



BY

BENJAMIN H. SNYDER

Haverford College

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology at Bryn Mawr College.

May 2003

Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim

In the name of God, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUALITY	
METHODS	
CHAPTER 1: BAWA AND THE GENERATIONS	18
THE FOUNDING OF THE FELLOWSHIP	
THE FIRST GENERATION AND THE EARLY YEARS	
THE SECOND GENERATION AND THE LATER YEARS	
CONCLUSIONS	
CHAPTER 2: TRADITIONALISM, MODERNISM, AND THE PATH	47
LEARNING UNITY, LIVING UNITY	
FORGING A MIDDLE WAY	
A RELIGION FOR THE MODERN AGE	
CONCLUSIONS	
CHAPTER 3: THE POND AND FELLOWSHIP CULTURE	68
WHY THE FELLOWSHIP WAS CREATED	
PROBLEMS AND SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM	
A CULTURE OF UNITY	
EXPRESSING FELLOWSHIP CULTURE	
CONCLUSIONS	
CONCLUSION	86
ENTERING HEARTSPACE	
APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	97
GLOSSARY	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	99

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH thank yous in my body to express my gratitude to everyone at the Fellowship who took time out of their days to talk to me, who took an interest in *my* life, and who generally made me feel more welcome than I have ever felt. This project is by you and for you. I can only take credit for writing it down. Thank you for opening my eyes to the importance of unconditional friendship and having a melting heart. If I have made any mistakes, please forgive me.

Thank you also to Professor Takenaka for being a patient and challenging advisor and to everyone else in the Bryn Mawr Anthropology Department for supporting a four-year habit of being nosey. Thank you goes to Greta for her helpful comments, continual emotional support, and making me feel like what I'm doing is important. And finally, thanks to Bawa, for always being right here when I needed inspiration.

ABSTRACT

THE PHILADELPHIA BRANCH of the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship is a diversely populated spiritual community of about four hundred individuals located in suburban Philadelphia, which formed in the early 1970s around the Sri Lankan mystic Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. From 1971 to 1986, Bawa, as he is called, revealed the profound Truths of God to these seekers through a spiritual path closely related to and highly influenced by the mystical traditions of the Sufis and the Islamic faith. Although Bawa's physical presence was charismatic and, above all, unifying of the community, since his passing in 1986 the community continues to thrive. Even though Bawa's physical presence is now absent from the Fellowship, the second generation of Fellowship members, who unlike the first generation have had little to no experience of one-on-one contact with Bawa, still feel drawn to the path and praise the benefits of growing up in their loving community. This project explores how this community was created, the nature of Bawa's path, how it has functioned in the lives of both generations, and the cultural phenomena of the community itself. The result of this inquiry is that the Fellowship is a modern spiritual community in the deepest sense. That is, it fulfills a deeper yearning for quasi-religious spiritual work in its members without excessive restriction to their modern conceptions of freedom and individuality as might occur in a stereotypical religious setting. At the same time, it caters to a deeper yearning for communal living and mutually reciprocating relationships while encouraging its members to remain fully engaged in wider society. This has occurred because, using Bawa's path as a foundation, the culture of the Fellowship is one that elevates the qualities which allow one to function cohesively in a communal setting *and* in the modern technological world to a divine level. Fellowship culture encourages a unity of inner beliefs and external actions, the transcendent and the mundane, the sacred and the secular.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IF the one person with all of the answers to your life questions became a daily part of your life? What if the focus of your life was simultaneously and seamlessly the unconditional love of others and the love of yourself? What if you lived by this axiom: “separate yourself from the things that separate you from your fellow human being” instead of this axiom: “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing”? There is a place like this and there are lives like this. The place is called the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship. The people you wouldn’t recognize as the ones described unless you were to sit down with them in their homes or perhaps a coffee shop, as I did, and simply ask them.

The Fellowship is a place, a space, in which what is on the surface is perhaps not quite telling the entire story. It is a place where an old and frail Sri Lankan man called Bawa became the spiritual magnet for a group of seekers of all different races and classes. Based in an old white colonial style house in suburban Philadelphia, Bawa daily poured forth the Truth of God from 1971 to 1986 in a form loosely similar to the ancient Sufi and Islamic traditions but mysteriously modern at the same time. If one goes to the Fellowship today, however, one will not see Bawa; he “passed on” one cold winter night in December of 1986.

Today, only Bawa’s “children” (and their children) remain. Surprisingly, despite the loss of their charismatic Father, this community of seekers is thriving. The Fellowship house sees meetings nearly every day. An executive committee, composed of a dozen or so of Bawa’s closest devotees, now presents video tapes of their guru’s discourses, designs the future of the organization, publishes books, and generally tends to

the upkeep of this “pond of Wisdom.” The mosque, a beautifully constructed building attached to the rear of the house, supports the Islamic five-times prayer every day. The kitchen is always cooking up one of Bawa’s recommended curries. And if you step into the building on a weekday you will probably get roped into collating drafts of Bawa’s latest publication or organizing the next fundraising event.

Consisting of two generations of nearly four hundred individuals, about two hundred of whom are serious practitioners, the Fellowship is the spiritual home to a surprisingly diverse group of people.¹ On a given Sunday, a well attended Fellowship meeting may be eight to nine percent African American, one to two percent South Asian, and the remaining percentage White. In the mosque, which tends to attract more traditional Muslims, the percentage of African Americans increases to around twelve to thirteen percent. As for occupation and social class, most Fellowship members would probably be described as middle to upper-middle class. The majority represents education and the arts – holding positions as teachers, artists, writers, musicians, etc. However, the Fellowship community also consists of plumbers, electricians, and other unskilled laborers.

Despite this diversity, Fellowship members place little importance on these worldly categories in describing themselves. Sharon, who has been a follower of Bawa since 1975 and spends most of her day at the Fellowship as an editor for Fellowship publications, says, “We’re either disposed or trained to be color blind here. It’s hard to quantify [race, class, etc.] because we deliberately don’t keep track of that kind of thing.”

In fact, rather than placing any importance on their worldly categorical diversity,

¹ The following numbers pertaining to the Fellowship population’s categorical makeup were by no means statistically obtained. Rather these approximations stem from personal observation and conversations with knowledgeable community members.

Fellowshippers choose to parse the community in terms of generation. The older generation, having personally sat at Bawa's feet, and the younger generation, who experience Bawa through books, stories, and video taped discourses, are all the divisions that Fellowshippers choose to see.

It is with this somewhat unexpected picture in front of me that I undertook this project. I wanted to understand how this place came to be. Why did these people come here? What was it like for them to be unyieldingly dedicated to a man whom they could only realize was on some higher plane of consciousness? Furthermore, since that man has passed away, how is it that they have continued on, bringing the next generation with them? Moreover, how do the two generations of members, with differing experiences of Bawa, continue to connect with the path and live surprisingly fulfilled lives after his death? With such a diversity of individuals, in terms of race and class and generation, what is keeping the Fellowship together?

The results of this inquiry led me to the conclusion that the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship is a spiritual community in the deepest sense of the term. The Fellowship remains cohesive because at the heart of whatever goes on at the Fellowship lie the essential qualities that allow communities to thrive. From conversations to prayers, meetings to meditations, the very purpose of the Fellowship is to maintain and create deep reciprocating bonds between its members without creating further separations from that which is not the Fellowship. It nurtures the feeling of community without resorting to a withdrawal from the world akin to a strict religious community. In fact, as a community, the Fellowship goes so far as to open its doors to everyone.

At the same time, it is a deeply spiritual place. That is, its members come to perform the strictly personal internal work of making oneself a better person. Better not in a mainstream religious sense, as in becoming a better Christian who abides more deeply in the strictures of Christian law and denies other religions, but better in a spiritual sense, as in acquiring the qualities that make one more connected with oneself, with others, and with God. There is the sense at the Fellowship that spiritual work necessitates connectivity within oneself that can be practically exercised in the outside world so that, as one lives within the world just as it is, one can transcend the daily stresses and strains brought about by the alienating nature of workaday existence.

Where they have found no fulfillment of this sort in traditional religions or modern materialistic ways of seeing the world, Fellowshipers celebrate and nurture the idea that a worldview based on Bawa's teachings that is focused on unity of mind and world can develop a way of life appealing to their communal yearning *and* their modern lifestyles. That is, while they find individuality in the freedom with which they can practice the path, they do not become isolated by this individuality as can often happen in our secular success-driven lives. At the same time, they find an overwhelming sense of unity and connectivity in the ideals of the Fellowship community and Bawa's path without being stifled by religious or communal separatism. At the Fellowship, the traditional communal and the modern individualist are encouraged to lie beside each other.

Consequently, the members of the fellowship cook together, laugh together, cry together, pray together, meditate together, bury their dead together and support each other for no other reason than they are a family or, as Bawa used to call them, "God's funny

family.” However, they are not exclusive. They live lives that, in outward appearance, do not differ from many other people’s lives. They have jobs, cars, and homes, go to public colleges and high schools, and face the stresses and strains that most average Americans face. The key difference is that their lives are not held captive by this world of the everyday. They combat the negative effects of modern living that come with temptations like unbridled success, social status, materialism, and the blinding pace of fast-food culture, not through reactionary protest, asceticism, or simply going-with-the-flow, but by creating a new world that is inviting to their inner spiritual souls, their outer material selves, and, most importantly, to all others with the same thirst for deeper meaning in their lives. They are finding fulfillment in the teachings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and the Fellowship community, yet they do not feel the need to renounce the things outside their community in order to carry on their lives.

In this project I explore exactly what it is about the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship that counteracts the social stresses of modern culture and enriches its members’ lives without requiring a withdraw from society. By exploring this aspect of the Fellowship I am really asking about two issues. Firstly, to what extent does the Fellowship represent the essential attributes of a spiritual path and a spiritual community that can work in the modern world? And secondly, just how is a community like this created and can it be maintained for a significant period of time?

The importance of these questions lies in direct connection to an inherent problem with modern culture that has been documented by scholars like Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. These thinkers and dozens after them have found that for many people, especially those in developed countries like the United States, living

individualistic and career-centered lives leaves them feeling alienated from what really matters to them – family, friends, and a better understanding of themselves. Alexis de Tocqueville, who visited the United States from France in the 1830s, poetically captures the crisis of individualism which he witnessed in America in his famous treatise *Democracy in America* (1969[1835-39]). He notes that as individualism increases amongst citizens, “there are more and more people who, though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs” (508). He continues:

Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands. Thus, each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart (Tocqueville 1969[1835-39]:508).

As this world becomes more and more outwardly focused, as we suddenly come to find that the cars and televisions and careers of our lives have somehow become conflated with our personalities and the people around us, we begin to feel psychologically separated from others. Suddenly we find ourselves, as Tocqueville says, shut up in the solitude of our own hearts.

Tocqueville’s analysis of the psychology of individualism emphasizes the same point that Marx, Weber and Durkheim all come to: that today’s society has a powerful potential for inducing in the everyday individual a kind of existential alienation or estrangement from the inner self born out of the workings of materialism, consumerism, rugged individualism and the pace of globalized society. In an age such as this, the Fellowship seems to be nourishing a way of life for its members that counteracts these

alienating effects while not removing them from the secular world to a significant degree. How this has been achieved must be understood.

