

7 – SPIRITUALITY: A SOURCE OF GUIDANCE AND COMMUNITAS

The spiritual experience is an integral part of Molokan life on an individual basis and as a community experience. The spiritual experience serves as a source of guidance for the community and creates *communitas* that builds social cohesion. The Molokan spiritual experience incorporates several activities that are inter-related and considered to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. Spiritual experiences such as prophecy (being a mouthpiece of God), spiritual work, having dreams and visions, or healing are important to the community because they provide it with religious and social direction, and guide or heal others. The ecstatic experience is primarily a personal experience in which people either speak in tongues, weep, lift their hands, tap their feet, or jump. Generally it provides the individual with a sense of being uplifted and inspired.

Ecstatic experiences are an integral part of Molokan church services. In his study of ecstatic religions, Lewis notes that:

Belief, ritual, and spiritual experience: these are the cornerstones of religion, and the greatest of them is the last. This, at least, is the view taken by many who consider themselves religious. (1971:11)

The spiritual experience in all its forms has been open to personal and group interpretation throughout Molokan history. It can be used to maintain the status quo within the community, initiate change, warn of imminent danger and provide healing and a sense of identity. It can also be the cause of community tensions and conflicts as people dispute the authority of the prophet or spiritual worker and how messages are to be interpreted or acted upon. Alternatively, it can act to promote group cohesion through the formation of *communitas* or a community boundary. In this chapter I explain spiritual work and the role of the prophet, give examples of how spirituality

binds people in individual communities and between various Molokan centres, and show how prophecy has provided the impetus for some migrations.

I include a fuller discussion on prophecy, spiritual work and dreaming and their role in building group cohesion in the Molokan community in Appendix 13. In this chapter I limit my discussion of spirituality to the topic of spirituality and its role in Molokan migration.

SPIRITUALITY AND MIGRATION

The impetus for voluntary Molokan migration has often been accompanied by spiritual experience on a personal level or the 'voice of prophecy' on a community level. In Russia the prophecies related to maintaining the physical survival of the Molokan community with instructions to leave areas to avoid tragedy. In the United States of America the impetus for migration was to preserve the cultural integrity and social cohesiveness of the Molokans. This was usually brought about by the concerns of elders who organize prayer meetings. I will provide an example of migration as a result of the personal spiritual experience followed by several examples of prophetic instruction at community level.

One couple who had been married for over 20 years had never contemplated moving away from their close-knit church community. Then they began experiencing an unusual series of metaphorical dreams that caused them to seek guidance on interpreting those dreams. They found in one instance that they received a letter from some friends in South Australia stating that they had a dream about them they felt important to share with them. Surprised, they then received a telephone call from a relative in West

Australia stating they had had a dream about them which they felt important to share. The telephone call and the letter arrived on the same day or within a day of the other.

The couple was really perplexed by this development and made another private petition just to ensure these developments were not mere coincidences. Several weeks later the above scenario was repeated, followed by another repetition several weeks later. By that time, the couple in the United States of America had decided that their contacts in Australia were conspiring together to convince them to move to Australia. They telephoned the family in Western Australia 'just to chat' and asked if they knew how things were going for the family in South Australia. The family in Western Australia stated that they had met the South Australian family more than 25 years ago but had not seen them since nor realized that they had moved from the United States of America to South Australia. The American family then repeated this exercise with the South Australian family who corroborated the story. The American family then began to make enquiries about migration to Australia.

The 1904 migration from Russia was based on a prophecy in 1855 by E.G. Klubnikin who was known as the boy prophet because he was 12 years old at the time he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to make the following revelation:

Soon there will be three signs prior to movement into refuge. Firstly, they will gather for prayer in the middle of the night....Secondly, a brilliant light will flash from the heavens during the night, which will be seen over the entire earth. Thirdly, the night from East to West will begin to sing, "A cry is heard, the Bridegroom is coming!" (Pivovarov 1976:563)

Molokans who were interested in prophecy kept vigilant and looked for the signs that were prophesied by Klubnikin. In 1889, when Molokans were living in Turkey,

Armenia, and Turkemistan, one Molokan, F.F. Wren (one of the men who was incarcerated in Arizona in 1917 – see Chapter 3), saw the night light up like the day and began to notify Molokans of the fulfilment of prophecy (Valov and Valov n.d.:3).

