



Petersburg paganism

PETERSBURG PAGANISM

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The collection Petersburg Paganism was published in St. Petersburg in 1999 by Apostolic City Publishing House in a small print run and is a collection of student works in which the students attempted to describe seven St. Petersburg religious organisations of the pagan tradition. Without claiming to be an exhaustive analysis, the articles are interesting for their collected facts and direct presentation. Some of the observations are still virtually unknown to lovers of religious exoticism. Of the seven participants in this student project, only two have linked their professional careers to religious topics.

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Professor Paganel Student Scientific Society

Alexander Shchipkov

In the spring of 1998, students celebrated Easter in one of the apartments in St. Petersburg. It is good when two or three gather together. There were seven of our students, and the reader can find out their names by looking at the table of contents of the collection of articles they are holding in their hands. The girls chopped vegetables for a salad, while the young men assured them that opening cans was a man's job and tried to dip their spoons into the yellowish mayonnaise. It was delicious and fun. As evening approached, the noise died down, the sun set in the west, and the tulle curtains were drawn. The conversation turned to the Veles Book, Shambhala, and Belovodye. Everything around us was strange and incomprehensible: where was Orthodox Russia, and where was pagan Russia? The doorbell rang. Who was it? The landlord had arrived. What are you arguing about, children? Will the pagans defeat the Christians? Who prepared this wonderful salad? There are two ways to resolve your dispute: either repeat the spell about the gates of hell until you turn blue, or get together and explore modern urban neo-paganism. But we are not sociologists, you might say. But then again, God is not a potter...

This is how the Student Scientific Society was born, which the guys named after a fearless and cheerful botanist. Why? Who knows! The "pagans" found refuge in the inter-church educational and enlightenment organisation "Apostolic City - Nevsky Perspective", founded by Orthodox priest Vladimir Filippovich Fedorov. The Apostolic City provided technical support for the Petersburg Paganism project. Seven religious organisations were selected from several hundred in St. Petersburg: Tezaurus, Skhoron Ez Sloven, Venedi, Gremlandia, Rosenkreutzers, Indeanists, and Brahma Kumaris. Some of them can only be called pagan in a relative sense. The work was difficult. The leaders of the religious groups under study were reluctant to engage. And indeed, who likes to be the "subject of research"? Especially when it is not distinguished professors or famous journalists who are interested in you, but ordinary curious students. Freedom of conscience gives the right to remain silent. At the same time, society has the right to know everything about the world around it, including the world of religious ideas. Based on these principles, students from St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg State Pedagogical University, and the Russian Christian Humanitarian Institute managed to build friendly relations with almost all of the organisations they studied.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt at a collective description of the urban neo-pagan movement in St. Petersburg. The authors would like to

grateful for constructive criticism and will gratefully accept advice from professionals. The articles are journalistic in style, but this makes them more accessible to the general reader, to whom they are addressed.

Shoron yez Sloven

*Vladimir Povarov,
student at St. Petersburg Pedagogical University*

Along with the revival of traditional religions and the emergence and growth of new religious associations, religious movements that had been forgotten many years ago began to revive and gradually gain strength.

The paganism of the ancient Slavs has deep roots. Its origins can be traced back many millennia before our era. Fragments of it have survived to this day. One such religious movement is "Rodobozhie," practised today by the religious association "Shoron Ezh Sloven."

In the 11th century, a certain "North Slavic medicine" founded the medical school "Shag Volka". Followers of "Shag Volka" pass on the basic tenets of the "Svorozhich Tablets" – the religious teachings of the followers of Slavic paganism – from generation to generation.

The expression "skhoron ezh sloven" means "preservation of all Slavs." This translation is provided by the high priest "Skhoron ezh sloven" Vladimir Yuryevich Golyakov, whose religious name is Vladimir Bogomil II. According to mythology, at the beginning of the 11th century, the Novgorod prince Miloslav Bogomil the First founded the community "Shoron ezh sloven". Miloslav Bogomil was the high priest of the Slavic Triglav, the ruling body of "Shoron ezh sloven". Golyakov claims to be descended from the ancient healing family of Golyakov-Glukhov, where knowledge of the ancient religion has been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. Golyakov himself is a healer, licensed to treat infertility and impotence, and delivers babies. Healing is the main source of income for his family, but the midwifery profession is primarily filled with religious content.

As recently as 1991, the Grand Circle of the nine main healing families of Pomeranian (or "Black") Russia decided to restore "theocracy," a religious and legal system that aims to unite the Slavic people with the Three-Headed God through the deification of their ancestors, father and mother, male and female principles, clan and homeland. The Great Circle is a governing body consisting of nine secret and one open member who make all important decisions, such as the creation of a new temple or sacred grove. The open member of the council carries out the decisions. Vladimir Golyakov is an open member of the ruling elite, combining the roles of priest and sole executive authority.

Vladimir Golyakov says that in the past, the Slavic people gave the names of real people to the elements of nature. The elements were deified, but behind each deity stood real historical figures whose successes or failures were associated with various natural phenomena. For example, Prince Dazh is the prototype of Dazhbog, and Prince Strig is the prototype of Stribog. The former is in charge of rain, the latter of wind.

The Slovenes consider the Ugric-Finnish tribes to be their cousins, who borrowed and preserved, albeit with some modifications, the Slavic faith and Slavic gods. This position allows the gods of Finno-Ugric mythology to be "brought home". For example, according to Vladimir Yuryevich, the Finno-Ugric god Ukko is the hypostasis of the Slavic Perun, son of the god Rod, and the god Odin is a distorted name of the Slavic Yedinobog.

The movement has its own sacred books, written by Vladimir Golyakov and stylised as ancient Slavic texts, such as Solntsevorot, Trizna, Spolokh, and Shesten. There are nine temples, sacrificial sites, and sacred groves in St. Petersburg and its environs. Each temple must have several priests and between ten and thirty "wolves" – disciples. Religious services are held regularly: three times a week at the temple and three times a day at home. The Slavs do not sacrifice animals, but offer honey, bread, kvass and eggs. On holidays, special decorations are placed on the idols and rituals are performed: sacrifices, the lighting of sacred fires, and ritual fights – hand-to-hand and with swords. The training of the "wolf cubs" also takes place here, at the temple.

Rodovodstvo is based on three main dogmas (runes) formulated in a text called "Trizna":

1. Bo ezh se (God is everything). Everything is capable of giving birth to God.
2. Se ezh bo (Everything is God). Everything is ready to fertilise everything.
3. That is the law that is clear (What is, is).

The third rune is the core one. It speaks of the futility of trying to explain what we are fundamentally incapable of understanding. This rune is the main principle that guides the Shokhoron Ezh Slovenes in their daily lives. The text of the Trizna is written on the inside of a wolf skin and is used during sacred rituals.

The Slovenes believe that Rod is the life-giving principle of nature, which is dead without him. In ancient times, the magi understood what others are searching for today, namely that man knows God as existing in everything. Man has no

the right to know God in isolation from nature. According to Vladimir Golyakov, this is the power of the Slavic faith, which can only be restored with absolute accuracy by observing nature itself, without books or legends.

The Slavs have a peculiar interpretation of the concept of holiness. They understand holiness not as sinlessness, not as adherence to a set of ethical norms, but as the affirmation of truth. Holy is the one who said what is, without adding anything of his own. This is the essence of the third rune. A person is holy through truth. For example: "The sun is the heart of the earth, for without it there is no life." The one who said this is holy, because it is true.

The sorcerers created the logic of knowing the All-God, called "po-vedeniam." Po-vedeniam means an action performed according to knowledge, that is, according to known knowledge. Those who possess po-vedeniam can give definitions to various phenomena.

The Slovenes say that there is only one God, despite his many names. He can be both Belobog and Chernobog. Good and evil are combined in him. Every nation is born of one God. The people are directly given knowledge of God, and they have the right to their own image of him. In addition, each nation creates its own pantheon of manifestations of God, depending on its own needs. Foreign nations can be guests here, but not hosts. They can profess God in their own way, but they have no right to teach the Slavs how to believe.

Rodobožhie states that everything is one in Vsebog, and from the unity of everything comes Podobny Zavyaz. Podobny Zavyaz is a system of relationships between the hypostases of Vsebog. The universe cannot exist without balance. Divine balance is maintained in the trinity of the All-God. Golyakov introduces the concept of Treglava, which is vaguely reminiscent of the Christian Trinity. The "Trinity" of the Slovenes consists of Nature – the mother goddess, Svarog, who represents the "body of the All-God", and the god of Time, who is the "condition of Everything", the force that connects the Triglav in the Podobny Zavyaz. Golyakov asserts that only among the Slavs did the concept of the god of Time remain intact. Other peoples and religions have hints that a similar cult once existed but was lost over time. Among the Slavs, however, the god of Time has been preserved.

Time is the force that accompanies a person from the moment of birth to the moment of death and gives them the opportunity to be reborn. The Slovenes say that everything is born in order to die and then be reborn. Therefore, the concept of death does not exist at all.

¹ Cf.: *Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the human soul is in the blood.*

Unlike the Christian Trinity, which, according to Golyakov, is "incomplete" due to the absence of a mother-giver, the Slovenian Triglav has a mother – Nature. Golyakov's arguments are not spontaneous, but carefully thought out. In nature worship, nothing comes from nothing. The god of the Slovenes does not create, but gives birth, and therefore the female principle is introduced into Treglav.

The Slovenian people have a unique concept of hell and paradise. God is a blacksmith who strikes the anvil with the hammer of trials. The anvil is nature, where a particular people was born. The people are the blade that God tests. Tempered by the hammer of trials, the blade remains in a state of "paradise." If the blade breaks under the blows of the hammer, God throws it into the furnace and abandons the useless people. This is "hell."

The preservation of dogmatic rules is the responsibility of the hierarchy. In ancient times, according to Golyakov's teachings, the Slavic priesthood had three main cults (ukrep):

1. Rodari. Priests responsible for the cult of the god Rod. They are also the bearers of legends.
2. Rozheny. Priests of the cult of women in labour and nature.
3. Volkhvy. Priests responsible for maintaining the balance between the animal and human principles in man.

Rodari are above Rozhens, since Rod is the masculine principle, which always dominates the feminine. A sorcerer could be either a Rodari or a Rozhens, but in either case, his main task was to establish a balance between human consciousness and animal subconsciousness. A sorcerer distinguishes between good and evil in a person. The Slovenes say: a person who is too good is blissful, and a person who is too evil is a sadist. Both are bad. Therefore, the task of the sorcerer is to help restore the lost balance, to balance the good and evil principles, which are understood in an unconventional way. Good is everything that leads you to victory. Evil is everything that leads to defeat. A person has no right to determine whether they are good or evil. But this does not mean that they do not know who they are. When a person does not know who they are, a spiritual breakdown occurs within them. In other words, if you are a bastard, you must be a bastard to the extreme. And if you are a hero, you must be as pure as Belbog himself. "If you do black, do not call it white; if you do white, do not blacken it," says Golyakov, "do not sit on two benches, for one bench is for Chernobog and the other is for Belbog."

The Slovenian hedgehogs have no priests in the professional-bureaucratic sense. There should be nothing materially profitable in serving Vsebog, since service to Vsebog-Time is "selfless," that is, not

based on a contract. A contract with Vsebog is impossible, as he is not endowed with emotions. Vsebog is an impassive arbiter of fate. The Slovenes say that the magi always viewed the people as a single organism. The priest is not concerned with human passions. He is as impassive as a god. Only in this case is he able to know the essence of things and reveal them to people.

Rodari have the right to give names to natural phenomena. Only indigenous names corresponding to the space called the Motherland have the right to exist. For example, the movement of the sun is called "Solntsevorot" (Sun Turn), and its symbolic image resembles a swastika. Golyakov opposes the use of the term "swastika" and distances himself from its political connotations. He says that the Slovenes cannot know what a swastika is because they are neither Hindus nor Germans. Each system has its own concepts. Solstice has its own symbolism, and what it resembles is a problem for those who seek similarities, says Golyakov.

Vladimir Golyakov asserts that people have to fight for their existence. But the meaning of the struggle is not to acquire goods that cannot give life force. People fight for Time, which binds the world together. Through their struggle with the surrounding nature, through their death, people give their descendants the opportunity to grow with Time. The struggle, the battle that people wage with their environment, is a constant cycle of defeats and victories, births and deaths. In this cycle, the Slovenes see a manifestation of the principle of constant change. The principle of constant change is also present in the changing forms of the All-God. Perun, Dazhbog, Semargl and others are the faces and names of the one All-God, who is constantly changing his guise. The change of guises symbolises the constancy of change. The eternity of God lies in the fact that he constantly repeats the same thing. In nature, this is reflected in the change of seasons. This principle embodies the eternity of God and man as part of the All-God.

The Shoron Yezh Slovenes believe that all people of Slavic origin are divided into Slavs and relatives. A Slav is someone who glorifies his blood. A relative is a Slav by blood, but does not glorify "his blood", that is, he is not a member of the "Shoron Yezh Slovenes".

A Slav recognises that it is in the blood of descendants that the soul of their ancestors is preserved, in the blood that flows "through their veins".¹ Golyakov believes that the name "Slavs" consists of two words - "to glorify" and "veins" - and interprets "Slavs" as those who glorify their blood. This is a typical case of folk etymology.

¹ *Analogies with Chronos and the Zoroastrian god of time, Zervan, come to mind.*

Shoron the Hedgehog The Slovenes believe that the human soul is a combination of informational experience and energy fields. Matter and energy are distributed by God very strictly, according to his internal laws. Man is eternal through his ancestors and descendants. A son will always be born of his father and mother. The latter statement gives the Skhoron Yezh Slovenes reason to consider the doctrine of reincarnation erroneous, since in order to be born a mouse, one must be a mouse.