REFLECTIONS ON COMMUNITY AND SPIRITUALITY

ALTHOUGH THE FELLOWSHIP IS difficult to define among the variety of definitions of religious and secular communities, I feel that the term that best classifies the Fellowship is *spiritual community*.

Generally speaking, one of the most powerful forces that builds and maintains communities is mutual reciprocity. Mutual reciprocity is a shared sense among individuals of, “I’ll do this for you without expecting anything specific back from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road” (Putnam 2000:20). However, the complexities of communities run much deeper than this and can best seen, I think, in comparison to what they are not. Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, in their book *Habits of the Heart* (1985), come to conclusions about community that I feel fit nicely with what I have observed at the Fellowship. They note that in America the term community is used widely and loosely and is often incorrectly connected with the term lifestyle. Rather than including groups formed around lifestyle in their definition of community, they reserve the term for something more specific. They state:

Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive whole, celebrating interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all, lifestyle is fundamentally segmental and celebrates the narcissism of similarity. It usually explicitly involves a contrast with others who “do not share one’s lifestyle” (Bellah et. al. 1985:72).

As we shall see, Fellowshipers, for the most part, do not consider themselves similar in terms of lifestyle. They lead all different kinds of lives and find unity in that diversity. I would not, then, define the Fellowship as a “lifestyle enclave” as the authors of this book refer to such groups.

Bellah and his team also make light of the therapeutic conception of community. Groups based on this conception are “communities of interest” that superficially form around self-interested notions of maximizing one’s personal potential in life by “getting connected” or other utilitarian ideas (Bellah et. al. 1985:134). They note:

“Community” is not a collection of self-seeking individuals, not a temporary remedy, like Parents Without Partners, that can be abandoned as soon as a partner has been found, but a context within which personal identity is formed, a place where fluent self-awareness follows the currents of communal conversation and contributes to them (Bellah et. al. 1985:135).

Community, as the authors of *Habits of the Heart* describe it, should not be thought of as a means to an end. Communities do not exist for individuals, although they may benefit from them in very personal ways. Rather, individuals in communities exist for each other. As we shall see, the Fellowship is probably the furthest thing from a means to an end for its members. Fellowshipers focus on the workings of connectivity between each other and seem to find personal fulfillment in that very act.

Bellah and his team use the term community in much the same sense that I feel it should be used. They reserve this term for groups that have, “a history – in an important sense they are constituted by their past – and for this reason we can speak of community as a ‘community of memory,’ one that does not forget its past” (Bellah et. al. 1985:153). Because of its ascribed role as the keeper of the wisdom of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, the Fellowship is certainly aware of its history. And in recognizing this common history,

bonds are certainly formed. However, unlike the sense of community described in *Habits of the Heart*, the bonds at the Fellowship are not entirely secular.

As we shall see, the Fellowship is not a religious place according to its members. It does seem to be focused around notions of religiosity, such as belief in a supreme higher being, developing internal goodness, and communing together in that belief, but it does not affiliate itself completely with a mainstream religion. Perhaps, then, the Fellowship is a sectarian community. Elmer T. Clark, in his study of American religious sects entitled *The Small Sects in America* (1949), describes a kind of religious organization that he calls the communistic sect. These religious bodies are those sects built up around ideas of religious practice specifically within a communal setting. He describes the typical ideological framework of this kind of community:

The underlying principles of those groups which have undertaken to build up self-contained colonies of like-minded people is that of the essential perfectibility of human nature. Communistic sects...deny natural depravity and teach that man is inherently good; human ills are caused not by inbred Sin, with a capital S, but by the environment in which man lives. In a corrected environment man would attain perfection by “living naturally” or following his impulses. Hence the attempts to establish colonies in which ideal conditions will obtain (134).

The communistic sect sets itself apart from the rest of society because it feels that by externally removing those of a different mind, and by putting together those of like mind, a coherent life full of the natural goodness already existent within its members can be realized. As we shall see, the Fellowship certainly upholds the idea that within human beings the Divine Qualities of God are alive and well. In fact, they are what make the world go round. However, unlike the communistic sect described by Clark, the Fellowship embraces a diversity of religious experiences and opinions within its population and, above all, chooses to realize inherent goodness while remaining open to

society. In fact, several Fellowship members related to me that they had participated in communal religious and spiritual groups before but found the Fellowship to be refreshingly different from them because of its diversity of personalities and lifestyles. In light of this, then, I would not describe the fellowship as a strictly religious or sectarian community.

A term that seems to come closer to describing the Fellowship than secular or religious community is mystical community, particularly a kind of mystical community called the master-disciple group. Robert S. Ellwood, in his book *Mysticism and Religion* (1999), lists the essential characteristics of the mystical community or, as he calls it, the mystical group.

1. Ideally, the group negates ego by reducing individual decision to nearly zero, thus sociologically approximating the zero experience.
2. The group approximates mysticism's sense of being part of something infinite. In the group, the member is part of something visibly larger than the self whose ideal is *communitas*, a symbol of the divine milieu.
3. The group provides a setting for and favorable evaluation of mystical experience.
4. The group provides appropriate symbols and an intellectual tradition for the religious interpretation of unusual and ecstatic experience.
5. Insofar as some outlet is necessary for ego and the ego-building drives, the group presents religious experience as the optimum occasion for it (Ellwood 1999:149).

Mystical groups provide an outlet for the essential mystical desire of cutting ego, while providing a setting for a communal sense of togetherness (complete with symbols and traditions), and while addressing its members' egoistic sensibilities by providing some outlet for individuality (i.e. individual religious experience, administrative duty, etc.).

As we shall see, the Fellowship community provides all of these characteristics for its members, however, it does not seem to fit with any of the five types of mystical groups that Ellwood enumerates from these characteristics. The one group type Ellwood

describes that seems to come closest to the Fellowship is the master-disciple or devotee group. He states:

The devotee group is loose in formal organizational terms, though it requires intense commitment from an inner core. All five of the characteristics of mystical groups cited earlier are actually realized among disciples because of their intense relationship to the master, validated by his charisma. There is considerable self-negation through obedience in such groups, and certainly the master offers a powerful religious symbol that authenticates the disciples' experiences and lifestyle. The master-disciple group, with its partial dissociation from society, provides an excellent climate for stimulating, as well as authenticating, mystical experience. It offers a combination of stress (in separation from society and the high anticipatory exhilaration) and nonstress (in the peace of acceptance by the master). Finally, there is the mutual reinforcement in the spiritual outlook (Ellwood 1999:150).

Master-disciple groups provide the five characteristics essential to mystical communities by realizing them in the charismatic leadership of a wise teacher. This could certainly be said of the Fellowship in its past. However, after 17 years of Bawa's passing, what do we make of the community in light of the *Sheik's* current physical absence? Although his physical presence of correction is gone, there is still an intense commitment from the inner core. Finally, again, the Fellowship is not and never was separated from society, yet it seems to maintain the mystical criteria that Ellwood describes. Although the mystical devotee group seems to be a close fit with what the Fellowship is, a solid definition nevertheless remains illusive.

In light of the literature concerning the various kinds of secular, religious, and mystical communities, then, I define the Fellowship as a spiritual community. The word spiritual seems to include the values and practices of inner change that are of a religious nature but excludes the idea of dogmatism and traditional religious Law that we often associate with the term religion. Spiritual connotes the internal work that a religious life offers, the feeling of divinity, without emphasis on adherence to external requirements for

leading *the* religious life, the feeling of bounded-ness. Hence, a phrase that I heard from one of my interviewees and one that we often hear in today's society is, "I would consider myself a spiritual person but not a religious person." I argue that there is a psychological difference between these two words in society that seems to point to some sort of deeper alternative religiosity that individuals are yearning for in today's secular world.

As far back as 1949, Clark seems to have picked up on the results of this yearning in the form of what he calls "esoteric cults," which, incidentally, he does not include in his census of American sects. He notes that these groups, "would be regarded by most people as quasi-religious, but they hold the spiritual attachment of their adherents and claim to bring them into right relations with God. Their members would certainly not care to be classed as irreligious" (Clark 1949:13). As we shall see, the results of this project speak directly to the kind of traditional/modern religious/secular tensions that the term spiritual brings to light. The Fellowship is probably best defined as a spiritual community, then, because its focus is spiritual practice, in a communal setting.

The phenomenon that the Fellowship embodies seemingly contradictory positions as both an individualistically oriented spiritual place and a group oriented communal place is typical of the community. In this project I will show that the key to the Fellowship's success, and what sets it apart from other religious communities, is that it is able to unify seemingly disparate aspects of the individual and social levels of experience.

METHODS

I DISCOVERED THE FELLOWSHIP through two of my close personal friends, both of whom were born to followers of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. I have always had a penchant for spiritual people, places and things (I would, in fact, classify myself as one of those people who is spiritual but not religious), so when one of these friends described the Fellowship to me I was naturally interested. Whereas I had become familiar with Buddhist monastic communities, myself identifying most closely with Buddhism, I was intrigued by the Fellowship because its guru was not descended from a recorded lineage, something essential to Buddhist practitioners, and because that guru was now physically absent. My first visit was in March of 2001. I visited purely out of personal curiosity, having no idea that this would be an ideal situation for an anthropological study. During April and May of that year I carried out a very small and superficial study centered specifically on the master-disciple relationship between Bawa and his students. Over the next year and a half I visited perhaps once or twice more and then began serious fieldwork for this project in September of 2002 completing it in March of 2003.

The bulk of my conclusions are based on a total of 16 in-depth interviews. Eight of these were taped interviews conducted by me. I took few notes during these taped interviews in order to favor a more natural conversational style and transcribed each entire conversation later in an attempt to review what was said and leave a more easily accessible resource for future data analysis. In most cases interviews lasted for two hours – longer than the duration of the tapes. When a tape ended, I took handwritten notes to complete the interview and later expanded on these notes in my field notebook. The other eight interviews were obtained from a member of the Fellowship who conducted a

series of taped radio broadcasts for public radio over several years featuring members of the Fellowship from all generations. These tapes were given to me with the understanding that they might be used in this research project. I was unable to listen to the over fifty hours of material on these tapes and so I selected interviews that I felt would be pertinent to my research interests. Within these interviews, fragments that I felt were most informative were transcribed.

I obtained this project's sample using generational identification as the dividing criterion. Of the four hundred or so members of the Fellowship, it is difficult to determine the numerical breakdown between the generations because so many of the younger generation are in college, living elsewhere, or are simply too young to have fully entered into practicing the path. As an estimated breakdown of practicing members, however, I would estimate that the ratio of older to younger is about 2:1 and becoming narrower.

Generation is typically determined at the Fellowship by actual age and somewhat by experience with Bawa's physical form. Those who studied closely with Bawa as his original American followers I refer to as the first or older generation. These interviewees range in age from fifty to seventy. I obtained eight interviews from the older generation, one of whom is the leader of the Fellowship Branch based in Des Moines, Iowa, and one of whom recently came to the Fellowship just a year ago having had no contact with Bawa physically. They hold a variety of jobs including artist, teacher, psychologist, writer, etc. Seven are white and one African American.