In 1894, another prophet prophesied the fall of the Russian Monarchy:

"This Russian Tzar, will be the LAST LAST Tzar in Russia! Following this will be the judgement of God upon the people of Babylon's generations and all their kingdom will be destroyed! The Kingdom of Christ will be strengthened." ... This prophecy was during the time of the coronation of Nicholas II. (Shuken and Shuken n.d.:3)

After this incident occurred the Molokans began to gather in earnest to pray for guidance on how to avoid the judgment that was to fall upon Russia. In 1899, they noticed that Doukhobors were being given permission to leave Russia and move to Canada and began to make similar enquiries (Shuken and Shuken n.d.:3). In this case, the physical survival of the Molokan community was the issue. In 1904 (first wave) and 1916 (second wave) many Molokans fled to the United States of America to avoid impending war and social unrest. Many others did not believe in the prophecies and others did not have the economic means to make the migration.

Those who did not leave Russia in 1904 fled to Iran in the 1930s, to avoid Lenin's and Stalin's purges, and then moved to the United States of America in 1945 (third wave). Those who remained in Russia were left to face the brutality of the Communist regime. The following anecdote took place in Armenia in 1924 and is an example of several wealthy and influential Molokans not accepting prophecy because it did not suit their economic interests. Their actions had negative repercussions for the rest of the Molokans in the region:

During a large church gathering, regarding a movement to go to Persia, while in the presence of Communist government officials. Dunya Iakovna [14 years of age at that time] came out in the Spirit and said "Time to go." A man prophet came out and said to the government official "Thus says the Lord God, let my people go." Then opened the Bible [made an *otkreasha*]¹ and pointed with his finger to one verse.

The government official walked over and looked at the verse, it said "Thus says the Lord God, let my people go." Fear came over the government official, and he declared all Molokans are free to go. However, it was not to be. Several wealthy Molokans (who didn't want to leave) approached this government official to persuade him to change his mind.

The government official told them, "Since you didn't believe in the Living God that you worship, no one is free to go." The land was taken away from those wealthy Molokans. The prophet, that prophesied to the government official, was taken away to jail and never seen again.

It was said by the Spirit "Those people who are witnesses here today **will all die**, they will not see Pahot [migration]." (Portnoff n.d.:17)

The above prophecy was followed in 1988 (64 years later) in Armenia by the same prophethess, Dunya Iakovna. At the time of the second prophecy Dunya Iakovna was 78 years old:

She came forward, took the towels down that were hanging on the wall. Tied them together, and had a few Elders hold it up, going lengthwise down the row. Then said, "Those who believe grab hold." The people grabbed hold, and she said, "The time is ready, the path is ready and clean. Whoever believes will go. (Portnoff n.d.:41)

Portnoff noted that within 7 years of that prophecy being revealed the people who had grabbed hold of the towel had moved to Australia. Molokans use situations such as this to emphasise the continuity of their spiritual community and to validate it to future generations. In this example, continuity is shown in the form of the woman who maintains her faith and her spirituality throughout her life. Elders endeavour to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit works in their lives as individuals located within a

larger and very specific religious community. Molokans throughout the world demonstrate that they are still one religious community by respecting and accepting the spiritually inspired utterances that take place in other parts of the world.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, after living in the United States of America for a couple of years, Molokan elders became concerned with the cultural erosion and lack of social cohesion in their community. Groups of people made personal decisions about moving away from Los Angeles to farming communities in California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, and Hawaii. One group moved to Mexico and formed the colony in Rancho Guadalupe in 1906. At that time, for the most part, Molokans seemed intent in remaining in the United States of America.

