects of the guru’s relationship to his followers are reminiscent of the mechanisms which Kanter (1968) suggests promote the obedience and moral conviction of 'institutionalized awe'. The requisite 'distance and mystery' can be achieved in the following ways (the conceptual points are Kanter's, the examples mine):

- An authority hierarchy (which may overlap with spiritual differentiation) e.g. an 'enlightened master', with followers who aspire to that status

- Physical separation of the leader from followers. Gurus tend to be separate from their followers in living arrangements, and seen only at ritual occasions called darshans. Furthermore, their followers are frequently based in another country and in contact by media only.

- Special leader prerogatives (for example, the 100 or so Rolls Royces owned by
Rajneesh, or having sexual access to all of the women, and men, as Jim Jones had, even while he prohibited sexual relations between couples)

- Having a basis for decisions other than rationality e.g. inspiration, intuition or magic.

The guru has great significance for the belief system via his/her lectures and expositions which link the elements, showing how they may function as a PSP. In the literature of the movement and in public and taped addresses the guru translates into practical techniques (often giving anecdotal examples) the manner of explaining and resolving felt difficulties. The range of these difficulties spans daily concerns (such as sexual mores) to more ultimate concerns such as the reasons for suffering and the finality of death. Explanation is achieved utilizing the general postulates of the movement's belief system.

Because of the untraditional or exotic nature of the beliefs from which these PSPs derive, the necessity of the believer being encapsulated from a hostile and critical society has been emphasized in the past. The believer was thought to require encapsulation from both 'Come off it Saul' responses (Berger and Luckman, 1967) and from disconfirming evidence for his or her beliefs. However, concerning the belief system of the Nichiren Shoshu, Snow and Machalek (1983) note:

its formidable interpretive scheme is not highly vulnerable to contradiction and challenge. Not only does it protect believers from negative evidence, but it defines virtually all evidence and experiences as confirmation of the system (p.19).

In support of this they cite Lofland (1966) who suggests of the Unification Church "all
experience, all counter-arguments would only produce confirmation" (Snow &
Machalek, 1983a:18). Snow & Machalek (1983a) conclude that the movement belief
system is robust, in so far as "unfalsifiable claims are used to support falsifiable
claims". In other terms, "an empirically non-relevant belief (is used) to protect an
empirically relevant belief" (Bornhek & Curtis, 1975:127, cited in Snow & Machalek,
1983a:21). Such robust systems, they suggest, do not require extensive legitimation or
protection from the disbelief of the wider community.

These 'empirically non-relevant beliefs' refer to the central tenets of a religious belief
system, some of which, this study suggests, include the beliefs that:

- There exist sacred forces
- Death is not the end
- A life without spirituality is one without meaning
- A life devoted solely to the pleasures of the material world is incapable of
  sustaining true happiness
- A person with no spiritual beliefs at all leads a partial existence
- Religious belief is at least as valid a way of 'knowing' and experiencing the world
  as any other

To allow these central tenets to span Eastern and Western devotional systems, the
form of continued existence after death has been left unspecified to retain the tenet's
pertinence whether reincarnation or a soul judged before God is the follow up to death.
Similarly, the nature of the sacred forces and their mode of operation is unspecified,
e.g. whether they form a super-empirical realm or operate through natural events.

It is suggested that someone who did not endorse these beliefs as even possibly true would be unlikely to be open to a religious interpretation of his/her life events, and unlikely to make contact with a NRM despite having the opportunity to do so from social channels or the media. A failure to endorse such beliefs may be one factor associated with departure from NRM contact at the earliest opportunity. These are merely general spiritual tenets: some further consonance of cognitive orientation may be required to explain why a person is drawn to eastern or western systems of belief.

9.2 Do Affiliates have Pre-existing Spiritual Orientations?

Of the direct tests of Lofland and Stark’s model two of the three studies investigated orthodox religions. Needleman (1975) and Robbins et al., (1978) suggest that western orthodox religions are not strong in terms of their practical problem-solving application.

Rather than accepting the idea that ideological congruence is an important predisposition to movement involvement, Snow and Phillips (1980) suggest that "conversion to NSA frequently effects a significant change in problem-solving perspectives" (p.436). They do not make explicit their criteria in deciding whether a person qualified for inclusion in the religious PSP category. Their data base was randomly selected testimonies from the movement’s newspaper. They acknowledge the atypicality of the data in that they "pertain to the more highly committed and active members". but do not give any indication of the representativeness of the case.
examples they cite. They merely suggest that they are 'not exceptional'. They suggest that these findings cast doubt on whether pre-participation ideological congruence is a necessary condition for conversion (p.436).

However, it is not merely the examination and representativeness of the case studies cited which calls these findings into question, but whether the very nature of the data can be assumed to be free of bias. It is, in a sense, a form of witnessing. It is retrospective and likely to be couched in the situated vocabulary of the movement, or (as Beckford (1978) suggested of Jehovah's Witnesses conversion accounts he studied) formulated in terms acceptable to the movement. Biographical reconstruction is a feature of conversion, as Berger and Luckman (1967), Snow and Machalek (1983), Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen (1980) and Snow and Phillips (1980) themselves note. Hence the accentuation of 'then...now' differences is to be expected. Further, as noted above, it cannot be excluded as a possibility that the accounts published were selected on the basis of the scope of their appeal and the 'radical' change attendant on conversion. They are highly political documents, not the relatively unbiased first-hand accounts the exigencies of social science require.