Of the younger generation, whose ages range from infant to mid thirties, I obtained eight interviews, focusing on the eighteen to thirty age group who seem to be in

the process of bridging the gap between the older and younger generations. I felt that by focusing on this specific bracket within the generation I would get the broadest picture possible of the younger Fellowship members' experience. All eight of these interviewees have parents who are members of the Fellowship to some degree or another. Most have very little memory of Bawa in his physical form. Seven are either in college or have recently graduated within the last few years and one is a senior in high school. Those who have graduated hold positions in a variety of fields from business to education to medicine, etc.

Since Bawa's death has created a generation gap in terms of experience with the path, members tend to place more importance on generational identification. Because of this, I made the judgment that it would be more important to obtain this project's sample with generational identification in mind. Although there are a variety of ways the Fellowship population could be parsed, I felt that the locally recognized category seemed the most feasible point of departure. Given this, then, I feel my sample is representative in terms of the variety of specific experiences within the generations in relation to Bawa, his teachings, and the community.²

My interview questions were also divided by generational identification. To the younger generation I was most concerned with the following issues³: the experience of growing up in the Fellowship community, the effect the Fellowship community and Bawa's spiritual path has had on their lives, their relationship with the older generation and Bawa, their outlook for their future lives and the life of the Fellowship. To the older

² Unfortunately, I was unable to locate or secure contact with any former Fellowship members who left either during Bawa's presence or after his death. There is also a small population of Sri Lankan devotees who came to the Fellowship with Bawa and remain there today. Because of language barriers and my desire to focus on American societal issues, I did not conduct any interviews with these members.

³ See Appendix for sample interview schedule.

generation I focused on the following issues: how most individuals came to the Fellowship, the experience of being in the presence of Bawa and living in the Fellowship community in the 70s, the effect the Fellowship and Bawa's path has had on their lives, the effect of Bawa's death on the Fellowship, their outlook for their future lives and the life of the Fellowship.

I collected the data for this project primarily through participant observation and interviews recorded either on microcassette or in a field notebook. I had sole access to these data sources and at no point were actual names used, including in fieldnotes.⁴ Observations were carried out primarily in the meetinghouse of the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship's main branch in Philadelphia. This is the location in which the *Sheikh* Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen spent the majority of his 15 years of spiritual instruction with his American students and a small number of Sri Lankan students in the United States. Other observations were made at the Mosque of Sheik M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and the Mazar, the final resting place and sanctuary of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen.

Group meetings are held at the Fellowship House in Philadelphia on multiple days throughout the week for any who want to come in order to hear and discuss the teachings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, eat a vegetarian meal, or just sit and talk with one another. Over the course of my six months of fieldwork I attended these meetings every week spending most of my time at the Sunday meeting, which tends to be the largest. During these meetings I listened to the discourses given by various Fellowship members, taking notes in my field notebook. After the meetings I engaged in small conversations sometimes

⁴ In one case, I have used an interviewee's real name at her request. Sharon Marcus, whom I have quoted from her memoirs, a radio interview and an interview conducted by me, requested that I use her English name (she uses an Arabic name at the Fellowship) throughout this thesis for the sake of consistency.

about my research and sometimes not. I continually made the purpose of my presence known to those I talked to and I feel that at the conclusion of my fieldwork a significant portion of the Fellowship population was aware of my project.

When not attending meetings I made it a habit to explore the fellowship house, with or without one of the members, to observe what sorts of activities were going on and how the space was used. During one week I visited the Fellowship house every day observing the activities of the members outside of collective meetings – activities like prayer and meditation, book editing and collating, cooking, etc. I would often end up in Bawa's room, the space where the *Sheikh* did most of his private teachings and many of his public discourses as well. This is considered a very powerful space for Fellowship members and I was able to meditate and pray here, common practices in this space. All of these observations were made in an attempt to get a feeling for the Fellowship House as a space and how it reflects the people that fill it.

I visited the Mosque, which is attached to the Fellowship house, twice during the course of my fieldwork. This is also considered a space of great importance to many Fellowship members. On both occasions I was able to observe and participate in the traditional Islamic five-times prayer.

I visited the Mazar, probably the most sacred space for most Fellowship members, during one afternoon in order to meditate, pray and see the burial place of the organization's founder and spiritual guide. At this time I also visited the Fellowship cemetery and farm, both of which are located near the Mazar. This experience allowed me to see the final spaces that I feel make up the heart of the Fellowship community physically – the House, the Mosque, the Mazar, the farm and the cemetery – and also to participate in the activities that a Fellowship member might perform in these spaces.

CHAPTER 1

BAWA AND THE GENERATIONS

THE FOUNDING OF THE FELLOWSHIP

RECORDS OF M.R. BAWA MUHAIYADDEEN'S life begin around 1914 when he was found in the jungles of Sri Lanka by a group of pilgrims. As the story goes, the pilgrims were awed by Bawa's wisdom and asked him to come teach them in Jaffna, a town on the north coast of Sri Lanka in the predominantly Hindu Tamil area of the island. He agreed and began an *ashram* in Jaffna where he taught for many years virtually unknown.

In the early 1960s, the Muslim community of Colombo got word of Bawa and invited him to come teach in their homes. Bawa agreed and began to divide his time between Jaffna and Colombo. Word of him spread throughout the local Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities and soon even to a few passing Westerners. By the late sixties, a diverse group of students from many religious backgrounds centered their lives around Bawa and even began to translate and publish books from his discourses (Muhaiyaddeen 1991).

The story of how Bawa came to the United States and how the Fellowship began is not documented in books. Rather it is a history found in the stories of its members.⁵ In 1963 Katherine, an American woman who is considered one of the founding members

⁵ The majority of the historical background contained in this section was obtained from dozens of overlapping conversations I had with Fellowship members throughout my time there in combination with a taped radio interview with Katherine given to me by an older Fellowship member.

of the Fellowship, had a mystical experience of the highest order in which, she reports, she “saw everything.” The experience changed her profoundly and compelled her to look through various books on mysticism for explanations. What she read seemed to only partially describe her experience but, in the end, left her unsatisfied. In 1969 she was introduced by a friend to a Sri Lankan student of Bawa’s who was living in America. Somehow, she knew in her heart that Bawa was the only person who could explain to her what this experience was that changed her life. She knew he was the teacher she had been praying for. She asked the man for Bawa’s address in Sri Lanka and wrote a letter to him describing her profound experience. Bawa soon replied saying that he had been expecting her letter. They corresponded many times over the next few years and in 1971 Bawa made arrangements to come to Philadelphia to teach. By this time a small number of other interested spiritual seekers who had corresponded with Bawa had joined Katherine to welcome him to the States. This small group, calling themselves the Guru Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship, centered themselves in a small row house on 46th Street in Philadelphia to sit at Bawa’s feet. Their lives would be forever changed.

Over the course of 1971 Bawa discoursed at the row house and word of his presence spread through the network of spiritual seekers that permeated the United States in the seventies. Some of these early followers would post fliers and advertise on the radio, but for the most part, as one early member notes, “People just came. I’m not sure how they came, but they just started coming.” By the end of Bawa’s first visit to Philadelphia, about ninety to one hundred thirsty spiritual seekers, many from the Philadelphia area but some from other parts of the country too, were listening to Bawa’s constant discoursing.

In 1972 Bawa returned to Sri Lanka for about nine months taking a few of these first Fellowship members with him. He returned to America in 1973. By this time the number of seekers who had gotten word of Bawa had far outgrown the space available to them in the row house in downtown Philadelphia. And so, gathering what little funds they had, the Fellowship purchased an old colonial style house formerly occupied by a Hasidic Jewish community in a small neighborhood just on the edge of Philadelphia where they remain today.

THE FIRST GENERATION AND THE EARLY YEARS

WHEN ASKED, older Fellowship members say that they could not possibly have ended up anywhere else *but* the Fellowship once they had begun their spiritual journeys. The stories they tell of their initial inner awakenings during childhood and young adulthood at first seem as diverse as the people who are telling them. Upon closer inspection, however, there seems to be a strong force which they feel was guiding them toward Bawa's path.⁶ Keye, who joined the Fellowship in 1975 and is now a semi-retired psychologist and marriage counselor, describes this force clearly. He says:

What brings and brought people to the Fellowship is certainly not advertising. I would think at a later point, after Bawa got here, Bawa was the magnet and the people who came were the filings. But the filings have to have something in them that is magnetic and strong. It has to have an iron element in it. So the people that I knew early on that came to the Fellowship in the early seventies were all seekers. They were either conscious seekers, like the people who got the thing started, or people who were really disenchanted with their life – who didn't really know they were looking for truth or wisdom but they were open to it.

⁶ By "path" here I refer to not just spiritual and religious teachings but also to how these teachings are to be digested, reproduced and applied in all aspects of one's life.

This magnetic charge for truth and wisdom, particularly of the transcendental kind, is a trait all eight of the older interviewees reported about themselves. Three of these interviewees recall that at a young age they became disenchanted with the religious traditions that had been handed to them from their parents. Sharon Marcus, a writer who divides her time between the Fellowship branch in Toronto and the Philadelphia house, describes her and her husband's backgrounds in her memoirs entitled *My Years With the Qutb: A Walk in Paradise* (2000). She writes:

Intuitively drawn to the religions of the east, especially India, Tibet and Japan, we avoided certain traditions in principle, others through mere disinclination: Judaism and Christianity we avoided, except for a few interesting mystical threads... The disaffection of my father whom it pleased to make occasional droll comments on the observances of my relatives sealed my inability to extract anything from the traditions I was born to. As for Christianity, [Sharon's husband] had been sent routinely to church once in awhile as a youngster, flirting briefly with Catholicism for his first marriage, but lost interest in it somewhere before the marriage itself collapsed, and that seemed to finish whatever curiosity he might have had about this major religion of the west (7).

Once personal experiences like Sharon's had pushed these seekers away from the traditional religions of the West, a certain propensity for more mystical traditions, typically represented by Eastern spiritual paths, seems to have bubbled up. It is this propensity that started these seekers on their journeys toward an alternative spiritual fulfillment.

Jeff, a sociologist and head of the Iowa branch of the Fellowship, simply found the religious traditions of the West to be inadequate in explaining the mysteries of life. Jeff and his wife became disillusioned with the Christian Church's way of dealing with death after a loved one had passed on. He began seriously reading books from other spiritual traditions and found a deep connection with the mystical traditions of the East. Jeff recounts that he was drawn to the past and present lives of the great mystics because

they could get closer to God than he had ever dreamed possible. In Sharon and Jeff's experience, a general dissatisfaction with western traditions was superseded by something best described as a propensity of life perspective for transcendental traditions, especially those of an Eastern origin. As Ismar, a 25 year-old-second generation Fellowship member, says, "I don't think you could be involved in a community like the Fellowship and not have some kind of different world perspective than the common person, if that makes any sense."

The different world perspective that Ismar refers to, which Keye claims magnetically drew members to the Fellowship, is actually not as uncommon in America as one might think. Sociologist Paul H. Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson, in their book *The Cultural Creatives* (2000), found that currently 26 percent of adult Americans – nearly 50 million people – seem to demonstrate social behavior which they propose is, "shaping a new kind of American culture for the twenty-first century" (4).⁷ The Cultural Creatives, as Ray and Anderson have labeled this sector of the American population, are not satisfied with the status quo of American life.