After World War I and World War II Molokan elders became alarmed at the rate at which their youth accepted military service and 'just' war and began to consider how they would preserve the Molokan faith. They began to have prayer meetings seeking guidance on relocating the community to an environment more conducive to their religious beliefs. There was division in the Molokan community because different prophets directed them in two different directions, namely, Brazil and Australia. For the purposes of this thesis I will focus on Australia. Many prophecies regarding migration to Australia have been made in both Armenia and the United States of America. I will present several of the prophecies to demonstrate the time span in which they occurred and their different geographic origins.

The first took place in Armenia about 1944-1945 when a woman, Tyotyia Alona, prophesied that there would be an exodus from Armenia:

"The first Pahot [migration] will be quick, and a small amount of people will go. Those who are left will see very hard times. Out of those who remain and stand firm in the faith, will go on a second Pahot [migration]. It will be very hard, they will have to go through the Fire." Then she went outside and drew a picture in the sand. Then said to the people, "**You will go to this Land, which is surrounded by water, a place of wilderness.** This generation will see it." (Portnoff n.d.:17)

The second occurred in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1960 when a man, N.I. Karabanoff, heard a voice that said,

"There's a people living in the Land of America, that will go Pahot [migration] to the Land of Australia, some of them will return back to America." Then he asks the voice a question, "What about us living here in Baku?" The voice answers, "You will go Pahot [migration] also, but close to Mount Ararat." (Portnoff n.d.:19)

In 1964 N.I. Karabnoff prophesied that

Soon, when the time comes, people will go on Pahot [migration]. **To the land where the soil is red.** This place is called Australia. (Portnoff n.d.:23)

A final example happened in Kerman, California, in 1970 during a prayer service seeking guidance on the matter of migration to Australia, Elder Kornoff came out and prophesied

"Behold I see a great dragon, when he shall go forth a Great War will begin. Those who remain here, **in America**, will fall on their knees and cry, 'Lord, Lord, Lord, do not allow those whom you have brought to this land of refuge, to perish.' But the dragon will compel them anyway. When he shall go forth, there will gather a great army from all the corners and a great amount of blood shall flow. We must implore God for his mercy. His shelter and guardianship of Zion. For this war is verily coming and another shall follow, making it extremely difficult for mankind."

Later during the same prayer meeting Elder W.C. Shinen prophesied,

"... Now, **as it was in Russia, so shall it be here in America.**"
(Portnoff n.d.:34 and 35)

"[A]s it was in Russia" refers to the imprisonments, tortures and executions of Molokans and political dissidents which took place under the Monarchy and Communism. In the above cases, there would have been no communication between the various prophets or the spiritual workers. This is important as these uncorrelated events are used to confirm to Molokans the strength of prophecy. Prophecy is often delivered in symbolic expressions using mini-archetypes such as dragons representing nations, towels or cloths representing journeys, unknown continents drawn in the soil, or colour of soil. These expressions are often relied upon by transmitters of oral history to validate that the prophet was not using their personal knowledge to corrupt the message while serving in the capacity of spiritual worker. Collecting prophecies that have taken place in different parts of the world and integrating them into a single text as Portnoff has done symbolically unites Molokans in different parts of the world as a single brotherhood that is responsive to the Holy Spirit and prophecy.

On 5 September 1964 in Monterey Church, California, prior to the first Molokans' departure for Australia, the following prophecy was made:

And there all the people of Israel from afar personally bowed and worshipped before you alone and in which they without misfortune came through their **forty years of temptation in the wilderness, until their entrance into the land of promise**, which you gave them by lots. (Portnoff n.d.:24)

Australian Molokans who have remained faithful confirm that they are now in the closing phase of their 40 years in the 'wilderness'. Many have sought guidance for their next migration [*pahot*] but as yet there has been no guidance as to their next destination.