Barker (1981) found that 80% of the British members of the Unification Church already believed in God and that "just under half of the British members of the workshop who joined, but less than a quarter ... who did not join, said they had been actively seeking the truth" (p.76). When asked why they joined, nearly 66% of the British members answered in theological terms. Those who left the workshop and discontinued involvement with the group were most likely to be agnostic, atheist and
non-Christian. Galanter (1980) also found that those leaving earliest from such preliminary workshops had least "creedal assent" as assessed by a scale he developed which concerned specific beliefs of that group. Concerning previous religious involvement, Galanter et al., (1979) note a strong religious orientation in the background data of their respondents. Sixty-seven percent regarded themselves as at least moderately committed to their families' religion before the age of 15. Thirty-four percent had, at some later date, become at least moderately committed to "one of the eastern religious sects such as the Divine Light Mission, Zen, Muktananda, and a smaller proportion (19%) to fundamentalist Christian sects. However, fully 90% reported at least some history of at least some prior commitment to these sects (p.166)". This contrasts with the fact that only 47% reported at least some prior political commitment. Galanter and colleagues assessed only the commitment to parental religion, rather than direct assessment of the degree of belief in spiritual conceptions and the eastern or western orientation of those conceptions. Their broad focus was narrowed to the assessment of specific details of creedal assent to the tenets of that group in Galanter's (1980) later study.

Heirich (1977) found that religious orientation was twice as significant a predictor of involvement in Pentecostalism as all other factors combined. Balch and Taylor (1977) found that pre-existing congruence of individual beliefs with those of the group led people to make a conversion requiring the sacrifice of lifestyle and possessions even in the absence of pre-existing affective bonds or intensive interaction with group members prior to commitment.
While Lofland (1978:20) suggests that "many people not religious at all have joined" the Unification Church since the 1960's, it is important to query how this religiosity (and its absence) was assessed. From the literature it seems that those making contact with NRMs endorse beliefs which may be classified as religious in the widest sense, yet they may not actively attend church or even claim a particular denomination. Barker (1981) notes a disillusionment with established churches in the convert group, yet 87% of the Unification Church acknowledged having "been aware of a presence or power" prior to joining. She notes that those attending preliminary workshops "refused to mention any denomination" (p.80) when asked which faith they held. More of the workshop group than the control group came from households where the family had mixed denominations. So it seems that potential converts may have a general religious orientation rather than exclusive endorsement of any orthodox faith.

Needleman (1975; cited in Robbins et al, 1978:105) as noted above, pointed to a lack in Western religions of practical techniques and applicability of the beliefs to modern concerns, which may be part of the reason for the disaffection with formal denominations noted by Barker (1981). Seggar and Kunz (1972) found that few of their Mormon sample saw organized religion as relating to solutions of problems in any way. Few of the subjects saw their problems as sacred in origin. However, this may be because Seggar and Kunz's operational definition of sacred involved the devil and/or evil spirits, and the notion of 'God's will'. This excludes a broader conception of spiritual which I have attempted to outline above. In attempting to assess whether his Christian subjects had a religious problem-solving perspective, Austin (1977) asked
them whether they felt God had influenced their lives prior to conversion, only 2/6 responded affirmatively.

Snow and Phillips (1980) suggested that less than 15% of the NSA converts fit into the religious PSP category prior to encountering the NSA. More than 3/4 of the sample "saw both the source and the solution to problems as residing in forces other than mystical, supernatural and occult" (p.436).

There has been a distinct failure to consider belief in the more subtle operation of sacred forces in explaining or solving problems which characterizes a more eastern type of belief system, and modern Christian accounts. It is unlikely that even for orthodox religions a religious PSP can be reduced to: "The devil and his evil minions cause my problems and God solves them". In psychological research, the subtleties of karma and maya are nowhere to be found. Snow et al.'s (1980) remark about motivational analyses paying too scant attention to movement ideologies, while not in principle alien to a psychological consideration of movements, appears to have become so in practice. Lofland and Stark (1965) merely observe that affiliates endorse general religious postulates. Snow and Phillips (1980) suggest that conversion effects a change in PSP. It does seem unlikely that a fully-fledged interpretive system exists prior to any tutelage by the movement. It is likely that specific beliefs, their interrelation, and potential application would be learned during sustained contact.

To summarize briefly, it is suggested that NRM belief systems do have the potential to function as PSPs. They have wide explanatory scope due to the 'economy' of their
organization, the central features of which are not amenable to empirical falsification. They are 'constrained' in a quasi-logical manner, deriving in part from the guru's function in interpreting the general principles, modelling their explanatory relevance to everyday and ultimate concerns, and incorporating those beliefs into practical techniques and workshops.

Disaffected with western orthodox institutions (as Barker's 1981 data showed) and not belonging to any organised spiritual group, these people are seekers, open to the appeal of new religious movements. If they endorse the possible validity of meditation, yoga, karma, and reincarnation and find comfort in such notions when strife occurs, then they may be open to the appeal of NRMs of an eastern orientation. It is suggested that such consonance in spiritual orientation between the individual and the NRM has a determining influence on movement involvement within the wider causal model specified above.