They are disenchanted with "owning more stuff," materialism, greed, me-firstism, status display, glaring social inequalities of race and class, society's failure to care adequately for elders, women, and children, and the hedonism and cynicism that pass for realism in modern society (Ray & Anderson 2000:17).

A vision of what the world *should* be like is actually a commonality between Cultural Creatives. Their reality "includes heart and mind, personal and public, individual and community" (Ray and Anderson, 2000:17). Their worldview is holistic, interconnected and seamless as apposed to partisan and fragmented. Much of Ray and Anderson's

⁷ The reader may find it interesting to note that this book was first recommended to me by one of the older generation Fellowship members as a study that particularly matched his experience.

research correlates closely with what I have observed at the Fellowship. Part of this connection I will touch on here and part I will expand on in later chapters.

Despite agreement on a lofty worldview, on the outside Cultural Creatives probably have less in common than one might expect. Ray and Anderson (2000) propose:

What Cultural Creatives have in common is not their success in navigating the cultural crossover, nor their personalities, intelligence, religion, or ethnic origin. They are simply ordinary people who share a culture of values and worldview and, to some extent, a lifestyle (20).

This diverse section of the population is not distinguished by a commonality of external traits or intellectual pursuits, rather, they share a way of looking at the world that involves a common culture of values and a feeling about the way life *should* be. I found this to be true at the Fellowship. Sarah, a 19 year old second generation Fellowshippier, confirms this notion about the Fellowship community. She says:

See, the Fellowship is a really unique place because in most communities *like* people come together. For whatever purpose, a common goal... The Fellowship is a place where there are many different people with many different backgrounds and faiths, you know religious, political, spiritual everything. They're all very very different. You know some of them were like ridiculous hippies dropping acid every two days and seeing a new *swami* every week. Then there are other people in the Fellowship who are very conservative. They were raised in a conservative household and their rebellion was living with Bawa. So you've got people from India, people from Africa, America, Jewish people, Christians, Buddhists and Muslims. All coming together, united in this common purpose, trying to pursue whatever spiritual goal they have.

Rather than coming together because of race, class or religious background, Fellowship members have come together as a result of something more personal that is beyond outer appearance or history – they all have the desire to be spiritual people and to attain their individual spiritual goals.

Awakening to one's deep-seated desire for this new worldview begins, as I found time and again among members of the Fellowship, with what Ray and Anderson call the Inner Departure. They give an example of this process from one of their interviews:

Dominique Mazeaud had been an ambitious young art curator "happily working my way up the world of the New York galleries during the 1970s," she told us, and "at the same time I was working my way down into my soul. I was asking, 'Who am I? What am I here for?' Nobody I knew was looking for answers because as much as I loved working with the masters of abstract expressionism and pop art, everywhere I looked I found insecurity and devastation. I concluded that something essential was missing, and I thought to myself, every period of history has had its own way of expressing the spiritual in art. I'm going to help find our way" (Ray & Anderson 2000:48).

Dominique's inner dissatisfaction with what she saw around her caused her to begin asking questions about the very nature of her identity and the purpose of her life. Her outlet for these concerns was found in a spiritual pursuit that would combine with her secular life while fulfilling her inner yearning. Compare this with Keye's account of his early years. He says:

I ended up in New York City in my early twenties after going through the Marine Corp and a few other experiences – drinking heavily, unhappy with my life, knowing things were black and white and they should be Technicolor, walking the streets of New York, working, well employed, living in The Village – this was the early sixties – and really not happy with myself and my own life. Knowing things should be right but they really weren't.

At this moment of dissatisfaction with his life, Keye experienced an incredible moment of oneness – a truly mystical experience of existence that he was to never experience again until he came to the Fellowship. He says:

One day...I remember walking up town. I was on the corner of 23rd and 5th at Gramercy Park and I remember crossing over to the southwest corner of Gramercy and this thing came up out of me kind of like this Gestalt. Like a giant word and the word was "image". And it kind of burst on my brain and my emotional – and all the stuff I'd been thinking about, trying to figure out, kind of made sense. Made sense in the understanding that everything I was living was living to portray, support, stabilize, enrich, an image, which I had either chosen or

had been given to me but it wasn't really me. It was a defensive mechanism or a way of getting what I wanted or what I thought I should be all about but it wasn't really what I was. Which was very profound for me. It was one of those, "Ah Ha!" experiences – a very spiritual experience in a true sense.

This initial dissatisfaction followed by a glimpse of something much greater prompted Keye to explore Hinduism in India, travel to Japan where he practiced serious Zen meditation for a number of years, experiment with LSD and Jungian Analysis, and finally to the Fellowship. Like Dominique, Keye's professional life as a psychologist and marriage counselor has become a part of his inner spiritual life also. For example, he has recently published a book about marriage, which he claims is "all Bawa." Similar to the experiences of the Cultural Creatives described by Ray and Anderson, it was clear to Keye that his black and white world *should* be Technicolor and that the path to this new world was inner spiritual work. In early adulthood, there was a sense among the first generation of Fellowship members, whom I am suggesting are the very type of person documented in Ray and Anderson's study, that life in the workaday world, seen as the norm for many Americans, was not in line with their inner-most hearts. They felt, perhaps from a very young age, the necessity to set out on a path of exploration to claim their spiritual destiny.

On top of this seemingly inherent need to search, the first generation of Fellowship members were conducting their journeys during the sixties and seventies, a time in American history when, as Jeff says, "Everyone was exploring everything." The hippie movement was at its most dispersed. "We were seriously thinking that we were on the verge of something big," recalls Mitchell, an artist and one of Bawa's closest students, "like we were at the beginning of a major change in world consciousness." Jeff,

having traveled from Iowa to the Fellowship in 1975 with his wife to see Bawa, describes the Philadelphia Fellowship house at that time. He recalls:

There were a lot of eccentric people there. People who had lived in tents, people who found and explored the path through drugs... My wife and I were probably the straightest people who ever entered that place. We were in to the counterculture and youth movements in Iowa, but not drugs. The place was a little hippy-dippy for us.

All of the older Fellowship members whom I talked to were to some degree or another involved in or at least informed by the network of spiritual seekers, activists and visionaries associated with counterculture movements in the sixties and seventies. Texts by the great masters from nearly every spiritual and mystical tradition in the world were becoming well known at this time and Bawa's future students drank thirstily from this new/ancient wisdom, connecting with others who were carrying on similar pursuits.

Sharon Marcus (2000) recalls the pre-Bawa years for her and her husband:

We...read voraciously. *The Diamond Sutra* the most treasured among the Buddhist sutras we approached with little understanding but an open heart, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Upanishads* as well as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the *I Ching*, Lao Tsu, the Cold Mountain poet, Ramana Maharshi, Muktananda, Shunriyo Suzuki, Milarepa, Lama Govinda, Philip Kapleau, Stephen, John Lilly, Alan Watts, Michio Kushi, *Akwasasne Notes*, *Mother Earth News*, Carlos Castaneda, Yogananda, Bubba Free John, Ram Das, *The Boohoo Bible*, Chogyam Trungpa, many, many accounts of spiritual adventure and investigation, handbooks of yoga, Satchidananda high on the list of physical practices, recorded meditations, chants and devotional singing, all these give some idea of the exhaustive purpose which filled our days and inspired our nights (7).

The combination of freedom to explore mind-expanding drugs and freedom to explore mind-expanding philosophies and religions was the cultural environment in which the first generation Fellowship members carried out their spiritual journeys. It is logical then that Fellowship members, already endowed with the urges of the Cultural Creative, would be furthered along on their spiritual paths by the mood of the hippy era and the abundant

spiritual resources available to them. Philip Wexler, in his book *Mystical Society* (2000) confirms this:

The 1960s drug transgression of socially conventional perception inscribed the preexisting belief of the American religion in an ‘immanent presence of the sacred’ in the ‘human heart and natural world’ more indelibly than a revivalist campaign. It offered a model of a cultural and social alternative that was based in a very different, unmodern, direct, individual perception of the inner recharting of experience along the lines of mystical traditions (120).

In other words, as one Fellowship member said, “Religion is altered perception. In the sixties we were trying to hold on to that kind of change of perception. We did it with drugs at first.” The clear conclusion, then, is this: what initially jump-started the journey for most first generation Fellowship members was an intricate combination of factors.

Personal awakening, a proclivity for the spiritual, access to networks of information, new freedoms spawned from the social fabric of the time – each of these factors pointed first generation Fellowship members toward the spiritual path.

Once Bawa’s American students had set themselves on the path toward wisdom, it was only a matter of time before they found themselves at the feet of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. Bawa’s name and his discourses, a few of which had been published in the early seventies, were certainly available to any who were looking for them alongside the hundreds of other gurus who had descended upon America at that time. In seven of the eight cases I investigated, first generation Fellowship members found the Fellowship through a stranger or acquaintance who was either a member herself or at least had access to one of Bawa’s published texts.

Sharon Marcus and her husband, for example, were invited by a friend to come to Toronto where Bawa was speaking for several days. They were accustomed to traveling various places in Canada and the United States to hear gurus speak. On this particular

occasion, several arranged plans had been cancelled suddenly freeing them on the very same days Bawa was to come to discourse. Knowing there is no such thing as a coincidence, they decided to make the trip to Toronto. Sharon (2000) states, “When God wants you in a specific place at a certain time, make no mistake, you will be there” (11).

Other accounts of finding Bawa are even more “coincidental.” Jack, who feels he had been searching for a wise man of perfection all his life, found himself out of work and waiting for direction in his life when one day he heard a man talking about Bawa in a New York City diner. He butted into the man’s conversation saying:

You know these gurus who’ve come from India to the United States, they’re running a business without capital. It’s just a scam. And these *Sheikhs* from the Middle East are even more despicable with their male chauvinist authoritarian models. And if you look at the injustice in these regions, what have they brought? What justice and harmony is existing there? Why have they come here?

The man simply replied, “Well, this man is not like that,” and showed Jack Bawa’s picture. Under the picture was a quote that read, “Meditation is not sitting with the eyes closed pretending the mind is still. The mind is never still. Meditation is transforming hastiness to patience, selfishness to compassion, hatred to love, and burning out the ego in the fire of Divine Wisdom.” Jack recalls, “And that made sense to me. And I looked at this picture and I had this profound experience of déjà vu – as if I were remembering something.” He immediately asked, “Where is this man? I need to go see him.” A few hours later, Jack received a phone call from an old roommate he had not talked to in many years who wanted to travel to Philadelphia in order to spend some time together. Somewhat taken aback by this sudden turn of events, Jack accepted the invitation and soon miraculously found himself in Philadelphia walking up the stairs of the Fellowship to Bawa’s room.