For some Molokan sub-groups there is a desire to 'return' to Mt. Ararat as it is considered a holy site much as there is an anticipated return to Israel for Jews. In this way Molokans and Jews both share what Finkelkraut (1994:117) describes as a "...faraway nation...an inner kingdom, providing its subject of anxiety, pride and conversation. A Diaspora of dreams".

As mentioned before, the spiritual experience can impact on the whole community or simply provide individuals with guidance in their lives and spiritual development.

THE PERSONAL SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Mr and Mrs Jones were very cautious about speaking about spirituality in the context of research. They stated that they were persecuted for their spirituality in Russia, Armenia and Turkmenistan. The government did not approve of Molokans having an authority higher than civil authority and made every effort to imprison or execute 'spiritualists' and to confiscate any literature of a religious or prophetic nature published by Molokans. They believed that the Soviet government believed that not all publications had been purged and that officials were still seeking material for the purpose of destroying the spiritual heritage of Molokans.

Several of my respondents, however, were prepared to share some of their insights into their personal experiences with spirituality. Spirituality was understood differently by each of them and their experiences were unique and served a different purpose for each person. For some, the experience reinforces their current beliefs, in other instances it promotes change in life direction, for some it initiates the role of acting as mentor to others, in others it provides a warning. Yet in other instances, it provides people with the strength to deal with adversity in their lives.

Alex shared a spiritual experience that took place in 1923 when he was ten years of age. His family was at church and had gone before the altar (*na krug*) to participate in a prayer during a church function. As the group before the altar completed their entreaties and bowed to the floor while kneeling to await the minister's prayer, Alex saw a vision of his older brother Vania who passed away at the age of 15 earlier that same year. In this vision Alex was standing on a little hill in a farming area that had fences and gates separating various pastures. He saw his brother walking away from him down the hill toward a gate. On the other side of that gate, a man came out of a large house and approached Alex's brother in greeting. The man hugged the child and they went into this large house together. After church, Alex rushed off to find his grandmother who was in the bakery and told her about his vision. His grandmother had come to live with his parents after her husband died and had not remarried although her husband died at a young age. Upon hearing the description of the man, the grandmother became quite excited and said that the man in the dream was her deceased husband. Alex felt this was significant for him because their family never took photos nor kept any so he did not know what his grandfather looked like. He and his grandmother then told his parents of the vision.

The *Spirit and Life* was first published in 1928 and copies were distributed throughout the Molokan community. During 1928 Alex, who was then 15 years of age, picked up a copy of the *Spirit and Life* and began leafing through the pages. He came to page 648 and thought that the house on the left side of the drawing looked familiar but could not place where he had seen it before. Later on he remembered that the house in the drawing in the *Spirit and Life* was the same as the one he saw in his vision during the church prayer in 1923. This spiritual experience validated the authority of *Spirit and Life* for him.

Lynette notes that her introduction to spirituality came from her parents' teachings within the home and in the Molokan environment. I enquired as to whether she had observed 'spiritual' activities in the wider society and she commented that she had been in many social situations in the wider society but had not noticed anything that she would have labelled as spiritual. Lynette feels that the spiritual side of Molokanism is derived from ancestors and kinship networks. She feels that the close family and intergenerational relationships provide a connection to the beliefs of the forefathers something similar to a living memory or a collective consciousness.

Noreen added that church services support the concept of spirituality in that they provide a social platform for the practice of spirituality on a group level during the formation of an individual's spirituality. The singing, praying and the sermons all introduce children to the concepts of the supernatural and provide an avenue for expression. Although Noreen is no longer a practising Molokan she still has a connection to the community through their mutual sharing of the spiritual experience. In essence, it is the communitas that still unites her to other Molokans:

I find that spirituality connects me the most. I can go to a Molokan church, a home or a prayer and that what connects me straight away – the spirituality. When everything else comes into question like personal family values or where we want to adapt to as individuals are where I will find the conflict. But through that spirituality I've learned to be a stronger person....spiritual teachings that were taught to me are what keep me, give me the strength today although I might not be a practising Molokan in a sense of their traditions and rituals. In the present day, it is what I was taught in the spiritual sense that gives me the strength today.