The struggle that people wage, according to Vladimir Golyakov, is "business." An inactive person dies. The meaning of the struggle is to prolong the time allotted to a person so that they can complete their business and fulfil their destiny. Death is a necessary condition for the birth of offspring.

Rodoboizie asserts that all peoples are born of God. The concept of divine election is impossible for a pagan, since God cannot give or withhold his preference to anyone.

The work "Solntsevorot" mentions another name for Vsebog – Volkov Semarglovich. Volkov Semarglovich is God's dog, the side of Vsebog that is responsible for the natural balance of all sides of Vsebog within himself. It is the force that prevents anyone from winning completely and dying completely. He maintains the balance between the aggressive and positive sides of ever-changing nature.

When harvest time came, the magicians promoted the cult of Ditsnop, the god of harvest. When it was time to procreate, they promoted the cult of the god Pokhotich. During times of illness, they promoted the cult of Zdravich. But at the same time, they did not forget that these were aspects of the same All-God, which were most needed at that particular moment in time.

Any relative who deifies their ancestors can become a member of the community: their father as the God of the Clan and their mother as the Goddess of the Motherland. Such a person becomes a "man of the Slavic people." The only requirement for them is to do everything to strengthen the glory of their people through their destiny, strength, and will.

The members of the community are indifferent to political activity and do not belong to any parties. As for their attitude towards other religions, the community is alienated from Judaism as a religion that preaches the divine election of one people; it is favourably disposed towards Orthodox Christianity and the "priests of Orthodox Christianity of the Slavic race," but sharply negative towards Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, and new religious movements. The members of the community see no need for missionary activity, as they are convinced that the cult of Rodobozya is so understandable and logical that the Slavs themselves will understand that a return to a single god is only possible through the deification of their ancestors.

Gremlandia

*Philip Shchipkov,
student at Saint Petersburg State University*

Is there death, or is there not? This is the question that torments everyone who has embarked on the path of religious inquiry. The idea hammered into them since school, "no, I will not die completely," inclines St. Petersburg intellectuals, freeing themselves from atheism, to search for the immortal component of their own "I." It is easy for those who have been "raised in the faith" since childhood, easy for opportunists who go to church as if to a bathhouse. But what about the honest intellectual, whose brain has not yet emerged from atheism, but whose heart yearns for eternity? Sometimes he rushes to the familiar lifeline – science. Science explains everything: what was and what will be. Science connects faith and knowledge. After all, we know more today than we did yesterday. Newspapers have told us that matter can be not only thick but also thin, that information is material, and that extrasensory perception is all-powerful. Perhaps even God Himself is material? Religious ideas must be presented scientifically, then they will be accessible to humanity – this is the motto of the modern intellectual.

In St. Petersburg, D.S. Likhachev, academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation, and G.B. Dvoyrin, academician of the World Academy of Sciences, director of the World Institute of Spirituality and Religions, proposed a scientific answer to the "deadly" question.

In the early 1990s, Academician Dmitry Sergeyevich Likhachev created the mythological state of Gremlandia. Gremlandia is a unitary democratic republic with all the appropriate state attributes: legislative, executive and judicial powers, a coat of arms, an anthem, a flag and a state seal. The Gremlandians translate the name of their country as "the country of resounding initiatives". For the convenience of conducting foreign affairs, Gremlandia has a second name – Dreamland – the land of dreams, the land of fantasies. In honour of the creator of the country, where the spirit of science and free creativity reigns, the Gremlandian calendar is based on the date of D.S. Likhachev's birthday.

The coat of arms of Gremlandia is a shaped shield, at the top of which is depicted the "all-seeing eye of the Creator of all living things." Below are two cats, white and black, above whose intertwined tails hovers a crown topped with a cross. The crown symbolises folk wisdom – it is impossible to live "without a king in your head" – while the cats represent independence and self-reliance.

The coat of arms is decorated with the Latin motto *Tota vita ludus est* (All life is a game). Therefore, the government of Gremlandia is headed by the prime minister, the minister, the theatre

director Boris Vasilyevich Smirnov. The cabinet is formed personally by the prime minister and performs an advisory function under him. The prime minister appoints senior government officials and has broad powers in the field of domestic and foreign policy.

The country's legal system is based on ethical justice. The entire structure of Gremlandia is permeated with a desire for justice and harmony – this is the fundamental ideological principle of the creators of this dream country. People should not disturb the harmony of nature; they should understand it and live in harmony with it.

Alongside the government, Gremlandia has a body of public self-government called the "Public Council of the Community". It is based on the "World Academy of Sciences, Arts and Culture" – the country's main scientific institution. All citizens of Gremlandia automatically become members of the Community Council, regardless of age or position. "Each citizen, on the basis of their own initiative, brings to the common Altar decisions, knowledge and achievements that can enable the practical resolution of many problems related to the life of the community" ¹. Among the citizens are Yuri Temirkanov, Anatoly Sobchak, Mstislav Rostropovich, Andrei Petrov (Speaker of the Congress of Gremlandia), Kirill Lavrov, Yuri Solomin, Igor Dmitriev, Donatas Banionis, and Ilya Rakhlin.

The intellectual capital of the new state is called Sharm Petersburg. The name is deliberately desacralised. But it would be wrong to assume that the people of Gremland are not religious. They are pagans. However, their paganism is not a stylisation of any ancient national paganism, examples of the restoration of which can be found in modern Russia. The distinguished citizens of Gremlandia do not pray to Makosh or Rod, do not sacrifice chickens in sacred groves, and do not adorn idols. Such spirituality is outdated and smacks of ignorance. Their religious consciousness is based on the most fashionable contemporary paranormal achievements.

The worldview principles of this intellectual country are formulated in its Basic Law – the "Universal Constitution of the State of Intellectual Initiatives of Gremlandia".

The spiritual and ideological worldview of Gremlandia is based on the "scientific religion" revealed to Grigory Borisovich Dvoyrin and which author called "Unified holographic information theory

¹ *Constitution of Gremlania, Art. 14.*

universe"¹ . In life, there is no clear division between science and religion, according to Dvoyrin. In people's minds, evidence of faith and evidence of science are equally important. Therefore, he places an equal sign between science and religion. The purpose of religion is to preserve "the sacred knowledge of science"²

According to Article 39 of the constitution, "the main scientific textbook of the country is the scientific theory of the spiritual laws of the universe," as set forth in the revelations of scientific religion. Article 39 gives scientific religion the status of the state ideology of Gremlandia.

Dvoyrin's main idea is to preserve life for future generations. It was this desire that was the driving force behind the creation of a new religious system. The sacred meaning of life is "survivability." All other "meanings," both religious and political, only lead to the disintegration of the friendly human family. The new worldview should contribute to a unanimous desire for collective survival. Dvoyrin formulates this desire as the "Law of the Meaning of Life"³. The citizens of Gremlandia have no right to violate this Law.

Theologian Dvoyrin is not attracted to the idea of personal salvation in its Christian understanding. "Scientific religion" is permeated with a pagan worldview. The greatest misfortune that can befall a person is the interruption of their lineage. The inner subconscious meaning of life for a person absorbed by the idea of preserving their lineage becomes the desire to achieve personal immortality in their descendants.

Dvoryn asserts that "survivability" is a kind of informational basis laid down "in the essence of life at the genetic level." He exclaims: "How can we break through to the secrets of the nature of immortality?" And he answers: "Today, we know of the possibilities of cloning (reproducing) the body of a living subject. Based on new knowledge and possibilities and according to the author's testimony No. 1008161, cited in this book, with the aim of correcting hereditary and psycho-evolutionary factors, prolonging or eternalising the life of a living subject, simultaneously with the material cloning of the body of a living subject while preserving its external image, informational and intellectual cloning is carried out with the introduction of informational factors into the system... Based on this, *the informational spirit* (my italics – F.Shch.) of the primary subject passes into a new material shell... realising

¹ Dvoyrin G.B., *Unified Holographic Information Theory of the Universe. Scientific Religion*. St. Petersburg: INTAN Publishing House, 1997.

² Dvoyrin G.B., *Unified Holographic Information Theory of the Universe. Scientific Religion*. St. Petersburg: INTAN Publishing House, 1997, p. 86.

³ *Constitution of Gremlandia, Part II, Art. 20.*

The principle of immortality"¹ . Reincarnation through spiritual cloning – the theological know-how of G.B. Dvoyrin.

The main element of the Gremland religious system is the universe. According to Article 27 of the Constitution of Gremland, "the citizens of Gremland recognise the entire grand universe as the One Holy God."

The God of the Gremlandians is not personified. He is dissolved in everything, he is spread throughout nature, he has no personal characteristics or individuality. But he (God) does not fit into the usual pantheistic ideas about him; he is more like a mechanism. The God-Universe in Dvoyrin's theory is three-part and represents "all the Geometric Space of the Living Universe with its contents – the Soul and the Holy Spirit"². Dvoyrin calls the energy waves and energy fields that fill the entire space of the Universe the Soul. The Holy Spirit is the information contained in these energy fields, which can be expressed in the form of feelings and knowledge. God can be touched; he ceases to be a mystery and materialises.

The only thing that unexpectedly breaks out of the mechanistic system of "scientific religion" is man himself. In the pagan worldview, an important point is the idea that human nature is rooted in the nature of the Cosmos, since paganism is characterised by "the belief in the ultimate identity of macro- and microcosmic structures (the universe and man)"³. Dvoyrin is convinced that the human mind has come between the universal Cosmos and man. And it is precisely this circumstance that has been the main tragedy of the entire history of mankind.

Dvoyrin is a Darwinist. Initially, man was part of the animal world, but over time he separated from it as a result of the emergence of reason, which began to progress at an inexorable pace. Humanity has always needed material resources to satisfy its growing needs and desires. However, the resources of the surrounding nature, which humans consume first and foremost, are not unlimited; they are being depleted, leading to the destabilisation of the environment and the deterioration of the ecological situation. And the cause of all these problems is the emergence of critical thinking in humans. The predominance of reason over instinct has led to humanity ruining the earth and destroying the environment.

Dvoyrin, referring to Charles Darwin's theory, believes that reason was not originally given to humans, who were dominated by instinct. Instinct is given from birth. It

¹ Dvoyrin G.B., *Unified Holographic Information Theory of the Universe. Scientific Religion*. St. Petersburg: INTAN Publishing House, 1997. p. 17 7.

² *Constitution of Gremlandia, Part II, Article 27.*

³ Svetlov R.V. *Ancient Pagan Religiosity*. St. Petersburg: VGK Publishing House, 1993, p. 19.

It exists in humans, animals, and plants. Instinct is extremely necessary for the survival of animals in the complex system of nature. Instinct is good because it does not force you to think. For every unexpected situation that arises in life, instinct offers a ready-made solution and plan of action. Instinct is the mechanism that weaves animals into a natural existence, where everything is balanced and self-sufficient. The human mind has pushed instincts into the background and consigned them to oblivion. Humans have begun to stray from the natural rhythm of life and disrupt not only the harmony of the universe, but also their own spiritual balance. Thus, in the "scientific religion," critical thinking and reason are analogous to the biblical original sin. The Gremlanders believe that reason (sin) violates the principle of "survival."

As part of the natural world, humans are obliged to live in accordance with the six spiritual laws that operate in nature in order to maintain balance: the law of the meaning of life, the law of spirituality and morality, the law of happiness, the law of love, the law of goodness, and the law of sin¹.

The law of the meaning of life consists in the instinctive desire to continue one's own species. The other laws serve as a supplement to the first. Man observes the law of spirituality and morality only when he strictly follows the meaning of life, that is, when he reproduces. Happiness is "the presence of opportunities and the desire to fulfil the law of the meaning of life." Love is a person's ability to obtain sexual satisfaction, which contributes to the continuation of life on Earth. A person does good when they purposefully realise the law of the meaning of life. Sin appears when an unenlightened person begins to oppose the realisation of the meaning of life.

Closely related to the six spiritual laws of "scientific religion" is the "Law of Survival and Purity of the Species." It states: "One of the main conditions for the survival of every living species is the natural requirement to preserve genetic purity." The Gremlanders do not want to reproduce spontaneously; they are concerned about the possibility of giving birth to unsuccessful offspring. Questions of eugenics and selection occupy their minds. Speaking at one of the conferences, G.B. Dvoyrin said: "For hundreds of years, there has been an opinion, supported by a number of state laws, that it is forbidden to physiologically and genetically modify humans." Dvoyrin protests against this and calls for

¹ Articles 20–25 of the Constitution of Gremlania.

² Dvoyrin G.B., *Unified Holographic Information Theory of the Universe. Scientific Religion*. St. Petersburg: INTAN Publishing House, 1997, p. 1 55.

³ *International Scientific Conference "Informatisation of Education as a Real Path to Scientific Education of the Spiritual Personality."* 26-27 March 1998, St. Petersburg, conference hall of the International Shaping Federation.

"Improving humanity on the basis of modern scientific knowledge"¹ . How the Gremlanders will "improve humanity" is unclear. Perhaps through cloning and reincarnation, perhaps with the help of aliens, to whom Dvoyrin devoted a significant part of his research, or perhaps through less exotic but more effective methods already tested in the 20th century. Malthusianism in the "scientific religion" of Gremlandia has acquired the status of a religious idea.

Thus, the basis of this clownish state is a very serious religious worldview.

¹ *Ibid.*

Venedy

*Pavel Mezerin,
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A hundred years ago, Christianity was an integral part of Russian life. Russian patriotism at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries unquestionably identified belonging to the Russian nation with the principles of Orthodox Christianity. The idea of "Holy Russia" firmly held sway over people's minds, preventing them from questioning the "divine election" of the Russian people. Ancient Slavic paganism, apart from a few remnants, had practically disappeared by that time, arousing interest only in fairly narrow circles related to history.