While their personal backgrounds and cultural contexts may seem to have steered them directly towards the Fellowship, first generation Fellowship members are always quick to note that they feel something much deeper was at work in bringing them to Bawa's doorstep. The stories of the early member's first encounters with Bawa are some of the most mystically charged I have ever heard and are testament to the extraordinary nature of the *Sheikh*. Sharon (2000) recounts her initial perception of him on a chilly November morning at the Fellowship house in Toronto as he descended the stairs:

A small man, shorter than myself, immaculately thin, wearing a simple cotton sarong, a heavy sweater and a gauze-like prayer shawl wrapped as a turban on his head came into the room, luminous, smiling, radiant. When we were all seated again he began with an exquisite prayer of pure love which touched me profoundly, he called us the jeweled lights of his eyes, he said we were the children born with him, born of his heart. I had never heard such words before, I had never resonated with a love that was offered so openly, so honorably, so truthfully; he certainly commanded my focus and my attention immediately, totally, while I noticed at the same time that someone must have turned up the heat downstairs as the temperature in the room rose significantly, Bawa was clearly elderly and fragile, it was a natural assumption confirmed on subsequent mornings. As soon as Bawa appeared, began to speak, the icy edge dissolved in flowering warmth. It wasn't until the following year I learned by chance that no one had ever touched the thermostat, the warmth came from something, somewhere else (13).

Bawa's appearance, as I can account from photographs and videos, was at the very least unforgettable – a boyish face that is at the same time strangely old, flashing eyes of incredible depth and intensity like black holes, a strikingly thin frame, and his trademark snow white beard, which perfectly outlined the underside of his chin and the sides of his face. Even before his high timbered voice radiated the loving words that Sharon recounts, many early Fellowship members were sold on Bawa from a single glance at his striking form. Jack says, "When I went up those stairs and walked into his room and I saw him, I just knew he had been waiting for me."

In many cases, on their first visit Bawa was able to give instruction to these new students using personal experiences from their pasts. Keye's first visit to the Fellowship involved an experience of this kind. In the middle of his discourse, Bawa spoke directly to Keye. He recalls:

There was this little man sitting on the dais and I sat to the right and he looked at me in the middle of his talk and then said to me, "It's this way my child." Looking directly at me with those piercing eyes, he said, "If you cut an apple in half it falls in two pieces. On the left half is," looking at me and he says, "alcohol, sex, Zen, psychology, LSD" and he was even more exact than that, I can't even remember exactly, but he really read my life. He said, "And on the right side. The right side of the apple is God."

Powerful experiences like Keye's abound among first generation Fellowshipers and, as Keye says, all seem to point to the fact that, "When you met this man, you just didn't go anywhere else. That was it. You were now at Fort Knox. There's no point in going anywhere else." Given the depth of searching that most Fellowshipers struggled with in early adulthood, somehow Bawa seemed to validate on every level all of their accumulated criteria for the ideal spiritual father. They simply had to stay.

Consequently, if they were not convinced to drop everything and move to Philadelphia to live close to Bawa, his early followers would visit as often as possible. Some traveled hundreds of miles to see him even for just a few days. Those who lived in other parts of the country, or even other countries, began branches of the Fellowship, usually at Bawa's request. Jeff, who is one of the heads of the Fellowship branch in Iowa, notes every year they would make car trips out to the Philadelphia house. "The red carpet came out for us," he recalls of these visits. "Bawa would greet everyone when we came in and it would just melt your heart."

Life at the Philadelphia Fellowship house in the seventies could best be described as communal. Many of the early members lived in the house itself, sleeping on the floor in sleeping bags until they were able to move out on their own. Bawa would discourse two or three times a day. He spoke in an ancient form of Tamil, which the native speaking Sri Lankans (and eventually a few well trained Americans) who translated for him said was comparable to the difference between modern and classical Greek. Much of the activity, which always centered around Bawa, occurred in Bawa's bedroom as he was at this point already a very old man and physically frail.⁸ Nearly all of Bawa's public discourses, spontaneous songs, and questions-and-answer sessions were recorded either on audio or videotape by his students. These tapes, which still exist today and number in the hundreds, are now the primary teaching tool at the Fellowship.

When not giving discourses, Bawa would cook for his students, take them on car rides through the countryside, watch Hindi and Tamil films with them, give them medicine when they were sick, and answer any and every question they might have about their lives. What job to take, what car to buy, who to marry, what to name their children, how to raise a family – Bawa treated all these questions with the same importance. He was their father both spiritually and practically. Bawa encouraged them to stop taking drugs, stop eating meat, cut their hair, get good jobs, find good places to live. Eventually he began dropping hints about marriage and children. Sharon (2000) recalls:

In the early days we had a number of what I thought of as the sweaty tee shirt weddings because Bawa would send for the couple one morning, it was always in the morning, before noon, put their hands together with his, recite prayers, offer

⁸ Bawa rarely spoke about himself or his past. When questioned about his personal life, he stressed that his purpose was not to talk about himself but to talk about God. Consequently, no one knows exactly how old he was when he died. Considering the earliest records of his life describe him as already being an older man in 1914, it can only be assumed that he was well over one hundred at the time of his death.

advice, bless their lives, give them fruit and cups of tea, then tell them to do the paper work to make it legal (50).

By 1976 these married couples began to have children. The first of these second generation Fellowship members were born during one of Bawa's absences in Sri Lanka and by the early 1980s the Philadelphia house was full of American children with rather unusual Arabic names.

Life continued on like this at the Fellowship House in Philadelphia from 1973 to 1986. Bawa would often return to Sri Lanka for one or two years at a time in order to be with his students there who continued their devotion from afar. Small groups of American students would often accompany him in order to receive teachings from the master "in his element." When Bawa was away, life continued on at the Fellowship house in Philadelphia and at the various branches across the country. Students worked on the intense prayer and meditation techniques Bawa gave to them, trying to purify their hearts and get ever closer to God.

As time went on, Bawa's illnesses grew more severe. Eventually he was confined to a wheelchair and, during the last few years of his life, seldom left his bed and was bound to a respirator. Despite his poor health, Bawa discoursed endlessly, reserving each bit of strength for that purpose alone. He slowly revealed deeper and deeper teachings to his students and even began to incorporate traditional Islamic elements into the path. Over nine months in 1983 and 1984, Bawa oversaw the construction of a traditional Islamic mosque, which was attached behind the Fellowship House and built almost entirely by Fellowship members. Sharon (2000) notes:

Today when I look back on the significance of the mosque in our lives I cannot help thinking that Bawa had this sanctuary, this refuge built as a safe place to leave us when he would no longer be among us physically. Yes, we had the inner

light planted in each heart, we had the pure refraction of truth deposited in the grace and wisdom of the inner mosque, but we also needed the outer mosque to learn a few things there as well (171).

It is common among first generation members to report the fully conscious way in which Bawa died – as if he were planning it all along and waiting for just the right moment to pass. Sharon gives a vivid picture of this time. She writes:

There was no unhappiness in this time of his declining health, what there was instead was intermittent bouts of terror, for me, when his asthmatic episodes or sieges of pneumonia kept him poised at the edge of death, something he declined several times in conversation with the angel of death because, he said later, his children still needed him, and were told he was given permission to delay his departure until he thought the time was right. I took this to mean until we were ready to let him go, and in 1985 I could not imagine ever being ready to do that (Marcus 2000:170).

Finally in the winter of 1986, Bawa's children seemed to recognize that his physical suffering could go on no longer. A few days before his death, Bawa requested the doors to his room be left open so that anyone could come in to be with him or ask him questions. Although he had little strength, he taught right up until his death on the evening of December 8th 1986.

Bawa's passing was a shock to the Fellowship communities but uniquely so to the Philadelphia branch whose members spent so much time with his physical form. Their true father had passed on and yet, knowing the nature of death as Bawa had taught them, they knew his presence would never truly leave them. A comment frequently connected with any conversation about Bawa's death is that, "He always said he could do more for us once he had left his body." Although some did leave for a variety of reasons after Bawa passed (no one is sure of the exact number), the majority of the first generation members remained with their families and continued on. An executive committee was already in place while Bawa was alive and with this structure the Fellowship as an

organization continues to this day.⁹ As Mitchell, an older Fellowship member, explained in an eloquent discourse one Sunday morning, the burden is to live up to one of Bawa's last commands – "Don't forget me. Don't forget me. Don't forget me." Their responsibility is to keep the Fellowship going and keep the message that Bawa left pure. "Now that Bawa has left his body," Mitchell notes, "we must carry with us a portable, internal Bawa." This is their challenge.

Today, the Philadelphia branch looks much as it did at the time of Bawa's passing. The kitchen is still churning out Bawa's vegetarian recipes left to his children in his *Tasty Economical Cookbook*. Bawa's room has been left to look nearly identical to how it did before his passing. His bed remains in the middle of the room with his tiny black slippers tucked underneath. His paintings, meditative depictions of the complexities of God and the Cosmos, still hang on the walls. His dresser and personal effects remain. "This place is not a museum, though," Sharon assures me as she sits at Bawa's bedside editing one of his texts for publishing. Bawa's room continues to be a powerful spiritual center at the Fellowship. People pray and meditate here. They pay their respects to the *Sheikh* by lightly placing their forehead on his bed with closed eyes – a truly touching gesture.

Walking down the stairs from Bawa's room to the ground floor, the staircase is lined with frame after frame of photos taken every year of all of Bawa's children assembled for the annual Anniversary Weekend. Hundreds of smiling faces stand in

⁹ The executive committee consists of about a dozen older Fellowship members appointed by Bawa to run various aspects of the Fellowship organization. Positions vary from documenting and preserving Bawa's recordings, to publishing Bawa's discourses, to paying the bills. Executive committee members are responsible for presenting Bawa's teachings at community meetings throughout the week but are not looked to as spiritual guides per se. In fact, they often organize meetings around a particular topic by asking other community members from either generation to present on that topic or just come up with one of their own.

front of the Fellowship house, each photo quietly marking the passage of time. At the bottom of the stairs remains the large meeting room where Bawa gave public discourses. It is now lined with seats facing the raised dais at the front of the room. On the dais remain Bawa's big green chair and an ornamented mirror above it that symbolizes the guru's relationship to his students. He is a brilliantly polished mirror in which, as you peer deeper and deeper, you begin to see your true self.

Every Sunday morning at ten o'clock, instead of gathering to see Bawa speak physically, Fellowship members assemble in the meeting room to see Bawa speak electronically. Nearly every day members of the community present teachings on a variety of topics derived from their years with the *Sheikh* followed by a presentation of one of the hundreds of audio and video discourses housed within the Fellowship house. The lights go down and a large projector screen descends from the ceiling stopping just above the arms of Bawa's big chair. Someone presses play and Bawa's image comes tumbling out from the past onto the projector screen. Suddenly his children are at his feet again. Only for some they are at his feet for the first time.

THE SECOND GENERATION AND THE LATER YEARS

ALTHOUGH THERE ARE a few second generation Fellowship members who have many memories of Bawa in his physical form, most (all eight of my interviewees) were only a few years old or not even born in 1986 when Bawa passed on. "Our memories of him are in blips," reports one younger member. Amina, a 23 year old living and working on her own in Center City Philadelphia, remembers Bawa scolding her for taking some candy

without permission. Sarah, now a politically active 19 year old, remembers the night Bawa died and her parents taking her to the Fellowship to see him. Although these memories are but snippets of time, they nevertheless appear vividly to these young adults. They sometimes recall them as their earliest memories. As we shall see, the intriguing aspect of this generation is that, although their overall experience is markedly different from the older generation, and they are certainly perceived as a separate entity, most still accept Bawa's path as their own.