Miriam was a little more ambivalent about her spiritual experiences in that she was uncertain if she actually believed in spirituality or believed in the faith of those people in her life who believed in spirituality:

I remember at one point in my life I was really really down - extremely down. I had felt that I had no faith left in anything and one thing gave me a reason to go on. I forced myself to say, "There is a God". And that was the major factor for me to carry on with my life, not to end it. I don't know if I said that because I was taught, I felt like I said that because it was taught but I'm not too sure because it didn't feel very spiritual to think that. It could have been an act of desperation. It could have been spiritual in one sense. I suppose but it was more like I had to find something I could cling to. That thought helped me to get out of that situation and get better.

Miriam does not believe that she has ever had a personal spiritual experience. For Miriam, spirituality was a distant and abstract concept that was working through other people's lives. Despite this lack of a personal experience with spirituality she believes that she benefited as a result of the beliefs that other people had in God and spirituality as these people provided her with emotional and social support during periods of depression and hardship. For Miriam, Molokan spirituality is intertwined with family relationships so that even if one is distanced from the religious aspects of Molokanism one may still have access to it through family networks.

I have also had personal spiritual experiences that aided me in decision making in my life, guiding me to help specific individuals, to understand others better, or just to cope with the difficulties associated with being a migrant. In some instances these decisions resulted in taking a less orthodox path than the one I would have chosen if making a 'logical or rational' decision. I will share a couple of these experiences in the hope that what Molokans experience as spirituality will be less often construed as irrational, primitive, or hysterical behaviour.

In 1986, I was at home with my two year old son tending to the laundry and saw myself walking up the hill to the church at Wellington Mills near Bunbury. I was accompanied by a very tall woman with a particular personality or aura – she wanted to see the

Molokans. On our way to the church we were met by a Molokan lady to whom I handed my guest for safekeeping while I entered the church to 'work spiritually'. At this time I had not yet contemplated tertiary study. When I did enter university several years later I enrolled in chemistry and environmental science and studied in these disciplines for several years on a part-time basis before withdrawing from university. Eventually, I re-enrolled in university but took up sociology which took several additional years to complete on a part-time basis. Upon completion I applied for acceptance into the Honours' course. In 1999, the professor who interviewed me and listened briefly to my proposal for a course of research matched the description of the woman in my vision. She also stated that she preferred that I conduct research on the Molokans rather than my original topic. I was somewhat alarmed at this course of action because as a Molokan I preferred to go through life 'invisibly'. However, I accepted this course of action because it had been foreshadowed many years earlier. The woman who came to meet this professor and myself as we approached the church in my vision was the only respondent in the Bunbury Molokan community who participated in the research.

I have had several experiences that have led me to assist other people in their personal struggles or to warn them of impending danger. In one instance, I had numerous dreams of a woman but no indication of who this woman was. Later that same year, I began to spend a great deal of time with someone I did not know very well. During our numerous discussions she began to reveal some of her experiences, courses of action, and attitudes that matched those of the woman in my dream. I decided to commit my efforts to helping this woman come to terms with the many unresolved issues in her life. Throughout the next seven years I had two more spiritual experiences that coincided with crisis points in her life. A friend of mine called this form of spirituality 'shadow visionary' because I could observe an event but was uncertain to whom it related.