To say that the situation is different today is to say nothing. Let no one be misled by the feverish construction of churches throughout Russia. Despite all the talk of spiritual revival, it is more reminiscent of a kind of death throes. The years of atheism have not been in vain, and Orthodox Christianity no longer has a monopoly on human souls. We are living in an era of neo-paganism. Actually, we are not living in it, but only beginning to live in it, as this phenomenon is only about thirty years old. Perhaps the development of a pagan worldview, in the broadest sense of the term, is still ahead of us, but its beginnings are already becoming increasingly apparent today. One such beginning is the St. Petersburg-based Union of Venedi. Quite a lot has been written about this organisation, and quite emotionally. We would like to try to look at them impartially.

"Union of Venedi" is one of the first organisations of its kind in Russia. It was founded in 1990 by Viktor Nikolaevich Bezverkh, a candidate of philosophical sciences, a staunch pagan and an irreconcilable opponent of Christianity. The Union of Venedi preaches a "Vedic worldview" or, in other words, "Vedicism".

What is it?

The term "Vedicism" was introduced in the 1950s by émigré scholar Yuri Mironov, who studied ancient Russian culture for many years and came to the conclusion that Slavic history began in northern India, and that the pagan beliefs of the Slavs were a somewhat crude form of the religion recorded in the sacred books of Hinduism, the Vedas. Although Mironov's works were published only posthumously, he gained fame in 1953 when he announced the discovery of the oldest written monument of Slavic paganism, called the Vlesova Book¹. In his

¹ *The Vles Book. Translation and commentary by A. I. Asov. – Moscow: Manager, – 1994.*

In his research, Mirolyubov proposed looking at ancient history from a completely different perspective. This perspective sparked much debate in academic circles and was not accepted by everyone¹, but in the eyes of adherents of the movement for the revival of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs, which began to form in Russia in the second half of the 1970s, Mirolyubov became a kind of prophet, and the word "Vedicism" became the official name of the neo-pagan doctrine.

The Veneds understand the essence of the Vedic worldview in their own way. They are noticeably politicised. Due to the fact that they identify the Russian idea they adhere to with communism, dialectics has been declared the main principle of the Vedic worldview. According to their understanding, dialectics is "a set of the most general laws of nature's self-development" and shows "the absurdity of ideas about God or anything supernatural (supernatural)"².

This does not mean, however, that the Veneds are absolute materialists. They do have a religious component. During holidays, which are usually held on ancient burial mounds or in forests, religious rituals take place, at least in form: rolling a burning wheel into the water, naming children with pagan names, etc.

According to V. N. Bezverkhy, the Vedic worldview is "a holistic system of views on the world, an understanding of nature, which man continuously learns about, and of society as a just system of relations between people in the course of their life activities"³. He calls this worldview Common Sense.

The Vedic worldview is based on knowledge and common sense. Everything in nature is natural; nature is essence itself, asserts Alexei Tishchenko, one of V. N. Bezverkhy's deputies, in the newspaper *Rodnye Prostory* (the official publication of the Union of Venedi). "The supernatural and mystical arise either in the feverish state of a sick person or in the calculating mind of a cunning deceiver... The Vened-fisherman considered nature to be a self-creating force, continuously creating itself. Svarog is an image of self-creating nature that creates everything, "swaragivaya" without any anthropomorphic personification. Various spheres of nature's manifestation, including in human society, were artistically expressed in hypostases

¹ See Tvorogov O.V. *Vlesova's Book. // Works of the Department of Old Russian Literature. Vol. XLIII, – St. Petersburg. – 1990. – Pp. 170-254.*

² *Native Spaces. – St. Petersburg. – 1994. – No. 1.*

³ *Ibid.*

Svarog – Dazhbog, Khors, Lado, Perun, Stribog, Simargl, Svetovid, Makosh, Veles, Rode"¹ .

In other words, just as a person can be viewed in different guises: father, son, warrior, blacksmith, etc., so Svarog, personifying the forces of all-creating nature, was represented in different guises. The Venedi believe that in the guise of Dazhbog, Svarog is the giver of life, and in the guise of Rod, he is the progenitor of humanity. The Venedi revere Svarog as the supreme, single deity. They are opposed to the monotheism of Christianity and Judaism, but at the same time it is difficult to call their beliefs polytheism. It is rather a transitional state, common to many modern pagans, who sometimes do not notice that their worldview is influenced by the monotheism of Christianity.

The doctrinal doctrine of Vedism has not yet been established. In their appeal to like-minded people who are going to create new communities, the Veneds give them complete freedom for ritual creativity, on the condition that "the Worldview of Common Sense reigns in them." The Union of Veneds is the coordinator of all Vedic communities. It strives to ensure that holidays common to all Veneds are celebrated on the same days, that everyone has a common calendar, and that, if possible, communities are registered with the authorities.

The basic principles of the Union of Venedi are set out in the so-called "Vedic Concept". They are as follows:

- "1. To revere and preserve Nature, to live in accordance with its requirements, to learn the laws of its self-development, to increase scientific knowledge. To resolutely reject any religion, any belief in the supernatural.
2. Preserve the gene pool, maintain the purity of blood. Resolutely reject any concepts of internationalism.
3. Fight for social justice in a human society of full-fledged workers and necessary material and spiritual goods, for the just leadership of all peoples of the world (based on accumulated historical experience).

Resolutely reject false concepts of the equality of all people, the inevitability of class struggle within a single nation, and the right of some nations to dominate others (Christianity, Marxism-Leninism, nationalism)." ²

¹ *Native Lands. – St. Petersburg. – 1993. – No. 4.*

² *Native Lands. – St. Petersburg. – 1994. – No. 3.*

The second and third points are purely political in nature. As already mentioned, the Union of Venedi is a politicised organisation, with at least as much attention paid to the political side as to the religious side. It can be said that religion and politics are two integral components of the Veneds' unified religious and political doctrine.

The Union of Venedi, like other Slavic pagan communities, dreams of reviving the Golden Age of humanity. In their minds, the Golden Age is associated with the mysterious, enigmatic image of pre-Christian Rus, where the cult of ancestors, the cult of one's own clan and family played an important role. In a broad sense, the whole tribe, the whole people, was considered a family. There is no place for strangers or foreigners in the family. The veneration of their people as a single family, protected by their gods, is the main factor in their rejection of internationalism. The Venedi revere the gene pool of the nation as their main value, while resolutely distancing themselves from Nazism. In one of his speeches, the assistant chairman of the Union of Venedi, V. Shalaginov, said: "Due to an obvious misunderstanding, some 'critics' see Hitler's Nazism in all paganism. Explain to everyone that any form of Nazism contradicts the very spirit of Vedism!"¹ The Venedi emphasise their utmost respect for all "true" pagan cultures of the world. They actively cooperate with Vedic communities in Europe. In particular, the Venedi are very proud of their friendship with the German Vedic magazine "Thought and Memory" – the mouthpiece of the pagan communities of Western Europe.

So who is the modern pagan? A patriotic localist, a philosopher, or perhaps a politician seeking a new ideology? There is probably no single answer to this question. Neo-paganism is a very heterogeneous phenomenon and cannot be viewed as a single entity. New pagans often cannot agree among themselves and contradict each other on matters of doctrine. Some focus on politics, while others are very sensitive to nature and environmental issues and try to find a religious basis for their feelings in paganism (this, incidentally, applies to a large extent to the aforementioned German friends of the Venedi, many of whom are members of the Green Party). There are also those among the pagans who, for some reason, cannot organically accept Christianity and see it as the source of all humanity's misfortunes. Of course, absolutely all neo-pagans revere ancient history, study it, and constantly encounter various stereotypes that are ingrained in the mass consciousness.

According to school textbooks, the history of Rus begins with Rurik. The image of a pagan as a madman, overgrown to the eyes, banging his head on the ground in front of a wooden idol, has become a classic. This stereotype,

¹ *Native Lands. – St. Petersburg. – 1993. – No. 1-2.*

Officially imposed since the baptism of Rus, it lives on in the Orthodox Church today, hindering understanding of the religious processes taking place outside its walls.

It is important to bear in mind that not everything in history is as clear-cut as it is presented in educational literature. It is enough to refer to the work of Sergei Lesnoy (a pseudonym, his real surname is Paramonov), a historian popular in pagan circles, "Where are you from, Rus?"¹ to once again confirm the immutable truth: there are as many opinions as there are people. Following in the footsteps of Yuri Mironov, S. Lesnoy attempts to write a preliminary sketch of the history of ancient Rus from time immemorial to Askold and Dir. The author devotes a lot of attention to analysing materials related to the so-called "Vlesova Book", which many neo-pagans actually revere as "sacred scripture".

The Vles Book interprets both historical facts known to science and events not mentioned in Nestor's chronicle. A significant part of it is devoted to the religion of the ancient Rus. It describes customs related to religion, amazingly beautiful poetic images, etc.

The theme of the Vlesova Book is undoubtedly a separate one. In recent years, it has become the subject of various speculations on historical themes. It is well known that there are many doubts about the authenticity of the Vlesova Book. Due to constant criticism of hypotheses about its origin, this topic has become somewhat controversial, and leading experts have begun to avoid it for fear of damaging their scientific reputation. Their position is understandable. There are indeed plenty of reasons to doubt the authenticity of the Vles Book, starting with the language, which has no analogues in historical science, and ending with the extremely unlikely interpretation of some facts concerning the same religion. M.L. Seryakov, a researcher of Russian pre-Christian writing, writes: "The problem of the Vles Book is quite complex, and until scientists have at least one of its tablets at their disposal for comprehensive research, it will be extremely difficult to say unequivocally whether it is genuine or a forgery"².

Be that as it may, a free person has the right to their own mythology. Some defend the Norman theory of the origin of the Russian state, while others argue that the Slavic branch of European civilisation is "historically hopeless". But we must not forget that when a person is attacked, it is natural for them to defend themselves. This applies in full to the Venedi. We are witnessing how such scientific theories and the superficial American culture that is penetrating

¹ Lesnoy, S. *Where are you from, Rus?* – Rostov-on-Don. – 1995.

² Seryakov, M.L. *Russian Pre-Christian Writing*. – St. Petersburg. – 1997. – p. 7.

In all areas of our life, Russian society instinctively reacts by creating historical and patriotic circles, local zemstvo councils, patriotic parties, pagan movements, and national Bolshevism. The growth of localist sentiments as a reaction to Americanisation can be observed today in both France and Germany.

History repeats itself. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, in response to Western influence, the "Union of Russian People," the "Union of the Russian Nation," the "Union of Michael the Archangel," and others emerged one after another in Russia. Fear of the suppression of Russian culture provoked a rise in Orthodox-monarchist sentiments throughout the Russian Empire. Today's Westernisation of the country has given rise to a striking symbiosis in the minds of modern patriots between the ancient Slavic pagan worldview and the Russian idea, which is identified with communism. It is this incomprehensible combination that forms the basis of the ideology of the Union of Venedi. However, it only seems incomprehensible at first glance.

The term "communism" comes from the Latin word "communis" (common). Communism is the ideology and practice of fighting for social justice. Man, as we know, is a social being. The Slavs, according to the Venedi, possess a creative consciousness, a natural sense of higher communist justice. During the long years of Soviet rule, we became accustomed to the idea that "communism" and "Marxism-Leninism" are inseparable. However, the ideas of a communal society have always been present in philosophy in general and in Russian philosophical thought in particular. Suffice it to recall the idea of conciliarity of our Slavophiles or Mikhail Popov's Saratov sect of "commoners," which in the 1830s built its life on communist principles.

The original, primitive collectivism that existed among the Slavs in the pre-Christian era was, perhaps, the main reason why some neo-pagan organisations, including the Union of Venedi, declared communism to be their political ideology and identified it with the Russian national idea. The Vedic idea – the Russian idea – the communist idea. This is what the ideological triad of the Vedists looks like.

The Venedi believe that it is this triad, expressing the idea of social justice for working people, that will ultimately lead all nations to prosperity and well-being. At the end of an interview with Gennady Zyuganov (one of the politicians most respected by the Veneds), the editor of the newspaper *Rodnye Prostory*, A. Boikov, says: "We have heard before that you are guided by dialectics as a method of understanding the world. Today you have confirmed this... from this I conclude that your worldview expresses the deepest aspirations of the souls of the peoples..."

1 See Klibanov A.I. From the world of religious sectarianism. – Moscow: Political Literature. – 1974. – p. 254.

grain farmers." ¹It is worth noting, however, that G.A. Zyuganov himself is more inclined to support the idea of "Orthodox" patriotism.