Unlike the older members, for the second generation Bawa comes in videos, tapes, books, and the fantastic stories told by their parents. Sarah, when asked what she thinks about the videos, says:

They're really helpful because – well when Jesus came, he came, he spoke and then he died. And you know what happened? His words got all messed up. Not that I'm comparing Bawa to Jesus or anything, but it allows us to go back when we have questions and find answers. Everything is cataloged and so you can see in what context he said everything. Sometimes I'll remember something that Bawa said and then find out who he said it too originally and why and it will make so much more sense to me. That's what the videos are so great for.

Sarah and other second generation members have the luxury of access to thousands of hours of contextual discourse when they have questions. Although they cannot ask their questions directly to the *Sheikh* himself, chances are they can find their answer documented somewhere in his books and videos.

“One thing that is very typical of a Fellowship child's experience is that we're really really protected,” reports Sarah over a cup of coffee at her favorite diner. “Our parents are really really protective of what we experience and what we see of the world because they want to keep us as pure as possible for as long as possible. So, most of us have been strongly protected in every sense of the word.” Fellowship children did not

grow up like their parents. They were not allowed to explore drugs and sex, they were not allowed to go to dances, they celebrated Ramadan and perhaps even Christmas too, they did not eat meat like the other children in school, and they had very different sounding names than their peers. Consequently, in childhood many Fellowship children socialized little with those outside the community, finding more comfortable connections between each other. As prescribed by Bawa, Fellowship parents felt that a certain amount of insularity from activities outside the Fellowship would provide them with a more solid moral foundation for later life.

Bawa was very clear in multiple discourses about how children should be raised amongst the trappings of the twentieth century and Fellowship parents tried to follow these teachings to the letter. Bawa (1980) said:

Because God can no longer be spoken of in the schools, you are the ones who must teach your children about God. But your teaching must be in accord with science and the modern day. And it must be done in a manner which is appropriate for their hearts and will stir their love. Show them the love and truth that are the essence of God. Show them equality, tranquility, and peace of mind. If you can embrace your children with good qualities and show them a good path, they will accept what you say. Otherwise, they will never accept it (3).

Fellowship parents were strict in the ideals they desired their children to be raised in because they wanted their children to avoid all the “trappings” many of them had once been ruled by. However, their instructions from Bawa were also focused on providing a loving foundation sensitive to their children’s modern lifestyles so that later in life they would follow Bawa’s path. During one of my first visits to the Fellowship, this was made immediately clear to me by one of the older members. She said:

Bawa always used to call us [first generation followers] his children and the younger ones his grandchildren. One time someone asked Bawa why he did this and Bawa said, “It’s because you chose me. You chose this path and they didn’t. When they are older, if they decide they want to follow this path too, then they

will become my children. But until then they are my grandchildren.” So it wasn’t forced you see.

As with the older generation, Bawa’s path was never meant to be forced. Although I was certainly privy to reports about Fellowship children that seem to contradict this statement (rebellion stories which surprisingly often resulted in the child’s voluntary return to Bawa’s path) the younger interviewees I spoke to feel that the way they were raised was anything but detrimental to them.

An overwhelming sentiment from all eight younger interviewees was that their upbringings, having been based on the teachings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, provided them with a positive head start to life. While their childhoods were strict, they feel they were given a gift that other children were never privy to – the gift of wisdom. Grant, a high school teacher in his mid twenties, notes, “We were taught to set spiritual goals. Like you would – like, ‘I want to be a doctor,’ for example, well there are spiritual goals that are on the same level as that. And a lot of people aren’t thinking about that.” Fellowship children were raised in an atmosphere oriented toward obtaining a good intellectual *and* spiritual education. In another interview Grant speaks about his upbringing being a gift.

He says:

Here’s the gift I’ve been given. I was told that, well you don’t have to experiment and try everything. Or really you don’t have to experiment or try any of this stuff. If you have what’s called Wisdom, then you can gain the insight from the experience without having the pain of the experience. And that’s what Wisdom is...or one form of it. I always liken it to: If you’re walking and there’s a fire in front of you, then you can step into the fire and get burned and go back the way you came, but then you have to go back through the fire again. So that’s like if you come to a situation where you weren’t able to learn from it, so you regressed and you went back to where you were before and you have to experience the situation again. Or you go into the fire, the fire burns you and you step out the other side. So you went into the situation, you made bad decisions but you learned from the decisions and you moved on. *Or* you came to the fire and saw that there is a way around. Whatever divine insight came to you, you said, “Oh

look I can take this path. I can walk around the fire.” And so you’ve seen everything relating to the fire. You saw how hot it was, you saw what happened to the other people who walked through it, but you just walked around it. So you gained all the experience of it without the pain. And that would be using your Wisdom in the appropriate situation.

By staying “out of the fire” in childhood Fellowship children feel they have been able to embark on lives already equipped with the tools to deal with many of the obstacles that most children must struggle with on their own.

There is perhaps no better example of the gratitude Fellowship children feel towards their upbringing than Sarah’s story. Sarah is now 19 but has been through a lot. She is a self-described “addictive personality” and through high school struggled with the drug addictions and emotional problems that plagued her high school friends. Through Bawa’s teachings and the help of Aisha, one of her closest Fellowship friends, she was able to negotiate her situation successfully. She says:

I never did drugs. Partly that was Aisha’s influence. Actually it was interesting because I had always been like, “Of course I’m going to experiment, you know, I’m a young kid.” But Aisha and I started researching what Bawa had said about the subject and she’s like, “Well it might not be such a good idea. He said it can have lasting affects and he said one drop of alcohol distorts your judgment for seven years or something.” And you know if I’m serious about what I’m doing on this path, I can’t afford for my judgment to be distorted for seven years. So it helped to stay out of trouble because – well one of my best friends actually ended up killing himself from heroin at the age of 16 or 17. So I’m really pretty sure that my life was saved by that, by my connection with the Fellowship.

Fellowship children are by no means immune to the pitfalls of experimentation; however, they feel as though they have the analytic tools to decide how to conduct their lives in the face of these questions. For Sarah, this saved her life. Beyond just the teachings, the Fellowship itself has been a stable and loving center for her as well. She recalls:

When I was at my most depressed and all my friends had been thrown out of school, I started turning to the Fellowship as my way of finding the love that I needed. I started getting up for prayers every single day. Not so much just for

pleasure, I mean that was a nice added bonus, but even more so because my community was there. I was in a community where people would just throw their arms around me every single morning and I could sit in their arms and cry if I needed to and they'd take care of me as best they could. Everyone had another piece of advice to offer and they could just be really open and I really knew that I was cared for. I'd go there after school. I'd go there every single night and I'd go there every single morning.

Sarah found solace in the Fellowship community and the wisdom and love of the older members when she was at her lowest point. Surrounded by some of life's toughest problems and an emotionally draining friend group, Sarah emphatically reports of the Fellowship that, "it saved my life because, by focusing on my spiritual life instead of so much of my social life, I was able to basically not kill myself on heroin like many of my friends had. I didn't go down that same path."

Fellowship children feel that Bawa's teachings and the spiritually focused environment of the Fellowship make them feel from a very young age, as Grant says, "not in the dark" about life. However, they also view their early lives as somewhat of a strain. Grant recalls his experience in high school as leading a double life. He says:

I had my high school life, which was curtailed – I didn't go to the parties everybody else went to. I didn't participate as much in the social life that everyone did. I did a little bit but not that much. The people that I was closest with in high school were all the Fellowship people there. And those were the people I hung out with the most. So I had this double life where I had my life that people saw at high school and there was a totally other side of me that I never revealed there and I was really shy about it. I'm less shy now but I'm still very – like I don't go around announcing to people that I'm, ya know, a Sufi or I'm Muslim or...

In one sense, having been raised differently, the younger Fellowshipers feel that it has been harder to connect with non-Fellowship kids. A common sentiment among the younger generation is that they only reveal their Fellowship lives to a few select people who seem to be able to handle the concept. In an age of cults and "Islamic" terrorism the

Fellowship, with its charismatic guru figure and Islamic traditions, can be easily misconstrued.

In addition to the burden of their unique personal lives, the younger generation also seems to feel a certain responsibility to the gifts of Bawa's wisdom. Even Sarah, after astonishing me with her story, countered, saying:

Why is it that everyone else has the freedom to do whatever they want but because I feel like I know – I feel like I have been given this responsibility whether I like it or not. Now of course it has probably saved my life in more ways than one, you know literally and metaphorically, but at the same time it's really difficult because sometimes I'm like, yeah I'd like to just be the typical teenager and would really like to just go out and do what everyone else is doing and not think twice.

Although Sarah recognizes that she has been given an incredible amount of wisdom to separate right from wrong and what she should do from what she should not do, there is nevertheless the nagging suspicion that she must, to use Grant's analogy, walk into the fire and get burned, even if just a little bit. Ismar, who came to the Fellowship with his parents at age 12 after Bawa had died, agrees with Sarah. In comparison to the older generation he says of his generation:

I'd make the argument that in some ways it is a lot easier for us because we're already at the fifth level and they had to progress from level zero to level five. And we've already started at level five. But, because it's not a hand that we picked ourselves, there's always that question I think "Is this right?"

Ismar touches on several issues here. Compared to their parents, Fellowship children recognize that they have been given the tools for understanding themselves and the world at a much younger age. However, unlike their parents, they did not choose the path for themselves. It was given to them without a romantic search for truth. Besides feeling the obligation to keep an important part of their lives secret from those who do not understand, there is a sense among these young adults that one needs to own one's beliefs

totally. Is this path the right one for me or is there more out there? Fellowship children have been placed in a very unique and difficult set of circumstances. They have been blessed with a wealth of practical and spiritual knowledge from their parents and Bawa. While this is a huge part of their lives, they feel they must keep it secret from most. They did not choose the path for themselves, yet they are expected to inherit the Fellowship from their parents. On top of all this, they are trying to lead outwardly normal lives.

All eight younger interviewees I spoke to see college as a place where they can break from the complexities of their Fellowship lives, test their faith and explore the world independently of their parents and the Fellowship community. It is a trying time for both generations. Grant, who is now in graduate school, reflects on the college experience. He says:

College is like the anti-Fellowship... But you know what, it is and it isn't. It's an opportunity for you to test what you believe in and it's an incredible period of growth – of mental and intellectual growth, spiritual growth, worldly growth, learning to just be on your own. It's an important time period. And it's also a period when you can really screw yourself up if you aren't prepared for it.

For Grant, college was like “tempering steel.” It was a time for him to explore the world and see if what he believes really holds up on its own. At the same time, it can be an incredible force of separation from the Fellowship community. Not only are college age Fellowshipers separated from the physical community for extended periods of time, but also they are thrust into a new community with an entirely different orientation. One

Fellowship college student notes:

I think a lot of times the spirituality is lost. A lot of kids go to college with a lot of pressure to succeed in academics, finishing college and getting a job. And a lot of times I think in that whole complicated process they lose almost the process of building on their spirituality if they ever had it. It's a very difficult place and it definitely tests you in a lot of ways. There are a lot of pressures in college and I think that college doesn't necessarily help too much in building your spirituality

and building yourself. But I don't know if that's the whole purpose of college. I think that that's more on an individual's basis. I think that you can learn from everything. I mean I know that Bawa said everything is a lesson.