In another instance, I had a vision of the identity of the individual and a set of circumstances which puzzled me because the circumstances did not seem to match up with the knowledge that I had of this person. I was undecided about contacting this person because I did not know him very well. I had only visited his parents on several occasions. In my dream, the young man in question, had just purchased a high powered motorcycle and was 'testing it' out on the country roads resulting in a fatal accident. My last knowledge of this young man was that he was living in Perth and studying science at a university. Finally, I decided that it was better to contact him and make a general enquiry about his life. He immediately informed me that he had just purchased a high powered motorcycle and that he and a mate were anxious to test its high speed capabilities on the country roads. I then informed him of my dream about his fatal accident and asked him to enjoy his bike at more reasonable speeds. Although he and I have not spoken since the telephone call I note that he has modified his behaviour and has begun dating a Molokan girl.

However, spirituality is not limited to seeing dreams and visions. A Molokan woman in Adelaide shared an anecdote with me relating to seeing spirits. A Molokan man was walking down a street when he saw one of his best Molokan friends. He hailed his friend who did not respond. He pursued his friend and demanded to know why he did not respond to his call and the friend just kept walking as though he did not see him or recognise him. Later that day he rang his friend's home to see what was going on and why he was totally ignored on the street. The friend's wife replied very tearfully that her husband had passed away early that morning and her family had not yet notified anyone of his death.

The spiritual experience may be different for each person but for each of them it verifies the existence of a powerful force in their lives that is beyond their control or

understanding. Molokans identify this force as the Holy Spirit. While Moore noted that Molokans display a great deal of emotion in the public sphere of church (Moore 1973:74) I note that this usually occurs during periods of stress. The expression of emotion is usually a separate issue to the expression of spirituality even though they may occur simultaneously in some instances. For most Molokans, the experience of dreaming or having a vision is a very quiet experience that evokes reflection into one's own mental state and of one's world views before sharing with others.

Healing is another facet of the personal spiritual experience in the Molokan community. When Alex was two years old and living in Arizona, the spiritual events of 30 March 1915 relating to the prophecy of impending war transpired. While this information was related to Alex as oral history in his later years, the oral history was confirmed by the people who had received healing as a result of this event. One of the people healed of illness was Alex's brother who suffered from paralysis.

In 1943 Alex had another spiritual experience that further confirmed to him the correctness of his participation in the Molokan faith and the validity of the Holy Spirit. His first child, a son, had a severe case of eczema that simply did not respond to any medical or pharmaceutical treatments. One day, he and his family attended a prayer in the home of another Molokan. The lady of the house suffered from polio and had been bedridden for a long time. She was so ill that her face had a gray colour. During the prayer service, Alex's wife made a secret entreaty on behalf of her son for a healing from the eczema. After the prayer service the spiritual worker went into the bedroom to minister to the woman and took a glass of water with him. He asked the woman if she believed in the Holy Spirit. She replied, "Yes", and drank the glass of water. A short time later, the woman, whose skin no longer looked ashen but light, walked alongside the spiritual worker when he returned to the living room. She appeared to have been

completely healed. Upon his return, the spiritual worker approached Alex and took some butter and rubbed it all over his son and told Alex to do the same. Alex's son's eczema cleared up completely. These spiritual experiences further solidified Alex's commitment to his religion.

Spirituality is a complicated topic to research as it is as varied as the people who are experiencing it. Interpretation is guided by life experiences of people receiving spiritual revelation. When people hear of another's spiritual experiences they often rely on their personal knowledge of that individual to decipher the message. Despite the divergence of spiritual experiences and interpretations, spiritual experiences may work to create a strong sense of communitas between people sharing a similar experience or attending the same cultural performance. The following chapter analyses a funeral as a form of cultural performance which provides an avenue for the performance of ritual, spiritual expression, and the formation of communitas.

¹ An *otkreasha* is an action which is guided by spiritual inspiration. The spiritual worker opens a page in the Bible, *Spirit & Life*, or the Prayer Book without first looking at the page selected and points to a passage. If this corresponds to the question raised then it is considered validation that the spiritual worker is not a fraud and that his guidance should be accepted. In some instances the spiritual worker will make *otkreashas* in two separate books to indicate, without question, that he is truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.