The term "bread-growing peoples" refers to peoples who have lived by working the land since ancient times, and primarily to peoples of Aryan origin. The meaning of the word "Veneds" is explained as follows: "Veneds are the descendants of farmers, grain growers, those who 'veno venil' (bound sheaves). Anthropologically, these are the Aryan (from the word "orat" – to plough) and Finno-Ugric races of white people, that is, all Slavic, Germanic and Finno-Ugric peoples. Socially, they are labourers, primarily agricultural workers."²

If we talk about the picture of the future as it is presented by the theorists of the "Union of Venedi", we can say that they look to the future with optimism. Of course, they are not satisfied with the current situation in Russia and in the world, but everything should change in the near future. The Venedi have great respect for astrology. According to astrological tradition, in 2003, the vernal equinox will finally pass the constellation of Pisces (the twelfth sign of the zodiac) and settle in the last degree of Aquarius. The controversy over the coming New Era occupies a lot of space in various discussions among neo-pagans. But everyone agrees on one thing: the Age of Pisces will end and the Great Age of Aquarius will begin. "According to the ancient science of geomancy, the sign of Aquarius corresponds to Russia on Earth, with which all of humanity associates hopes for a happy future: after all, Aquarius is the sign of romantic plans and hopes for humanity"³. It is the astrological symbol of Aquarius in the form of two parallel, wave-like lines, symbolising flowing water, that is the official emblem of the "Confessional Union of the Rassenovs – Descendants of the Khlebobovs", also known as the "Union of the Veneds". It is the sign of Aquarius that is depicted on the front page of every issue of the newspaper *Rodnye Prostory* and the magazine *Volkhv*. The symbol of Aquarius is the main symbol of the struggle for the victory of the Vedic worldview, sometimes expressed in poetic form:

"We will triumph under the sign of
Aquarius, We have no need for
Marxism and Leninism, We will cast
aside without regret Catholicism,
Baptism, and Ecumenism."⁴

The absence of Orthodox Christianity in this poetic credo is not surprising. Despite their rejection of "Judeo-Christianity," the Orthodox Church was unexpectedly important to the Veneds.

1 *Rodnye prostory*. – 1993. – No. 3.

2 *Native Spaces*. – 1993. – No. 4.

3 *Native Spaces*. – 1993. – No. 3.

4 *Native Spaces*. – 1994. – No. 1.

"socially close." True, not all Orthodox Christians, but primarily patriotic Karlovtsy and catacomb Christians, that is, groups opposed to the current regime. But there is a fundamental difference between them. Orthodox patriots are, as a rule, monarchists and see the roots of their exceptionalism in Russia's divine election, at the head of which must stand God's anointed. Neo-pagans do not see themselves as mystics, but as historians. They attempt to fill in the "blank spots" in Russian pre-Christian history, often with the help of their own imagination. Just as Orthodox patriots tend to idealise Kievan Rus', pagan patriots idealise pre-Kievan Rus'. The fact that this period is difficult to study gives them free rein and allows them to use their imagination. It is precisely this rich pre-Christian history that gives modern pagans a sense of the greatness of their nation. Perhaps they live in a world they have reconstructed themselves, but should they be condemned for this? A free person has the right to their own mythology.

Indigenists

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How the "Russian Indians" appeared

For 20 years now, people from all over the USSR, who are called Indians and who call themselves Indeanists, have been gathering in the Leningrad region every year. These annual assemblies are called powwows, which among North American Indians means tribal gatherings and celebrations. Along with Indianists from St. Petersburg, Moscow, the Baltic states, Siberia, Ukraine, and Belarus, American Indians sometimes come to the powwow. Russian Indeanists maintain constant contact with them, learning from them how to be true Indians. There are known cases when Indeanists emigrated to the United States and settled on reservations together with Indians.

But Indianists began collecting information about Indians long before establishing ties with American Indians and Indianists in Europe. The roots of Indianism can be found in the novels of F. Cooper and M. Reed, whose heroes, free and honest Indians, captured the minds and hearts of young people. For Indianists, the life of the Indians became something more than a childhood hobby. Their interest in the Indians grew into a desire to get closer to their way of life, learn as much as possible about them, and find people who shared this desire.

In the 1970s, such people from different parts of the USSR began corresponding with each other, and then the idea of a general meeting arose. In 1981, the first powwow took place in the Leningrad region. Since then, it has become a tradition. More and more people gathered at the powwows, and the Indeanist movement expanded. In the 1980s, there was an Indeanist club called Alcatraz in Leningrad. At the same time, an attempt was made to establish a permanent settlement in Siberia, where Indeanists were engaged in cattle breeding.

Currently, there are about 200 Indianists living in St. Petersburg. New borders make it difficult to maintain contact with Indianists in neighbouring countries, but despite the obstacles, every summer they gather together near the village of Tolmachevo in the Luga District of the Leningrad Region.

There are also disagreements among the Indeanists. In 1997, there were two camps at the powwow. The life of one was widely covered in the media, while

while the other brought together those who were unhappy with the profanation of Indianism, when it was presented as a big game that delighted the eye with its brightness and unusualness. But apart from the romance of tent life, there is another side to Indianism, which can be called worldview.

How a powwow is held in Russia

A powwow lasts 1-2 weeks. People prepare for it all year round, because it is a big holiday. They sew tipis (cone-shaped canvas dwellings of the Indians), costumes, moccasins, headdresses, and learn dances. There is no general regime or mandatory activities in the camp, and no one is forced to do anything. At the same time, there are generally accepted rules at the powwow, so order is maintained and no one disturbs anyone else.

Tipis

Indians live in cone-shaped tipis. Each household runs its own economy: they gather firewood and prepare food themselves. Only dead wood is used for firewood. The space inside the tipi is strictly organised. In the centre is a fire, where paper and rubbish are not thrown, as this is considered disrespectful to the living fire. In front of the fire is the so-called altar, on which various items (food, cigarettes, etc.) are placed to be consecrated by the power of the spirits. This ritual is not mandatory. Everyone in the tipi has their own place: the male head of the household, women, children.

Things

All the attributes of Indian life (costumes, pipes, beaded items, bags, etc.) are made by Indianists themselves, based on traditional Indian models found in magazines and special catalogues brought from abroad. Natural materials and high craftsmanship make these items more authentic and closer to 19th-century artefacts than those of American Indians, who have been "infected by civilisation" and use substitutes.

Dances

When setting up camp, a totem pole is erected in the centre, symbolising the centre of the world. All the dances take place around this pole, accompanied by rhythmic songs. The Indianists have their own musicians with special instruments. Some songs are borrowed from American Indians, while others are invented here. There are general and special dances (hunters' dances, women's dances, children's dances). For dancing, ceremonial clothes and feather headdresses are worn, and faces are painted. Dancing, like any other activity, is a ritual.

Names

An Indianist can choose an Indian name for himself, by which he is known in his community. This name (Wolf, Red Wolf, Lynx, Fire, Stream, Wapiti, Arrow) is given for some merit or special qualities; it can be in Russian or another language.

Tribes

An Indianist chooses the Indian tribe that he likes best and feels closest to. He studies its history, mythology, customs, and language with particular diligence and adopts its main colours and symbols. Among the Indianists, there are followers of the Ojibwe, Lakota, Cree, Pony, and other tribes. But at the powwow, there is no division into tribes; the choice of tribe is a personal matter for each individual.

Indianists also have nothing resembling a strict organisation. The main issues of life are decided by a council of elders, but this is not an official body and its decisions are not binding. The elders are veterans of the Native American movement who were there at its inception. But being an elder is not an honorary position; elders are not elected, they are the wisest and most experienced. The elders decide where and when the powwow, or enipi, will be held.

Enipi

This is the name given by the Indians to a purification ritual. They purify themselves of everything that prevents modern man from connecting with the natural world. To do this, they collect stones and heat them. Then they put a polyethylene-covered tent over them, in which the participants in the ritual sit in a circle. At the same time, many recite

words or prayers, including Christian ones. An Indian pipe filled with a mixture of tobacco and various plants, such as sage, willow bark, cornelian cherry, and buffalo horn, is passed among them. The ritual pipe has a world-ordering significance for the Indians.

The religious aspect of Indianism

There is no uniformity of religious views among Native Americans, nor is there a religious cult in the strict sense of the word. In fact, it is impossible to speak of a religion of the American Indians, where religious experience is based on an individual's communication with the spirit. The mythological systems of North American tribes vary greatly. Since Native Americans belong to different tribes and do not form a single community, they have different views of the universe. A Native American does not necessarily accept the mythological system of his tribe. There are also Native Americans who consider themselves Christians. The religious views of many are syncretic, which is not surprising given the general worldview of society. But to accuse Native Americans of inconsistency on this basis is to fail to see what actually unites them and makes them Native Americans.

For them, the world of the Indians is fundamentally different from the world of "white people," society, mass culture, and the establishment. Indians live in harmony with nature; for them, the world is alive, which is expressed in a special attitude towards everything. The awareness of constant contact with the Great Mystery that underlies all life gives deep meaning to every action, sanctifies it.

But despite their dislike of the world of "white people," Indianists live in it and are forced to lead a "double life." Participation in social activities is distasteful to the freedom-loving Indian, as society forces them to play by its own rules, which are contrary to their nature, confining them within the narrow framework of social acceptability. Therefore, Indianists try to isolate themselves from this world and retreat into their own. But it is impossible to completely "leave the game" because, by the will of fate, they find themselves in the world of white people.

Indigenism for them is a path to self-expression, to themselves, a path that they cannot find in the lifestyle accepted by society. Apparently, the question of the degree of religiosity can be asked based on the premise that any existentially significant action has a religious background. Perhaps for many, Indianism is the realisation of religious sentiment. But the main thing they find is their own world, one that is close and valuable to them and opposed to the surrounding establishment.

Thesaurus

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The Spiritual Union "Thesaurus" professes the doctrine of "authenticism." Authenticism, according to its followers, is a special worldview, the essence of which is expressed in the name – authenticus, which in Latin means "genuine, reliable, true to oneself." By following authenticism, a person discovers their true nature. On this path, "every person inevitably discovers that their nature is God-given and that, in accordance with it, they are not only a living and cultural being, but also an immortal spirit."¹The main goal of authenticism is to create a civilisation of God-mankind.

Authenticists prefer to call their teaching not a religion, but a "worldview." However, this teaching has certain religious characteristics. For example, it speaks of a Supreme Spiritual Being—God—about man and about the world in relation to God.

The founder of authenticism was Sergei Petrovich Semenov, a medical psychologist whose religious beliefs, views on world history, and paramedical concepts form the basis of the doctrine. The Spiritual Union "Thesaurus" consists of members of the order (union) – thesaurites and so-called "associates", i.e. those who are interested or sympathetic.

The order is a closed and inaccessible structure, so it is difficult to judge its internal organisation and number of members. Judging by the attendance at Semenov's lectures, it can be assumed that there are only a few dozen members. Thesaurus is not registered as a religious organisation, but its educational, medical and political substructures are officially registered. All these organisations, whose "spiritual leader" is S.P. Semenov, are working to create a "civilisation of god-humanity".

In 1984, Semenov created the Studio of Psychic Culture, which was transformed a year later into the Leningrad Club of Psychic Culture "Mir". The club was engaged in the dissemination of ideas of authenticism and published the samizdat magazines "Psychic Culture" and "Kazan Cathedral". In 1987, according to Semenov, the club was closed due to its members' active participation in politics and went underground.

¹ Semenov, S.P. *Authenticity. Theses. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, 1998. p. 8.*

Semenov was always concerned with the mutual influence of ethnic groups, especially Russian-Jewish relations. His club included the groups Sinai and Rossy, which, apparently, were trying to find points of intersection between the two cultures in order to overcome the conflict between them. The idea was not successful: in 1989, the club split, and Sinai and Rossy went their separate ways. Semenov, who always emphatically referred to himself by his full Russian name, Sergei Petrovich, chose Rossy, and from that point on, his performances focused exclusively on Russian pagan themes. At the same time, the Leningrad Men's Club was formed, which later became the basis for a political organisation called the Russian Liberation Movement (ROD). At the same time, the voluntary society "Oasis" was created, which organises Semenov's lecture courses on Russian Veda (another name for authenticity), and the medical cooperative "Vita". In the early 1990s, the Humanist Party of Russia and the Russian Art Foundation were created. The abundance of religious, political, medical, and cultural organisations provides opportunities for political and economic manoeuvring.

Sergei Petrovich Semenov was born in 1952 in St. Petersburg and graduated from the 1st Leningrad Medical Institute in 1976. As Semenov himself says, in the course of his medical practice, he soon came to the conclusion that most modern chronic diseases are the result of an unhealthy lifestyle. Therefore, in his work, he began to pay more attention to promoting health-improving activities.

After a few years, a group of like-minded people gathered around him – enthusiasts of a healthy lifestyle. They explored various health improvement options, such as vegetarianism, yoga, the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, autotraining, etc. However, they soon came to the conclusion that all people are significantly different from each other, and therefore there is no universal healthy lifestyle. Some time later, in the early 1980s, Semenov "discovered the fundamental principle of the need for an individual's lifestyle to correspond to their specific nature – the principle of Authenticity."¹

Over the following years, Semenov and a group of like-minded people researched the "possibilities of authentication" as a way of bringing a person's life closer to their own nature. They came to the conclusion that this nature is complex, and that a person can only be separated from society, "from the fabric of the entire Universe," with a large degree of convention. The following definition of a person was formulated: "A person is the World converging in an individual history."² Along with this formula, Semenov's group also came up with a "distinctive

¹ Semenov, S.P. *Authenticity*. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, 1998.

² Semenov, S.P. *Authenticity*. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, 1998.

understanding that the painful condition of modern people is largely determined by the crisis state of society – civilisation."¹ Authenticists linked the physiological state of humans to the social processes taking place in the world.

Starting with the problems of a healthy lifestyle, authenticism has turned into a system of ideas covering all aspects of human life, that is, a "worldview," as the authenticists themselves define their teaching. Another version of the name carries a greater religious connotation: "Russian Veda," which Semenov defines as "the unique experience of spiritual ascension of the Russian people at the end of the Soviet era."

It is no coincidence that the doctrine has several names: the authenticists seek to encompass many aspects of human life. The main ones are religion, politics, philosophy and medicine.

From the perspective of authenticists, the treatment process has a spiritual basis – personal authentication of a person, which is understood as initiation into a certain religious ideology. In addition, Semenov has developed a number of proprietary treatment techniques: acupuncture programming, resonance psychotherapy, meditative role massage, and "L'chets" ("Home Doctor" – a health regulation system based on the use of "therapeutic phonograms"). He invented a special applicator called "Verizhitsy." All these techniques are practised in several centres created by the Vita medical cooperative.