Suddenly these young adults, who have to this time been raised in a spiritually focused community that provides tools to deal with the real world, are thrust into an intellectual community with considerably different views of drinking, sex, and drugs.

It is no surprise, then, that the older generation feels a tremendous amount of anxiety when younger Fellowship members go off to college and are seen at the Fellowship less and less. This second generation is the future of the Fellowship and the older members worry that the things of the world are pulling them away. Anisa, an 18 year old who has just been accepted to her first choice college, remarks:

I guess it wasn't really a choice that we made. I mean that's how we were brought up. We were told to go and this is who we are and our beliefs. It wasn't a choice that we made for ourselves. I guess it's only once you leave home that it becomes more of your own choice.

The message, which the younger generation feels the older generation does not understand, is that despite the fact that most Fellowship kids feel the need to leave in order to explore, they will always come back. The reason why they come back is very simple: the wisdom taught at the Fellowship gives them a sense of security and groundedness in their lives. Sarah says, "I haven't found anywhere else that I can feel as safe as at the Fellowship. But it's also my spiritual and religious center. It's also – you know it's my family, it's my spiritual life, it's everything. I think the youth will always come back because there is truth in everything that's said."

All eight of the younger interviewees, despite the fact that they are in differing stages of young adulthood, reported to me that they accepted Bawa's teachings as their own path. All eight have felt little to no desire to explore other spiritual paths. The need

to explore, more often than not, revolves around the desire for a greater understanding of Bawa's teachings and how they apply in the world or simply for a greater experiential knowledge of life in general. Sarah says, "We've got our problems just like any other community. But I value the Fellowship more than anything else. I don't particularly like Philadelphia, but I would never leave this place simply because I want my kids to be raised with the same morals and values and beliefs and sense of community." Fellowship children come back from their searching because Bawa's teachings remain a part of their lives and, perhaps more importantly, the unique ties they have formed within the Fellowship community cannot be replicated anywhere else. Grant emphasizes that this process takes time:

The people of my direct age group are the same age as the people who came originally. And one of the biggest misconceptions, I think, is that the timetable for the first generation is the same as the second generation. Because they never went to college, they were wondering hippies. And I think that's something the adults struggle with because I don't think they realized that we're not ready to assume leadership positions until we have our lives firmly established in the way they do now.

Whereas the older generation experienced the world and searched for their path at a young age, going to college and becoming settled in their mid to late twenties, the younger generation's search seems to be taking place at a later time in their lives. Their life "timetable," as Grant puts it, is different. Bawa seems to have anticipated this. In a discourse about parenting he states:

If you teach them with love and truth, what your children learn will remain with them as they investigate on their own. The truth they see when they are gone will be the same truth they saw when they were with you. Then they will not get mixed up with drugs and gurus. They will not ruin their lives or waste them in mental institutions. They will not follow the ways of evil or try to commit suicide to escape the suffering such evil brings (Muhaiyaddeen 1980:5).

Bawa's aim was to implant in Fellowship children a propensity for the Truth that would accompany them throughout their lives. Whereas the older generation found the teachings after they found the world, the younger generation began with the teachings and feel the need to find the world in order to apply them and return once more to the Fellowship.

Although this path has been difficult for them, in the end, the sentiment remains among Fellowship children that they are thankful for what they have been given. Grant, when asked about the difference between each generation's experience, says:

Generation one, my parents generation, was in the presence of the *Sheikh* when they were cognizant of his presence. I was a child so to me his form is in blips and memories – I mean his outer form. My parents, their generation, they were in presence of the *Sheikh* twenty-four-seven. They could understand who is God through this person because he embodied the qualities of what Godliness is. So that was their experience, but my experience was being given the gift of the teachings. I wasn't any longer looking at a person and how they acted. There are all these stories about how he acted from dusk to dawn and those are very important but the real gift for my generation is growing up in that safe environment. So I don't have to deal with the burden of letting go of that form because I never experienced that form in a cognizant manner. But I have to understand who that person was inside myself which is a totally different – which is an evolving process. It's nothing that happens immediately. I'm still trying to figure that out. But all the teaching is there, all the understanding is there, all the guidance is there. The structure is there. So it's all there. I just have to grab a hold of it.

The younger generation does not have the luxury of the *Sheikh's* wisdom at their beck and call. Fortunately, they also do not have the burden of the attachment to his form now that he is gone. Nevertheless, they must now answer their questions using their own internal judgment. Just as with the older generation, they feel they must develop a portable, internal Bawa.

CONCLUSIONS

THIS, THEN, is the appearance of the Fellowship today. The older generation, having wondered through spectacular experiences finding salvation in their true Father, has become settled and comfortable. Their gift was spending a decade or more of their lives with the *Sheikh*, having their deepest questions answered. Their burden is to continue the Fellowship without Bawa in a way that will do justice to the gift he has given them. The younger generation, having been raised in the security of Bawa's wisdom, must now navigate the real world and recon it with their faith. Their gift is the loving community of the Fellowship. Their burden is to live up to the wisdom given to them by their parents and the physical guru they never met.

The generations, although they are conceptualized as separate parts of the community, seem to connect and in fact agree at the highest point for both of them – the teachings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and the Fellowship that he created. This point of connectivity allows the generations to function cohesively as a community. Although Fellowshipers parse their experience by generation, it is clear that Bawa's path allows them to connect on a spiritual level. The generation gap has been bridged at the Fellowship by some quality of Bawa's path that is deeply meaningful for both sets of seekers.

CHAPTER 2

TRADITIONALISM, MODERNISM, AND THE PATH

DURING THE FIFTEEN YEARS Bawa Muhaiyaddeen was in the United States, he presented to his children a spiritual path based largely on the ancient traditions of the *Sufis* yet incredibly adaptable to their modern lifestyles. All sixteen of the interviewees from both generations feel that Bawa's path gives them guidance and makes their lives more meaningful. But why is this? I argue that their collective attraction stems from the fact that Bawa's path emphasizes the notion that the spiritual and secular sides of life are in fact not separate but unified. The way in which Bawa's path is able to unify these devotees' modern worlds with their spiritual concerns without conflict requires a deeper look into the basics of the path and how it functions in the everyday lives of Fellowshipippers.

LEARNING UNITY, LIVING UNITY

ON THE SURFACE LEVEL, Bawa's path was "a mild trip," notes Mitchell, an artist and close disciple of Bawa. Unlike other Eastern spiritual traditions – such as Tibetan Buddhism where the initiate is given a Tibetan name, asked to bow to Tibetan god figures, asked to meditate with Tibetan incense on Tibetan rugs, etc. – Bawa's path was, according to Mitchell, refreshingly free of "the exotic East. No sarongs, very few strange

cultural things. It was exotic culture neutral.”¹⁰ Bawa affirms this in *The Guidebook* (1976) saying:

You need not alter any portion of your personal life for the sake of God. Do not alter your qualities, your actions, or your beauty for the sake of God. For the sake of God do not grow long hair. Do not grow a beard for the sake of God. You need not wear ochre robes or gowns for the sake of God. Such symbols are unnecessary for Him. He does not need a cap, a robe, or a crown. All of these are unnecessary (140).

Bawa saw little need for ritual dress or cultural specificity in order to know God. There was no hierarchy. There were no secret teachings to be revealed to the select few. They were not asked to be monastics. And although many were given Arabic names, it was never a requirement to use them. Bawa always referred to himself as a student on the path as well – as the lowest of the low. “You could never out-humble Bawa,” notes Keye, another older member. One did not bow to Bawa or give him gifts. In fact, it was Bawa who, at the end of his discourses, would hand out fruit, candy and, in the early years, cigarettes to his students. The physical appearance of Bawa’s path, then, was initially non-intimidating to the older generation. This appearance remains today. For example, although it is common practice for some to keep their heads covered while at the Fellowship, this custom is a personal choice and is never required of anyone, even while praying in the mosque.

Much of the “mild trip” Mitchell found at the Fellowship, seems to stem from a freedom of individuality which Bawa’s path was able to sustain. “Under Bawa someone

¹⁰At the Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling monastery in Bouddhanath, Nepal during the fall and winter of 2001, I conducted a small study of Western Tibetan Buddhists following a particular Rinpoche (an enlightened Buddhist master) who described to me their experiences with Tibetan Buddhism. Entitled *Finding A Way: Western Culture and Tantric Purification* (unpublished), I concluded that, of the fifteen interviewees I questioned, the most troubling stumbling block on their paths was in fact navigating through the newness of Tibetan culture while battling the clinginess of their own American and European cultures. When Western students of Buddhism take on this new path, they also take on the culture in which it was developed. As Mitchell seems to indicate here, foreign culture can be an incredibly difficult barrier when trying to connect with a particular spiritual path.

could be a Methodist Buddhist and that's okay," notes one older member. Bawa was generally opposed to religion because of the divisive way in which it is used in the modern world. Mitchell recalls:

In one way he would talk that the thing he abhorred was any kind of dividing line that said, "Oh you're a Buddhist, well Buddhists on this side of the line and Muslims on the other." And one of the aphorisms he used was that there are seven doorways to hell. There's like caste, race, class, religion, etc. And they are all ways of saying, "Oh well you can't go on this side." So from that point of view it was clear that the entire world was a part of his family and there were no divisions.

When one came to the Fellowship, one's worldly categorical self was not an issue.

Everyone would be treated the same. This carried over into the teachings themselves.

Sharon notes, "Bawa sort of laid the whole banquet in front of us and he said, if you're smart, you'll take the whole thing but if you want to just pick and choose, that's fine too."

So, when Bawa introduced traditional Islamic prayer to the path with the building of the mosque, although some were panicked by it, no one was required to participate. In an interview, Sharon emphasizes this freedom of choice in the path. She says:

I don't see that there is necessarily an obligation on everyone to do the Shariat exactly like it is supposed to be done, because, it has become very clear to me over these years that the path that Bawa has described for each of us has been made very personal, very individual and very non-confrontational in the sense that what is required for one person may not be required for somebody else in exactly the same way. You can fulfill your obligations from a variety of roots, a variety of experiences and a variety of techniques and methods.

Bawa's unique ability to teach the path in light of the diverse backgrounds of his students allowed each of them to carry on their unique spiritual journeys no matter what prior religious experience they had. Even the younger generation, although they were not given the same kind of opportunity to choose spiritual paths like their parents, seem to be

reaping the benefits of this aspect of the path too. Grant speaks about his personal practice in light of this. He says:

For me personally I've found that when I need structure, when I'm just so frazzled, then I can go to the mosque and do formal prayers and there's structure and a form and I can follow that form. And then other times I don't need that structure, it's confining and I'm unhinged enough that I can just sit and meditate without that. But I'm really happy that both places are there. And you can sit and do silent meditation in the mosque as well. They're both very exalted places. People are praying in both places so it doesn't matter.

Bawa's path was not designed to be conflictive, separatist, or exclusive to other forms of spiritual practice or even certain forms within the Islamic tradition. Although he may have encouraged his students to imbibe all of the many forms of wisdom he gave them, there was no pressure to involuntarily compromise one's individuality.