Semenov's books are aimed at a wide range of readers and, according to the author, are "medical and psychological in nature."

"Tezaurus" is actively involved in politics. In 1990, S.P. Semyonov initiated the creation of the Humanist Party of Russia (GPR), and a little later, the International Coalition "For Humanism!" He is now the ideologist of these organisations. The foundations of his ideology are set out in a number of journalistic articles and brochures, the main ones being "Authenticity – the ideology of Russian revival" and "Russia. Russian order and Russian history".

The religious or "highest, spiritual part" of S.P. Semenov's teachings – "Russian Veda" – is presented in the form of a series of lecture notes from different years, published under the general title "Public Preaching of God-Manhood".²

¹ Semenov, S.P. *Authenticity. Theses*. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, 1998. p. 7

² Semenov, S.P. *Public Preaching of God-Manhood*. St. Petersburg: Istok, 1991.

Thus, authenticity, or Russian Veda, is a religious movement created by people of the Soviet era, the theoretical part of which attempts to synthesise the religious ideas of the East and West with the personal religious experience of its founder.

In practical terms, the teaching requires both work on personal improvement and active participation in the life of society, with the aim of transforming it according to the principles of authenticity. Participation in politics is necessary because the world and man are inextricably linked and, in a sense, represent the same thing, according to the formula: "man is the world converging in individual history."¹ The principles of authentication must be implemented on two fronts at once – internal and external, religious and socio-political.

Speaking of the theoretical ideas of authenticity, the most original part of the teaching is the assertion that human history begins in the future and is directed towards the future: "Life is a purposeful, goal-oriented Being; the essence of Life and Human nature is rooted in the Future, which is God-manhood – a new type of organisation of life on earth, based on Planetary Mind."² Life moves towards the future, towards God-manhood, which not only exists eternally as a goal, but also actively assists this movement by establishing a meditative connection with certain people from the "past".

Human beings are destined to acquire a "supra-individual" structure and become God-human beings, in whose bodies each individual will clearly realise, on a spiritual basis, their belonging to God-humanity and their personal connection with It. This supra-individual spiritual being is called the God of people or God-mankind, and a spiritual connection with it is already available to everyone now.

The opposite of God-man is another supra-individual entity – the devil or devil-man. Its existence is possible on the basis of the selfish part of human nature. A meditative connection can also be established with it, and it exerts its influence on every person.

It should be clarified that a supra-individual subject exists through a "substantial connection based on many individuals"³ and cannot exist separately without their participation. There are supra-individual subjects

1 Semenov S.P. *Authenticity. Key distinctive concepts and ideas*. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, – 1998.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Semenov S.P. *Authenticity. Theses*. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, – 1998. – P. 17.

collectives, cities, nations, planets, galaxies, supergalaxies. There are saints as personal ideal types of one or another human character, as God's plan for a specific person.

Semenov places the Slavic pagan gods into this same system: Veles, Rod, Mokosh, Perun, and others, affirming their reality but interpreting them in his own way as supra-individual subjects. For example, Veles – "I am the god Veli, I am stronger than all the gods" – according to Semenov's interpretation, the name Veles comes from the words "will", "greatness" and "power". According to Semenov, he became the "god of cattle" in a later interpretation because of the proximity of the concept of "greatness" to wealth and abundance, which the early Slavs associated with the ownership of cattle. In fact, Veles is the god of strength, fertility, health, the god of the earth, but also the god of death, which is expressed in his other name, Chernobog. Semenov explains this versatility of Veles as follows: The god of people, Rod, has different faces: his heavenly, bright face is Belobog, or Sventovid, and his underground face is Chernobog, or Veles. That is, God unites in himself the natural processes of life and death. At the same time, according to Semenov's teaching, Chernobog should not be confused with the devil. The devil is the seducer of humanity, while Chernobog is the executor of the natural law of life.

There are many other spiritual entities that exist on a supra-individual substantial level. They can be regarded as gods or demons. According to Semenov's teachings, they influence the lives of people, nature and the entire cosmos, being the embodiment of the elements. Each of them has its own so-called "area of responsibility," which generally corresponds to the Slavic pantheon. The task of the authenticist is to use the power of these deities on the path to god-humanity, that is, to strive for harmony with natural and individual spiritual elements.

Semenov expresses his teachings in the language of Slavic paganism, as this allows him to root authenticism in ancient Russian culture, connect it with the beliefs of distant ancestors, and trace ancestral continuity. The desire to take root in cultural tradition is natural for authenticity based on a "return to oneself." Authentication implies finding one's true nature in a religious, cultural, national, social, and even physiological sense. According to Semenov, Slavic paganism is the original and authentic religion for Russians. At the same time, using national pagan "clothing," Semenov essentially puts his own meaning into pagan terminology.

Semenov's fascination with Russian antiquity became particularly evident after his break with the Sinai group in 1989. Whereas his books and sermons had previously been saturated with medical terminology, from that moment on, the number of terms used in Semenov's speech rapidly increased.

Slavicisms. The following excerpt from the sermon "Velesova veda," which he regularly delivered in those years, is very characteristic: "Today we must understand ourselves, so that we may know and feel our place in the world as it is, and not in error. Therefore, listen!"¹ This is how Semenov himself explains this feature of his speech: "Many of you have noticed that from meeting to meeting I am increasingly using forgotten and Old Russian words... One should not think that I am constructing my speech in imitation of Church Slavonic texts. The truth is this: our spiritual teaching involves meditative reflection on the origins of ethnic culture, and one of the ways... is to use the semantic and sound fields of the language of our ancestors."

In this context, Semenov's teaching about Russia's special role in history becomes clear. Today, our civilisation is divided into two camps. Russia, with its commitment to the parental divine-human principle, is the stronghold of the God-man, due to a number of spiritual and psychological characteristics of its people. For the supranational spiritual essence of Russia, individualism as the basis of social structure is unacceptable. Its principle is the striving for unity and universal humanity. The Russian peoples are a thesaurus (treasure trove) of providential humanistic values, among which the most important is the concept of God-manhood. Russia is a God-bearing country, destined to promote the humanistic rebirth of the entire civilisation.

The modern structure of society, especially Western society, contradicts the principle of authenticity and does not correspond to the processes of increasing integration, that is, the movement of humanity towards unification in God-mankind, and of all living things on Earth into a single organism – God of the Earth. Modern society is built on the principle of individualism, the selfish isolation of both individuals and communities, while the integration process presupposes the unification of interests. The peoples of Russia are called upon to overcome this pre-human, animalistic organisation, "anti-culture" or "pornoculture",² the continued existence of which is destructive to the planet, as it develops inhumanity and suppresses genuine human qualities.

The alternative to anti-culture should be "humanistic transformation,"³ that is, the rejection of the stimulation of increasing needs and their satisfaction. Such a reorientation of human development is impossible without profound upheavals. It implies a restructuring of social production with the abolition of the principle of enrichment and a complete change

¹ Semenov, S.P. *Public Preaching of God-Manhood*. St. Petersburg: Istok, 1991. p. 3.

² *Ibid.* p. 8

³ Semenov, S.P. *Authenticity: Key Distinctive Concepts and Ideas*. St. Petersburg: Russian Art Foundation, 1998.

relationships in society, a kind of spiritual revolution. It will happen thanks to the efforts of authenticists, with the spiritual help of the coming God-manhood.

We live in an era of global crisis, when life on Earth is undergoing another transition: from a state in which the appearance of the planet is determined by the consumerist activities of irrational humans, to a state in which the appearance of the planet will be determined by the interests of god-humanity. This transition implies the self-destruction of the current organisation of life and the establishment of a new one – god-human. Thus, significant changes in the world occur through a qualitative leap, similar to how a caterpillar pupates and then turns into a butterfly. The previous state of the world was "Chaos," the current state is "Cosmos," and the future is "A Living Spiritual World."

The path of authentication (returning to oneself) can be conditionally divided into several stages of self-determination, that is, the conscious formation and reworking of oneself. As a result, other levels and planes of existence open up to a person, and ultimately, the "World Whole" ¹– God. Access to these levels is possible thanks to the psychotechnique or meditation developed by Semenov. It is designed for the perception of the basic (substantial) level of the organisation of the universe. Psychotechnique allows the authenticist to discover a fundamental sense of harmony and wholeness of being. Meditations can be either collective, led by a spiritual leader, or individual. In collective sessions, which are held by "thesaurus" groups at a specific time, participants connect on a substantial level, that is, in spirit, with each other, with the future god-humanity, and with outstanding spiritual leaders of all times and peoples.

From the point of view of an outside observer, authenticism appears to be an eclectic religious system in which S. P. Semenov's own ideas are mixed with Vladimir Solovyov's teachings on God-manhood, Slavic paganism, Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, meditation, and integral yoga (all of which, according to S. P. Semenov himself, influenced him). Jung's theory of archetypes, meditation, and integral yoga (all of which, according to Semenov's own admission, influenced him). Such versatility makes authenticism accessible to the widest possible circle of people engaged in spiritual search: the appearance of scientificity may be attractive to former atheists, Eastern elements are understandable to those who started with yoga, and the term "God-man" should interest those who are somewhat familiar with Russian religious philosophy. The politicised nature, a certain "Perun-like" severity and aggressiveness of the "Spiritual Union "Thesaurus," and its commitment to national culture make this teaching interesting for extremists.

¹ *Ibid.*

Information about unique healing methods and opportunities for recovery attracts elderly people, who, incidentally, make up the majority of "sympathisers" at S.P. Semenov's lectures.

On the other hand, the complexity of the material, the abundance of philosophical terms and Slavisms, and most importantly, the closed nature, sectarian spirit of "Thesaurus" and the very essence of the teaching tend to repel potential followers. In recent years, there has been a decline rather than an increase in the number of people associated with this teaching in one way or another. It is likely that in the future, the most active authenticists will increasingly turn to politics, cooperating with nationally oriented parties. Authenticism itself, as a religious teaching, will survive only among a small group of people, existing as a closed religious and philosophical society.

Rosicrucians

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"A secret society of people with superhuman, if not supernatural, powers; they say they were able to predict future events, penetrate the deepest secrets of Nature, turn iron, copper, tin into gold, prepare *the Elixir of Life*, or *Universal Panacea*, with which they could preserve eternal youth, and more than believed, that they could command *the Elemental Spirits* of Nature and knew the secrets of *the Philosopher's Stone*, a substance that made its possessor omnipotent, immortal and wisest," is how Dr. F. Hartmann describes the Rosicrucian Brotherhood in his work "The Secret Symbols of Rosicrucianism".¹

The history of the Rosicrucian Brotherhood has its roots in the distant past, continuing and developing the ancient traditions of the Gnostics: the Albigensians, Cathars, Essenes, and classical Rosicrucians of the 17th century. There are many versions, assumptions and legends about this movement and its founder, Christian Rosenkreuz (presumably 1378-1484), whose name was used by the classical Rosicrucians of the 17th century to designate the prototype of a new man, reborn in Christ.

The name "Rosicrucians" has long been used to refer to a wide variety of religious and ideological movements. Currently, there are several Rosicrucian organisations, the largest of which are AMORG, the Rosicrucian Community, and Lectorium Rosicrucianum, the International School of the Golden Rosycross, one of whose centres operates in St. Petersburg. This school will be the subject of this article.

In our century, the Rosicrucian Fellowship was founded in 1909 by Max Gendell in Oceanside, California, USA. In 1924, brothers Z. Leene (1892-1938) and J. Leene (1896-1968) joined the Dutch branch of the Rosicrucian Fellowship in Haarlem. In 1930, Mrs. H. In 1935, they created an independent Rosicrucian movement – the Rosicrucian Mystery School, founded and led by J. Leene, who took the pseudonym Jan van Rekenborg. Since 1936, the world centre of the Rosicrucians has been the city of Haarlem (Holland), where 16 like-minded people built a small temple between 1936 and 1953. Since 1945, the society has been

¹ Manly Palmer Hall. "An Encyclopedic Presentation of Masonic, Hermetic, Kabbalistic, and Rosicrucian Symbolic Philosophy." SPIKS, St. Petersburg, 1994, p. 505.

known as the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, acting as a "Gnostic Spiritual School."

Jan van Rekenborg and Kataroza de Petri (H. Stock-Hauser), his spiritual companion, wrote and published a number of books, which are still being reprinted today.

The main theme of Reikenborg's works is the Gnostic Path, interpreted as the only possibility of salvation. The author often refers to the manifestos of the Rosicrucians of the 17th century, to the Gnosis of Hermes Trismegistus and other Gnostic texts, and conducts a comparative study of Gnosis and the Christian Gospels. The Rosicrucians also draw on the works of Rudolf Steiner, Max Gendell and Antoine Gadal.

In Russia, the Rosicrucian movement was founded in the second half of the 18th century. At that time, there were several Masonic lodges in Russia. The well-known Russian Mason Ivan Grigorievich Shvarts managed to establish contact with a group of Rosicrucians in Germany, and in 1782 he returned to Russia to convey the new idea to Russian Masons. The Rosicrucian Order, founded in this way in Russia, was secret, and only the most influential Freemasons knew of its existence. With the help of the first Russian Rosicrucians, translations of the works of Jacob Boehme, Hermes Trismegistus and other authors were published.

The order did not last long. In 1786, the government banned its activities in Russia. For some time, members of the order met illegally, but they were soon subjected to persecution and execution. The order ceased to exist.

In the 1930s, Jan van Reikenborg and his brother visited Russia. The situation at that time was such that it was impossible to establish a Rosicrucian School there. However, the International Spiritual Leadership always kept Russia in mind as fertile ground for the spread of Gnostic teachings.

In the second half of the 20th century, Gnostic ideas reached Russia once again. In 1992, an exhibition entitled "500 Years of Gnosticism in Europe" was held in St. Petersburg at the A.S. Pushkin Museum-Apartment, organised by the Amsterdam Library of Gnostic Literature. One of the School's students gave a lecture on the Gnostic teachings of the Rosicrucians and the Lectorium Rosicrucianum Spiritual School. A small group of like-minded people gathered who decided to follow these teachings, and thus the St. Petersburg centre of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum was created. The first students studied by correspondence. The International Leadership of the School, consisting of students who knew Russian, organised the Russian Commission at the Dutch centre of the School. Members of this Commission translated the necessary

literature into Russian and sent it to students in St. Petersburg. Currently, the Russian Commission provides ongoing assistance to the Russian Directorate, which includes the St. Petersburg and Moscow Centres.

The teachings of the Rosicrucian Lectorium are based on the concept of the existence of two orders: the earthly natural order known to us, which includes life and death, and the original Divine order (in the terminology used by the School – "dialectics" and "statics"). The Gnostic teachings of the Rosicrucians are based on the idea that the last remnant of the divine world, called in the School the "spiritual atom spark" or Rose of the Heart, remains dormant in man. Gnosis addresses two categories of people: first, people with an active Spiritual Spark, in order to return it, once lost, back to the Absolute of divine Life; second, people with a dormant Spiritual Spark, in order to awaken it as the first condition for return. In the Gnostic sense, only people who are receptive to Gnosis, and not individuals of a dialectical nature, can be saved. In the teachings of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, there is a strict distinction between the original, completely divine human being and the dialectical human being. The dialectical man lives without any connection to the divine spirit and as a result perishes — with each new reincarnation, a completely new personality appears, which must suffer in the wheel of karma until it realises the need to follow its "divine spark," which releases a force capable of neutralising the experience of the past. It is impossible to completely get rid of one's negative past, but it is possible to curb it to such an extent as to make room for new opportunities. Lectorium Rosicrucianum, recognising the doctrine of karma, asserts that in order to break out of this endless cycle of births and reincarnations and free oneself from the wheel of time, a person must completely change. To do this, one must engage in the process of transfiguration — the change and transformation of the dialectical nature of man, as a result of which the old nature, the egocentric consciousness, must die, and the divine nature, the Christ within man, must awaken. The school points to the path of transfiguration as the only universal Way of salvation, which constitutes the meaning of human existence.

Two main themes can be identified in the Rosicrucian teachings: transfiguration — the transformation or metamorphosis of man — and esoteric Christianity in Rosicrucian symbols.

The path of transfiguration includes the following five main stages:

1. Understanding the true nature of our earthly sphere of existence and experiencing an inner call to return to the divine natural order.

2. A sincere desire for salvation.
3. Initiation of the egocentric personality to serving its inner divine spark, so that the process of salvation may be realised.
4. A new attitude towards life, accepted and implemented spontaneously, at the call of the inner divine spark.
5. Accomplishment: rebirth in the original field of life.

The Rosicrucians assert that the transfigurative teachings given by the Lectorium Rosicrucianum are embedded in the teachings of all great religions. In the Bible, for example, they see the concepts of two natural orders, the divine principle in the human heart, and the path of transfiguration in the following phrases: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

The Rosicrucians are convinced that this path, which all religions pointed to in their original form, can indeed be followed. The Spiritual School notes that the Way, the Truth, cannot be transmitted by any teacher or initiate, because universal teachings are never transmitted either in writing or orally. Living truth is not a word, but a force; it cannot be known, it must be felt. Truth was, is, and will remain unchanging, immovable in relation to our dialectical world. Truth can only be attained through an inner process of transfiguration. The immovable Kingdom of Truth is the Divine Kingdom to which man aspires.

The key to Gnostic discipleship is "all-encompassing Love" as a life position. This love must be "neutral, infinite, immeasurable." The disciple must understand that it is not his love that must be neutralised, but himself, and, taking no side, he must try not to feel either hatred or love, both towards humanity as a whole and towards each individual person. Students are taught that the world they live in is a world after the Fall, and therefore this world is sinful, false, and the relationships between people that exist in this world are also false. In Rosicrucian teaching, the Fall is a cosmic catastrophe as a result of which man lost all his true qualities and turned into the ego of man — a caricature of his original essence. The goal of the disciples is to return to the original state before the Fall, to revive the original man conceived by God. Disciples must be filled with infinite love for God, because the more of this love they have, which nurtures the original divine Soul, the less love they have for themselves, and then disciples love others as themselves, but "do not follow their lead." If a disciple has been able to achieve such "all-encompassing" love, then the people around him, under the influence of this love,

they too must change. If they do not feel the impulse of this love and are unable to be transformed by its influence, then that is their problem, but not the problem of the disciples of the Spiritual School. Achieving this "unique love" is one of the essential aspects of the discipleship process, as it gives the disciple the strength to save themselves, but this strength does not "work" with the dialectical world. Therefore, the students of the School are not attached to this world and to the results of their activities in it. They strive for neutrality, non-conflict, and maximum detachment from dialectical connections. The Rosicrucians explain that one must learn to relate to people without applying human, subjective judgement to what the disciple considers good or evil. The disciple must understand the relativity of all earthly good and love and no longer rely on them; only then can he free himself from the "sucking vortex of humanism." The Rosicrucians interpret humanism as natural goodness and note its sharp distinction from love for one's neighbour, which developed under the influence of Gnosticism. Humanists are focused on maintaining the earthly world, while the Rosicrucians are focused beyond this world – on the Immovable Kingdom.

The path to salvation cannot be walked alone; there must be a clearly understood and concretely applied group unity that forms a collective nature (a kind of force field) called the Ark, the Heavenly Ship, or the Living Body. Gnostic group unity implies personal dedication to the Living Body with complete self-sacrifice and acceptance of all the consequences of this.

Each "magnetic body" born in the graceful power of Gnosis is included in a large, multi-layered Body that forms a single whole. Limiting themselves to the new calendar, the Rosicrucians refer to the magnetic Body of the Essenes, the various magnetic Bodies of the Manicheans, the Body of the Cathars, the Body of the classical Rosicrucians, and the magnetic Body of the modern Spiritual School, which is in the process of formation.

In 1924, the Lectorium Rosicrucianum began the "Work" – the construction of the magnetic Body. Between September 1936 and 20 August 1953, over a period of seventeen years, the modern Spiritual School prepared the Work and gave it form. The Rosicrucians say that with the indispensable support of the Gnostic brotherhood, they managed to receive the legacy of their predecessors and build the magnetic Body. On 21 June 1953, the modern Body of the Spiritual School was completely ready, and on 20 August of the same year, it appeared on the world stage. On that day, a new period began, which was to last forty-eight years, until December 2001. Jan van Rijckenborgh assumed that by this time the modern Spiritual School would be able to reveal its potential, and it would become impossible for an ordinary person to join this group after 2001, since the ark or Heavenly Ship would already have left the shores of the dialectical world and set sail for the shores of the

the Unmoving Kingdom. But this is not the only ship; there will be others. When a group of brothers and sisters leaves the earthly world and passes into the Unmoving Kingdom, it always leaves behind a kind of universal idea contained in a kind of reflective ether. And if later, at some point, a new group of seekers prepares to follow the same Path as the brotherhood that immediately preceded it, it can use this idea and realise it.

The St. Petersburg Spiritual School has only been in existence for six years, and naturally, the students have not had time to achieve significant results in such a short period. Therefore, 2001 is not a "fateful" date for them; they still have a lot of work to do to build the Magnetic Body of their School.

This process consists of seven phases:

1. the beginning of the formation of the group;
2. initial contact with Gnosis;
3. development of Gnostic radiation;
4. breakthrough and foundation of the Shambhala vacuum;
5. unification with magnetic circuit, in which includes all schools of liberation from the past;
6. the development of a new sphere of life;
7. complete liberation.

The Magnetic Body of the School is a light-filled, life-giving field that reveals the risen Christ among Rosicrucian disciples, and therefore becomes Christ-centred. Rosicrucians call the Church's teaching about Christ's atoning sacrifice a "colossal deception" and "false doctrine"¹. For the disciples of the Spiritual School, to be part of Christ's Resurrection means to realise the same saving reality in their own lives. A one-time sacrifice must take place within the person themselves, and only then will the Light be revealed in them – the second coming of Christ will take place. Christ is understood not as a personality, but as "Light", "the power of radiation". Under the influence of the Light of Christ, the old, dialectical person in the student dies and a new one is born. The process by which everything old dies and everything new and divine is resurrected is called the Mystery. The Rosicrucians assert that pure, uncorrupted Christianity, a universal teaching, is the original religion.

¹ Jan van Rijckenborgh. *Catharsis de Petri. Universal Gnosis. St. Petersburg, 1994, pp. 112-113.*

have been preserved exclusively in the mysteries. The School of the Golden Rosycross is a reflection of this universal teaching in Europe.

A disciple who has freed himself from the slavery of the "ego" and placed friendship with the Lord above all else is called a friend of the Lord, a Guardian of the Kingdom of God. He continues to live in this world, but becomes not of this world. Light is born in him and he becomes a pentagram. For the Rosicrucians, the pentagram is a symbol of Light, a symbol of the divine human being. For such a person, there is no longer any time, space, or limitations. Having overcome the Path of Transfiguration, the disciple becomes a divine human being, best compared to a bright and shining cluster of Light that can take on various forms or manifest itself completely without form.

The work of the Spiritual School takes place in two spheres: in the material sphere and in the vacuum of Shambhala. The Spiritual School operating in the material sphere is called *the Militant Church* on earth, in the sense that each disciple fights with his dialectical nature and, in the process of transfiguration, comes to overcome the world and be born in Christ. In the vacuum of Shambhala, where the disciple overcomes death, *the Overcoming Church is active*.

Embarking on the path of Rosenkreutz, the student begins to perceive the immortal soul, as the mortal soul diminishes accordingly. At the moment of death, the immortal soul separates from his being and enters the vacuum of Shambhala — the outer portal of a new sphere of life. Having lost his body, the disciple continues the work he has begun beyond this world — in the vacuum of Shambhala, which is a bridge between the dialectical world and the Immovable Kingdom. Here dwells the Universal Brotherhood of Christ — the souls of all who have overcome the world in the process of transfiguration at different times and in different places. In the vacuum of Shambhala, a breakthrough to the complete rebirth of the Soul takes place, after which a person becomes a representative *of a new race*, worthy of entering a new sphere of life. The number of representatives *of the new race* is obviously small — salvation is available only to the chosen ones. Souls that are not ready to enter the new sphere of life are given the opportunity for another incarnation on preferential terms. Their lives unfold in such a way that they enter the field of the School early and complete the Work begun in their previous life.

The Golden Rosicrucian School in Russia is registered as an interregional public organisation — the Philosophical Society of Rosicrucian Followers (the St. Petersburg branch is not yet registered). The School offers its students a religious path to restore the original Spiritual Man.

The Rosicrucians have *temple services*. The St. Petersburg Spiritual School does not yet have its own temple, so services are held in a regular

classroom. According to the students, this is how it works: the leader reads a text containing excerpts from books and comments – something like food for thought. Classical music (Gluck, Schubert, Rossetti, etc.) is played, matching the mood of the texts. The students listen while seated. After the text is read, everyone sings temple songs with symbolic content.

Reikenborg, referring to quotations from the Gospel in his works, calls them mantras. For example, the words of the Lord: "This cup is the new covenant in My Blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20) are called the Grail mantra¹.

The Rosicrucians of Lectorium Rosicrucianum have their own sacraments – the sacrament of baptism (Christian baptism is not recognised as valid), the sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of preparation for death, about the rites of which nothing is known. They have their own burial rite, about which it is only known that cremation is preferred. The St. Petersburg School does not perform sacraments, as it does not yet have any high-ranking students who are authorised to perform sacraments, nor does it have a temple.

The Golden Rosicrucian School conducts classes with students, temple services, and other events at the A.S. Pushkin Central Children's Library in St. Petersburg, located at 33 Bolshaya Morskaya Street, where it rents space.

Lectorium Rosicrucianum operates as a multi-level School. Two or three times a year, so-called open lectures are held, at which students talk about the Spiritual School and answer questions from the audience. Those who show interest in the teachings are offered an introductory course consisting of 12 "information letters". Lectures are held once a week – two letters are read, after which there is an opportunity to ask questions on the topic of the letter that has been read. After completing the introductory course, one can become a member of the Spiritual School. Membership in the St. Petersburg Spiritual School is mandatory and lasts for at least one year. Members of the School study the recommended literature and have the opportunity to establish closer contact with the School's energy field. If, after a year of membership, a person expresses a desire to become a student of the School, they may be given this opportunity after a preliminary interview. For those who do not feel ready for discipleship (the main goal of which is the realisation of the Transfigurist teaching), but nevertheless would like to remain in the School's field, membership can last as long as desired. Both disciples and members pay fixed monthly fees.

There are seven stages of discipleship, which are not usually discussed. Only the first two stages are known: preparatory and probationary.

¹ Jan van Rijkenborg. *Catarosis de Petri. Universal Gnosis. Saint Petersburg, 1994, p. 106.*

Preparatory apprenticeship implies that after studying the course of lectures and recommended literature, the interested person can undergo a preliminary apprenticeship period. During one year, the candidate must comply with certain requirements: 1) not to smoke or consume alcohol; 2) not take any spiritual or other drugs; 3) switch completely to a vegetarian diet; 4) exclude all synthetic substances from food and medicines; 5) not wear fur or leather clothing; 6) fast once a week; 7) live very moderately; 8) attend School events – temple services and conferences; 9) support the School as much as your financial situation allows; 10) be prepared to participate personally in the activities of the School. Students of the Spiritual School are not recommended to watch television.

Probationary discipleship assumes that fulfilling these requirements has already become an inner necessity, a way of life for the disciple. At this stage, the disciple's steadfastness in choosing the Path is tested. He will have to resolve all his doubts and make a final choice either in favour of the School or in favour of the dialectical world. Apprenticeship in the School is incompatible with membership in any occult society, other order, or political party. Followers of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum must completely break with the Christian Church.

The Christian Church is referred to as a "caricature" that has lost its essence and retained only its form. It is a collection of countless churches that differ from one another, whose only common thesis is the assertion that Christ is the Head of the World. But these churches cannot agree on how to follow this Head of the World, how to confess Christ. And only the Gnostic Spiritual School is the "only universal Church" that recognises, confesses and accepts Christ as the Head of the World with all the consequences. Church mysticism and all theology "have no right whatsoever to be called by the name of Jesus Christ" ¹. The true meaning of the Gospel can only be understood through the prism of the Universal Teaching.

Racial religions and all sacred writings of individual races (the Old Testament, for example) always abuse the Universal Teaching for their own purposes within this world.

The Rosicrucians assert that all religions, parties, science and art have the goal of exerting pressure on people, distancing them from true life, knocking them off the Path and keeping them in a state of fundamental ignorance. The life of a person, who is subject to the influence of these institutions, passes in

¹ Jan van Rijckenborgh. *Catharsis de Petri. Universal Gnosis. Saint Petersburg, 1994, p. 117.*

organisational deception. Only by freeing oneself from this influence and following the Universal Teaching can a person find true salvation.

There is strict internal discipline in the School. It is emphasised that adepts are not required to submit unconditionally; they are always given the opportunity to make their own choices. If the School's "recommendations" become an internal, conscious necessity for the adept, then he will make the right choice – in favour of the Universal Teaching. The Rosicrucian School demands "all or nothing." Compliance with the so-called "recommendations" governing the lifestyle of students is, in fact, a necessary condition for discipleship. A student may choose not to follow the "recommendations," but then his progress along the Path becomes impossible.

During their apprenticeship, adepts undergo initiation rites at various levels. At each stage, they are given specific tasks to complete. If an apprentice believes that these tasks have been completed and feels ready to move on to the next level, they inform the School's leadership. A Russian Commission consisting of students of the higher degrees arrives in St. Petersburg from the Dutch Centre and conducts interviews with the students. At the interview, the candidate learns what tasks will be set for him at the next stage. At each stage, students have a limited amount of information, so they have no idea what "surprises" await them on the Path. Naturally, the higher an adept advances in the stages, the greater their knowledge of the essence of the Universal Teaching. In addition to published literature that is available to everyone, the Spiritual School uses literature that is not accessible to a wide range of readers. These are texts written anonymously by adepts of the higher stages.

There is a clear hierarchy in the Spiritual School, the existence of which is not hidden, but information about which is closed to the uninitiated. There is information that the "Universal Brotherhood" opens through three Services or "Temples" of the Rosicrucian Order: the "Antechamber" (Discipleship), the Higher School of Consciousness (Prophecy) and the Apostolic Circle (Apostolate) – since 1951¹, about which nothing is known.

According to the rules of the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, only those who want and are able to perform this Work, those who, as they say in the Spiritual School, are able to "stand on the carpet," can be admitted to the Work. It is the duty of the students to carefully ensure that there are no students who are only enrolled in the School. If a student indulges in the manifestation of his "ego," the other students ignore ("block") this manifestation so that no dispute arises from within, as this

¹ *Rosenkreuzer//Handbuch Religioese Gemeinschaften. – Guetersloh, 1993. – p.489.*

harm the magnetic Body of the School. The student is forced to follow the established rules, otherwise he will fall out of the School's field and be removed from it.

Lectorium Rosicrucianum reports that it currently has students in 64 countries (about 12,000 students and about 3,000 members). In many countries, there are temples and centres for holding conferences.

The spiritual leadership of the International School of the Golden Rosycross is carried out by the disciples of Reichenberg. In countries where there are large Centres, there is also a Spiritual Leadership. In the St. Petersburg centre, there is a three-person Directorate to deal with organisational issues, while spiritual leadership is provided by the Dutch Centre (Russian Commission). The St. Petersburg School has more than 100 members.

The School pays special attention to the education of the younger generation (aged 6 to 18). The youth section has its own international centre, Novarosa, in the Netherlands. The International Leadership of Lectorium Rosicrucianum also runs three general education schools in the Netherlands – the Jan van Reekenborg Schools.

The St. Petersburg School of Lectorium Rosicrucianum holds classes with two groups of children (older and younger) once a month. These are mainly children of the School's students and their acquaintances. The Rosicrucians try to neutralise the children's ego by communicating with them from an impersonal standpoint.

Young members of the School are introduced to the basic concepts of Gnostic teaching through fairy tales and stories. When the children grow up, the meaning of the teaching is explained to them. One can only become a student of the Spiritual School upon reaching the age of 18.

Lectorium Rosicrucianum believes that from early childhood, Russian people are influenced by the Gnostic messages contained in fairy tales. Many fairy tales that have survived from ancient times speak in a secret language based on complex cosmology and represent epics of initiation. Thus, the Rosicrucians see Gnostic symbols in the characters who play a central role in Russian fairy tales. The Firebird, for example, is a symbol of the resurrected original divine Man; Koschei the Immortal symbolises the higher "I" of man, which can only be defeated with great perseverance and caution; Vasilisa the Wise is a symbol of the new, eternal soul. According to the Rosicrucians, the main idea of Russian fairy tales is to awaken the original Atom in the human heart and lead it forward.

The Rozekruis Pers publishing house, headquartered in Haarlem (Netherlands), publishes books by Jan van Rijckenborgh and Katharina de Petry in Dutch and other languages, as well as works of a Gnostic nature

by other authors. Jan van Rijckenborgh's "The Revelation of Gnosis in Our Days" and Jan van Rijckenborgh and Katharina de Petri's "Universal Gnosis" have been published in Russian. The magazine Pentagram is published every two months in several languages, including Russian.

Brahma Kumaris

Elena Isakova

The World Spiritual University Prajapita Brahma Kumaris is the full official name of the organisation that will be discussed in my presentation. Time is limited, so I will try to give only a brief description of this movement.

First, a little history.

The founder of the movement is considered to be the Indian jeweller Lekhraj, born in 1876 into a teacher's family. In the late 1930s, he began to receive visions, which he considered to be divine revelations and which formed the basis of the Brahma Kumaris ideology. From that moment on, Lekhraj decided to devote himself entirely to God; he ceased his business activities and donated all his funds to the organisation of a community of followers. Soon he took a new name, "Brahma," which means "Creator." This name was given to Lekhraj because it is believed that, using his body, the deity Shiva creates a new world. It is through Lekhraj's mouth that Shiva gives people Divine Knowledge, by following which they attain a new spiritual birth. All of Lekhraj's followers now become his spiritual children, born from the "mouth of Brahma." They call themselves "Brahma Kumars" and "Brahma Kumaris," meaning sons and daughters of Brahma. Lekhraj receives another title, "Prajapita," which means "Father of Humanity." In 1950 (according to other sources, in 1951), the community, led by the teacher, moves from Pakistan, which until then was part of India, to the town of Abu (Rajasthan state). Here, in a picturesque location on top of Mount Abu, the official residence of the Prajapita Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, known as "Madhuban" ("Honey Forest"), has been located since 1952.

After Lekhraj's death in 1969, leadership of the movement passed to a woman named Radha (spiritual name Yagadamba Saraswati). Since then, women have been appointed to leadership and responsible positions in the movement, as they constitute the overwhelming majority of its members and, according to the Brahma Kumaris, are naturally endowed with deeper faith, modesty, tolerance and true piety. With the death of Lekhraj, the sessions of revelations from the deity Shiva did not cease. Since 1969 and to this day, the medium has been an Indian woman ^{named Dadi} Gulzar, through whose mouth the deity Shiva continues to impart Spiritual Knowledge to the students of the AUM.

1 The word "Dadi" is usually translated as "elder sister."

The first WSU centres outside India were established in 1971 in Hong Kong and London. In Russia, the first Brahma Kumaris centre appeared in 1989, and the St. Petersburg centre has existed since 1990.

Currently, the World Spiritual University Prajapita Brahma Kumaris is an international organisation. According to the movement itself, the University has 4,000 Centres in 72 countries around the world, where more than 300,000 students are enrolled. There are 11 Brahma Kumaris Centres in the countries of the former USSR, 6 of which are located in the Russian Federation. Two Centres (St. Petersburg and Pushkin) are located in our city. The exact number of students at the St. Petersburg Centre is unknown, but judging by the attendance records, there are about 300 regular students. The St. Petersburg Centre of the VDUPBK is headed by General Director Didi Santos, who is of Indian origin.

Brahma Kumaris is actively engaged in missionary work. Organising meetings with intellectuals and representatives of city and district authorities, as well as holding regional and international conferences, are among the most common methods used by the movement to attract new members and establish authority among government and public figures. References to a certain "consultative status" with the UN and repeated appearances before audiences by Sister Mohini as the official representative of Brahma Kumaris at the UN, combined with the Russian public's very limited knowledge of the activities and structure of this international organisation, usually create the impression that VDUPBK is part of the United Nations. This often opens the doors of very "high" authorities to representatives of the University and encourages leaders and representatives of city and district authorities, scientific, cultural and educational institutions to participate in various initiatives of the VDUPC. Meanwhile, official United Nations documents note that Brahma Kumaris University has the lowest observer status, which does not imply membership in the UN, and also contain a request that the emblem and status with the UN Economic and Social Council should not be used for promotional purposes in the future, as this may create the impression that the University's activities are supported by the UN¹. To get an idea of the categories of the population targeted by Brahma Kumaris' missionary activity, it is enough to look at the list of participants in any of these events: they are leaders of various governmental and non-governmental organisations, research institutes and centres, social foundations and movements, among which are, for example,

¹ Quotes from official UN documents are given in the book: *"Handbuch Religiöse Gemeinschaften. Gütersloch, 1993. S. 733.*

representatives of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, the Legislative Assembly and Administration of St. Petersburg, the Academy of Medical and Social Management, health care institutions, the Union of Scientists, Engineers and Production Specialists of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region, charitable and women's organisations, etc.

In addition, missionary work is carried out by members of the movement on an individual level. Neat, well-groomed, cheerfully smiling, friendly people in white clothes with golden badges on their chests, calling themselves brothers and sisters, can be found, for example, at exhibitions dedicated to education issues, at various seminars and conferences, and in the corridors of educational institutions.

Brahma Kumaris always and everywhere refer to themselves exclusively as an educational institution. They categorically deny their religious nature and are registered with the judicial authorities as a public organisation. For example, a letter sent from the Brahma Kumaris Centre in Minsk to the Chairman of the Expert Council under the State Committee for Religious and Ethnic Affairs of the Republic of Belarus states: "... common interests... have brought together about 80 Minsk residents... into a public organisation, not a 'religious community', since the goal is not the joint profession of faith and the satisfaction of other religious needs" (see the Law on Religious Associations). The activities of the University are educational in nature, not religious, and have nothing to do with worship (in any form), the repetition of mantras, prayers, etc. The goal and objective is to "realise one's civil, social and cultural rights" (see the Law on Public Associations). ... These goals, inherent to public and educational organisations, are achieved through methods characteristic of them: lectures, discussions, individual consultations, seminars, conferences... The practice of meditation, which is used as one of the teaching methods, has a fundamentally different meaning here. It is nothing more than the formation of a stable positive view of any situation and circumstance based on an understanding of the laws and mechanisms of their occurrence.

It is not possible to become a student at Brahma Kumaris University without prior preparation. If you want to learn more about the University and come to the Lighthouse, where the St. Petersburg Centre of Brahma Kumaris is located, you will be greeted at the door and kindly told that all your questions will be answered after you attend an introductory course of lectures. If you are lucky, after lengthy questioning (who you are, where you are from and why you came), you will still be shown into the foyer or shown the hall for classes and meditation, but they will still refuse to answer your questions about the doctrine. Even if you are suddenly admitted to the classes and hear one of the lectures, you will not immediately understand what it is about, because you do not

have a command of specialised terminology (University students are provided with a special Brahmin dictionary).

The introductory course is held twice a year (in spring and autumn) and lasts about three months. The number of students is determined by the capacity of the hall and is 150-200 people, each of whom fills out an application form and receives a registration card with a personal number, which also serves as a pass to classes. By the end of the course, 30-40 of the most persistent students remain, who, as a rule, join the main stream of permanent members of the movement. An attendance record is kept throughout the introductory course. Those who are absent for a long time are expelled regardless of the reason, and those who have missed several lectures are offered the opportunity to listen to them in their free time on audio cassettes. Each lecture begins and ends with a meditation session. Along with learning the teachings and mastering meditation techniques, future members of the movement also learn unspoken rules of behaviour, adopting them from permanent students of the University, a small group of whom attend the introductory course, maintaining order and helping newcomers to adapt.

The Brahma Kumaris' doctrine is called spirituality or Knowledge and is opposed to all religious systems. But this is only for the outside world. Even students of the introductory course are told: "At first, you were aware that you were going to Brahma Kumaris University. Now you know that you are coming to God." Then, constantly, in almost every class, students are reminded that the University is a place where God Himself gives the spiritual birth necessary for life in the Golden Age and where the "original religion of the deities" is created (or recreated).

Now, very briefly, about the religious doctrine and religious practice of Brahma Kumaris.

The Brahma Kumaris have no books that are considered sacred, no clearly formulated doctrinal documents. Divine revelation is transmitted to members of the movement in the form of murli¹. Murlis are texts written in the first person, addressed by the deity Shiva, which, according to the Brahma Kumaris, were received during his numerous incarnations in the bodies of Lekhraj (sakarmurli) and the current medium Dadi Gulzar (avyaktmurli). These texts, written in symbolic language and containing a large number of repetitions, plots and expressions from Hindu scriptures, are not a systematic exposition of the teachings and are extremely difficult for an unprepared reader to understand. The complete collection of mooli texts has never been published and is virtually inaccessible to the average person. Members and

¹ A masculine word, literally translated as "flute".

leaders of the movement are extremely reluctant and evasive in answering questions about the essential points of their teachings.

Members of the movement greet each other with the words "Om Shanti," which means "I am a peaceful soul." That is, according to the teachings of Brahma Kumaris, a person is a soul. The body is an instrument that the soul uses to perform actions; it is a suit that wears out over time, and then the soul changes it for a new one.

The soul is a substance that has no physical form, a point of light that is not subject to time or space. It is located in the brain, somewhere in the hypothalamus, and its projection is a point in the middle of the forehead, between the eyes. It is on this point in the middle of the forehead that one should focus during meditation.

A person is a soul, and whatever actions they perform, they must constantly remember this. The Brahma Kumaris call this identification of oneself with the point of light in the middle of the forehead spiritual consciousness. Identifying oneself with the body (bodily consciousness) is the greatest delusion and the cause of all the misfortunes that befall a person and humanity.

Beyond our physical world lies the non-physical world (Paramdhama). This is the true home of all souls. Here, in a world of absolute peace and complete silence, where there is neither time nor space, souls exist in their original form – the form of a shining point. From here, souls descend to Earth and return here again.

What happens on Earth, what we call history, Brahma Kumaris calls the World Drama. The World Drama lasts forever, obeying eternal laws that even God cannot change. The world goes through a period of perfection (the Golden and Silver Ages), then through a period of decline (the Copper and Iron Ages), and then back to a period of prosperity, making a circular motion, as it were. This circular motion from the Golden Age to the Golden Age is called the Cosmic Cycle. One Cosmic Cycle lasts 5,000 years and repeats itself exactly an infinite number of times. During each Cycle, a strictly defined number of souls descend into the world, take on a body, go through a series of rebirths, and rise again to the incorporeal world, each of which plays a unique role prescribed only for it, which a person cannot change in any way. This means, for example, that there is a soul that must be born in the Copper Age every Cycle, bear the name Christ, and be the founder of the Christian religion.

Now, according to the teachings of Brahma Kumaris, humanity has entered a special period called the Transition Age. The teaching about this culminating stage of the Cosmic Cycle is of exceptional importance, since

it determines the consciousness, behaviour and lifestyle of the students of the University.

The Transition Age is a special time at the junction of two Cosmic Cycles. It is now that God descends into the world. He has a specific name — Shiva. God is also a soul, a spark of light. He differs from other souls only in his power and purity (since he does not take birth) and his special role in the World Drama. His role is to turn the wheel of the World Drama from the Iron Age to the Golden Age of the New Cycle. In order to accomplish this task, Shiva must purify matter and souls. The purification of matter occurs through the destruction of the world in which we now live, as a result of numerous natural disasters, terrible cataclysms, civil and world wars, which will end in a nuclear catastrophe. And the purification of souls occurs through the burning of karmic accounts accumulated as a result of numerous rebirths. Shiva purifies all souls without exception and takes them to the Disembodied World. But this does not mean the final exit of souls from the cycle of births and deaths. Under no circumstances does the soul receive complete liberation; it is doomed to play its role on the stage of the World Drama forever. In this situation, the best fate a soul can dream of is to be born in the Golden Age and live in accordance with its nature: happily, freely, carefree for half of the Cycle (2500 years), but few are worthy of this fate.

Initially, there are two categories of souls. Some souls assimilate the teachings of Brahma Kumaris, establish a personal relationship with God, and destroy their karmic accounts by fulfilling all of Shiva's prescriptions. Such souls will pass into the Disembodied World painlessly (during the period of catastrophe and suffering, Shiva will entertain them with visions). Other souls will have to endure all the horror of the period of destruction and purify themselves through suffering. The first souls are rewarded with the chance to be born in the Golden and Silver Ages, where there is no suffering, where only beautiful princes and their servants live in wealth and abundance. The second group will be born eternally into an age of suffering. Souls belonging to the first category are called "children of God" or "brahmins" in Brahma Kumaris. All other souls receive the title of "stepchildren."

No one is given to know what kind of soul they are. Shiva gives Revelations to all. But not everyone is given to hear the Knowledge; not everyone who hears it is given to know God and understand everything He says; not everyone has the strength and desire to follow the advice He gives. Only those who have already met Him in the past Cycle, who have already listened to the Knowledge, who have already walked the path of transforming people into deities, will come to the Supreme Father.

So what does all this mean for a particular person? If a person living in the Transition Age hears the Revelation, accepts it, and becomes a follower of the Movement, then he can already hope that he belongs to

the chosen caste of "Brahmins". But this is not enough to become happy: one must earn a positive income, which is a ticket to the Golden Age. Brahma Kumaris University offers a method called "Raja Yoga" or "Royal Yoga," which is yoga that makes one a king of the Golden Age. Raja Yoga is an individual religious practice that requires a person to: 1) meditate daily; 2) devote themselves completely to Shiva; 3) serve without limit to spread Knowledge.

1. Meditation, as understood by Brahma Kumaris, is the constant "churning" of Knowledge, i.e., repeating certain moments of the teaching in the mind and reflecting on them. The best time for meditation is considered to be between 2 and 4 a.m., when Shiva gives blessings and strength. Daily group meditations in class in the morning (before work) or in the evening (after work) are also mandatory and are conducted in conjunction with listening to a new murl. Daily meditation is not limited to night hours and class sessions. Students should strive to use any time when their minds are not occupied with work for meditation. They should remain in spiritual consciousness and reflect on themselves, God and the World Drama while walking and travelling on public transport, while doing housework and physical work, while eating and performing hygiene procedures, etc. They should strive to perform their duties quickly and efficiently in order to save time for meditation. In addition, it is prescribed to control one's thoughts six times a day at specific times (at 7:00, 10:30, 12:00, 17:30, 19:30, and before bedtime). To do this, one must stop all activities and focus the mind on thoughts of God for 2-3 minutes. If you can do this instantly, then everything is fine, but if your thoughts keep returning to earthly problems, then your meditation is not successful.
2. Devotion to Shiva means in practice that a person who has decided to devote himself to God renounces everything that he previously called "mine," including his own "I." The body, mind, material possessions — all this now belongs to Shiva and should be used only at his behest, according to his advice. God's advice is called srimat and is the spiritual law for the practitioner of raja yoga. By dedicating oneself to the Supreme, a person entrusts himself completely to Him and no longer has the right to listen to the voice of his reason or the advice of others. From now on, srimat regulates practically all aspects of his life. Here are some of the basic srimats: Srimat on chastity prescribes complete abstinence from intimate relationships. Srimat on cleanliness prescribes certain rules of personal hygiene, for example, after each visit to the toilet, it is recommended to take a shower, or at least wipe the body with a wet towel and change clothes. Srimat on nutrition prescribes not

only a vegetarian diet, but also the method of purchasing food, the method of preparation, and the amount of food consumed. For example, university students are told that one chapati (a small, thin flatbread made from wheat flour) per meal is sufficient to maintain the body's vital functions. The Shrimad prescribes wearing only white clothes. The Shrimad on overcoming sleep prescribes sleeping no more than 4 hours a day, etc. The Shrimad on dispassionate attitude towards reality and detachment is interesting. It regulates a person's attitude towards the world and the people around them. The ideal relationship between people is based on the principle: "We are actors playing in the same play. A good actor performs the necessary actions and says the necessary words, but he never enters into personal relationships. He should not have any attachments, even to his relatives, because tomorrow he will play a completely different role."

3. Unlimited service means that everything a person has (material resources, time, etc.) is devoted to God's work, to spreading the Revelation, that is, to the Movement. The ideal is service that lasts 24 hours a day (meditation even in sleep).

Every student at the University should strive for this ideal, because by accepting the teachings of Brahma Kumaris, they enter the race. Since the number of souls destined to be born in the Golden Age is strictly limited (916,108). It is precisely when all of them hear the Revelation and accept it that the terrible period of destruction will begin, marking the end of the current Cycle and the beginning of the New One. When will this happen? According to the teachings of Brahma Kumaris, the Transition Age lasts approximately 100 years, with about 30 of them necessary for the purification of matter. That leaves approximately 70 years. The beginning of the Transition Age is considered to be 1937 — the beginning of Lekhraj's ministry. The exact date of the beginning of the period of destruction is unknown. It is only known that as long as Shiva comes into the medium's body and gives revelations, that moment will not come. Currently, Shiva's visits to the medium's body are becoming increasingly rare and less prolonged. The Brahma Kumaris explain this by the fact that almost all the necessary Knowledge has already been given. Shiva's meetings with his spiritual children take place in Madhuban (at the University residence), and the dates of the meetings are communicated to them by the transmitters. Usually, a series of such sessions, called a season, is announced in advance. When the season comes to an end, students eagerly await news of whether Shiva will come again. When the visits cease, what is called the end of the world in the scriptures of various religions will come. University students are told that there is still time to earn an income, but very little remains. One of the lectures states: "The sign 'Too late!' has not yet been posted, but the sign 'Late!' is already hanging."

In addition to individual practice of Raja Yoga, University students are required to actively participate in the life of the Movement. Shortly before the end of the introductory course, prospective students are shown Baba's House (House of God; "Baba" means "Father") and introduced to one of the main rituals of the Brahma Kumaris. Baba House occupies a small room with a separate entrance in Secondary School No. 100, which, along with a hall for murli and meditation, has two other special rooms: Baba's Room and a room for preparing bhog (food offered to Shiva). The audience is told that Baba's House is a place where a special spiritual Brahmin birth takes place. It is not known whether there is any ritual marking this spiritual birth, but several times a year, on certain days, group birthdays are solemnly celebrated. Here, in Baba's House, in a room specially designated for this purpose, every Thursday (Thursday is considered a special day by the Brahma Kumaris – the day of God), special pure food is prepared in meditation, which is then offered to Shiva after the morning and evening classes. The Bhoja offering ceremony takes place as follows: the food is placed in special dishes on a table designated for this purpose and covered with an elegant white cloth. One of the sisters, who is leading the class on that day, conducts a meditation, and then the food prepared in advance with a piece of Bhoga added is distributed to the students and eaten reverently. It is believed that this ritual allows souls to receive special strength and grace. In cases where the ritual of offering Bhoga is performed by the General Director of the Centre, the students receive Bhoga from her hands as a special blessing, receiving her minute gaze, which, according to the Brahma Kumaris, gives everyone the opportunity to feel the vibrations of Shiva. In the Baba Room, each student can sit alone with a large, life-size image of Lekhraj and a photograph of Dadi Gulzar to meditate while looking into the eyes of these two mediums. The Brahma Kumaris attach special importance to the gaze, or drishti. It is believed that the gaze, like a mirror, reflects the soul. Consequently, through the gaze of the mediums, which reflects Shiva himself, everyone has the opportunity to establish direct contact with him and receive support and strength from God.

After completing the introductory lecture cycle, newcomers join the general stream of University students and attend morning (7 a.m.) or evening (6 p.m.) classes at the Lighthouse every day (including weekends). The duration of the murli class is about 2 hours. One hour is devoted to reading and explaining the murli, which is preceded and followed by half-hour meditation sessions. Only the head of the Centre or one of several specially trained sisters has the right to read and explain the murli. Students must not only understand the meaning of a particular dogma, but also memorise almost verbatim all the phrases that appear in the mooli to express it. Therefore, the reading of the mooli is often interrupted by questions, which students must answer with quotations from previously heard revelations. Attendance at classes is strictly enforced.

controlled. Those who have missed several weeks must write explanatory notes stating the reasons or personally report the reasons for their absence to the head of the Centre. In the case of particularly long absences, the student is denied admission to the murli class. They are offered the opportunity to retake the introductory course.

Sometimes, after reading the mooli, another ritual is performed – the distribution of toli (spiritual refreshments in the form of sweets or fruit). This is a special kind of blessing that students receive from the head of the Centre. This usually happens as follows: the headmistress sits on a throne in the middle of the stage, and each student, kneeling before her on one knee, receives a handful of sweets from her hands after a minute of intense gaze. At the same time, for some reason, receiving toli directly into the mouth is considered the highest happiness, which few are worthy of.

Once a month, on a specific day and time, the VDUPBK holds a joint meditation session in which students from all Centres participate, no matter where they are in the world. On the days when Shiva comes into Dadi Gulzar's body (the schedule of visits for each season is posted in the lobby), students gather in the hall to listen to the revelations of their God, transmitted via the Internet with an English translation. The Centre's translator immediately translates what is said into Russian. On the day of each arrival of Shiva, a group of students led by the head of the Centre must travel to Madhuban for a personal meeting with God. The students themselves pay for the trip. Every student considers such a trip to be the greatest happiness possible in life.

There are certain unwritten rules of conduct at the Centre, which newcomers quickly learn from senior students: to speak in a quiet and insinuating voice, to always look happy and friendly, never to talk about their problems, not to ask questions, to treat the head of the Centre with reverence, etc. Outsiders can only enter the Centre to participate in events specially organised for them (lectures, seminars, conferences) or at the invitation of a member of the movement at a specially designated time.