While the surface of Bawa's path is inviting, both generations find an even deeper connection to the core of the teachings – as though they drive straight to the heart of modern spiritual and practical life. The crown jewel of Bawa's spiritual practice is the Arabic phrase *la ilaha ill-Allahu*, which roughly translates to, “Nothing exists but God. God alone exists.” Bawa's students are asked to recite this phrase throughout the day in conjunction with the breath so that eventually one does it unconsciously like an idling motor. In this way, with every out-breath one affirms *la ilaha* – that the world does not exist except for God. And with every in-breath one affirms *ill Allahu* – that God is in fact One with this world and is all that exists. Sharon (2000) comments on the importance of this recitation in Bawa's teachings:

That God is the only existent reality runs like a thread stringing together all the beads of his discourses over the years, tying his vast body of instruction on the nature of our universe and our perception, our experience of it to this singular truth (80).

With each breath, the focus is to unify two seemingly disparate aspects of God – that He is higher than the material world and that He is the very thing that makes up the material world. So, from its most basic structure, we see that the axial point of Bawa’s path is the unity of whatever *seems* disparate – namely the transcendent and the physical, the sacred and the secular, the inner and the outer.

Following from this structure, then, it is clear why Bawa addressed topics ranging from the religious to the secular. Bawa was no stranger to complex religious discourse, using hundreds of Arabic phrases borrowed from Islam to describe the Cosmos. The focus of Bawa’s path was (and still is) to reunite with God by becoming his 99 Divine Qualities – to die before death. God’s qualities include traits like Compassion, Forbearance, Patience, Tolerance, Love, etc. In the introduction to *The Guidebook to the True Secret of the Heart* (Muhaiyaddeen 1976), the editor’s note reads:

For the world the role of His Holiness M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen is to explain the meanings within all things, to give the explanation of the world and the explanation of human life in the world. For the Soul Bawa’s explanation is the Explanation of Wisdom, the Explanation of God, the Explanation which resonates within the Soul itself. In everything that he says, in every meaning that he gives, Bawa clearly distinguishes and defines: what is the world, what is God (xv).

In helping his children become One with God, Bawa simultaneously emphasized that in order to understand God one must also understand the world. Because we cannot see God directly with our own eyes, the only way we can unite with Him is to acquire His 99 Divine Qualities, then live lives in this world with those qualities (Muhaiyaddeen 1991: 35). Consequently, as the editor’s note above reads, Bawa’s discourses seem to run the gambit from detailed descriptions of God’s Divine Qualities to explanations of how to run an ethical business. For Bawa, everything was the path.

A sentiment about Bawa's teachings that I heard countless times from both generations was the incredible practicality of his path. A popular Fellowship joke is that Bawa's message is to put absolute faith in God, but tie up your camel. In other words, internally be nothing but a spiritual person, but do not neglect the practical duty of your everyday life. As a young adult just beginning to find his way in the world outside of college, Grant takes great solace in this aspect of Bawa's teachings. One evening at a local café he related this story about Bawa to me:

There's a man who was a doctor and he was driving a crappy car and he went to see the *Sheikh* and the *Sheikh* said, "Why are you driving this bad car?" And he said, "Well just because I'm a doctor doesn't mean I need to drive a nice car." And the *Sheikh* said to him, "Well God knows you don't have an attachment to fancy cars, but if you don't drive a nice car then people are going to think you're a bad doctor so go buy a nice car." You know, just having – the Wisdom of the Divine travels into all realms of both the highest level of thought and understanding and the most mundane trivial things. Sometimes it's astonishing to hear the trivial things he said to people about the mundane aspects of their lives because then you think, "Oh my God, this man could talk about God and the most divine mystical explanations and then he would tell someone that they should go – he told someone that they shouldn't be a Montessori school teacher because there was no money to support their family. Go be an accountant. Just other decisions that he helped people make. These are incredible.

Bawa was fond of describing this world in Shakespearian terms, "All the world is a stage and the men and women merely players." If you are a lawyer, you must play the lawyer-game. If you are a doctor you must play the doctor-game. Grant says that people are like actors: "The part that they were given was the part to be the lawyer who has the big house and the fancy car." Nevertheless, this should not separate the lawyer or doctor from, say, the high school teacher. Grant says, "Both people still come to the 'Ship and they still sit in the same Sunday meetings that I sit in or they stand in the same prayer line I stand in or they do the same *dhikr* that I do. So everyone's got their own part they were given and so they have to play their part." The practicality of Bawa's teachings is an incredible gift

to Grant at this stage in his life. Having come from college, “where everything is more theoretical and intellectual,” he says he now has to conquer the concrete problem of controlling a classroom of thirty disobedient high school students with his faith. This difficulty in his career has led him to investigate Bawa’s teachings deeply, specifically teachings about surrendering one’s problems to God. It has been a challenging time in his life but he knows that, “If I don’t go in there and say *Bismillahir-rahmanir-rahim*, in the name of God most Merciful most Compassionate, before every lesson, I know that lesson is doomed from the beginning.”

Unity of the inner spiritual compass with outer day-to-day activity gives Grant and other Fellowship members greater coherence to their spiritual lives and their everyday lives. As Helen, an executive committee member says, “At the Fellowship there is a new way all the time to understand your mystical life, your everyday life.” Note the absence of a conjunction in her phrasing. The mystical and everyday should be linked. This was characteristic of Bawa’s own life and what he spoke about. Sharon (2000) writes:

The reconciliation of illusion and reality, going correctly through the motions of everything attached to the illusory side of existence, while persisting in the reality alone, is profoundly characteristic of Bawa, his being, his essence, and the things he taught or spoke of (81).

One of Bawa’s pithy axioms, which I heard countless times from both generations, was, “Pretend to believe in the world, never pretend to believe in God.” This message was not just a general axiom about life but an actual prescription for living in the modern technological age. In his instructions for raising children, Bawa (1980) says:

The explanations you give your children, therefore, must be such that they will be able to accept them now, when they are with you, and later, when they have grown and gone away. You must teach them in such a way that they can accept what you say even as they walk out your door. To do this, however, you will have to let go of rigidity and religious fanaticism. In teaching children, there are

outer secrets and inner secrets. The nature of the present age is such that children want to understand both the outer and inner concerns; the internal and the external must be unified (5).

Modern individuals, according to Bawa, will no longer tolerate the do-this-do-that rigidity of tradition to explain their inner lives. They demand a unified explanation from an internal and external perspective that will give lasting meaning to them, yet will compliment their modern lifestyles. As we shall see, while many modern individuals often do not feel satisfied by mainstream religious traditions in describing their inner spirituality, they also become dissatisfied with the inadequacies of modern scientific culture to explain their outer lives.

FORGING A MIDDLE WAY

BAWA'S ANALYSIS OF THE MODERN WORLD addresses some of today's most pressing societal issues, and, I argue, is precisely the aspect of the path that attracts the kind of individuals that it does. The reason why Bawa's path seems to be intrinsically appealing to Fellowship members is actually much more complex than it might at first appear. In Chapter One I introduced the concept of the Cultural Creatives from Paul H. Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson's (2000) book of the same name, as an eloquent archetype for the kind of person who is drawn to the Fellowship and Bawa's path. The precise reason why this kind of person feels drawn to the Fellowship is important to understand. Bawa's path specifically addresses the concerns of the Cultural Creative because, in a related way, it seems to be an effective antidote to the pangs of modern scientific culture that plague a variety of individuals throughout the developed world.

In *The Cultural Creatives* (2000) Ray and Anderson illustrate that the position of this growing sector of the American population is a middle way between the extreme positions of Traditionalism and Modernism.¹¹ Ray and Anderson (2000) define Traditionalism as the recently evolved (within the last century) force that created phrases like, “as American as apple pie” and community-oriented values like the virtuous small town life (84). Traditionalism expresses the sentiment of returning to some mythically simpler time in America when everyone knew his and her place in the world. Ray and Anderson (2000) note, “Traditionals are trying to make the majority of society conform to their own ideas” (83). This approach to life and society does not work for the Cultural Creative and indeed for many individuals in modern society. Emile Durkheim came to much the same conclusion in his work. In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915), he notes, “The great things of the past which filled our fathers with enthusiasm do not excite the same ardour in us, either because they have come into common usage to such an extent that we are unconscious of them, or else because they no longer answer to our actual aspirations” (475). And again in *Suicide* (1951), he writes:

When it appears, when men, after having long received their ready made faith from tradition, claim the right to shape it for themselves, this is not because of the intrinsic desirability of free inquiry, for the latter involves as much sorrow as happiness. But it is because men henceforth need this liberty. This very need can have only one cause: the overthrow of traditional beliefs (158).

Although it appears glaring to us today, to our ancestors the “traditional way of life” must have seemed transparent. This is why it worked for them, and why when created again it falls flat today. Now, these rules no longer apply to our world. The very nature of how

¹¹ I realize that in actuality there are few individuals who abide completely as “traditional” or “modern.” However, I am interested in the way individuals seem to nevertheless parse experience psychologically as traditional and modern. Therefore, I employ extreme definitions of Traditionalism and Modernism (note that they are capitalized) to better illustrate how, psychologically, a middle way between these two worldviews might be conceptualized.

individuals live in the complex modern age necessitates a new way that either rejects or transcends the traditions of their ancestors. The global market puts the modern person in touch with an incredibly diverse set of worldviews and traditions every day. Bloch (1998) notes:

An overriding desire to unify seemingly disparate worldviews has been conceptualized as integral to the contemporary life experience. Given the social uncertainty that can arise when bombarded with so much competing information, people often attempt to acknowledge numerous forms of understanding (religious and/or secular) with a minimum of contradiction to their overriding belief systems. In this context, someone's becoming a "Hindu Methodist" can seem a creative and functional solution for reducing social uncertainty (9).

The disparate worldviews that greet individuals every day elicit a creative outlook that necessarily overrides the axioms of Traditionalism. Considering the global context of most individuals in the developed world, Traditionalism does not work because its ideals are too totalizing – they are an oversimplification of the variety of worldviews that intermingle throughout the world now quicker and more freely than ever. "The strengths and weaknesses of Traditionalism are two sides of the same coin," Ray and Anderson (2000) state. They continue:

Its political strength lies in its enunciation of shared beliefs, principles, and values that can claim a divine sanction, its use of simple images that appeal to less educated people, and its nostalgic appeal to tradition. Its weaknesses are an ethnic and racial politics that, with nostalgia and scapegoating, lends itself to authoritarianism, and its use of a biblical moral framework for every new event, which can make the complex realities of today's world even harder to deal with (81).

On the upside, Traditionalism appeals to a warm sentimentality for the simple things in life, including communal living, which can certainly inspire a feeling of greater meaning in one's life. On the downside, it does not recognize that these simple things indeed are *oversimplifications* without explanation and actually make it harder to live in an

increasingly complex world. This sentiment clearly stands out among Fellowship members. Much to the relief of Fellowshippers like Sarah, a younger member, Bawa was not prone to giving totalizing rules without explanations. In a radio conversation with an older Fellowship member, Sarah says:

One of the most wonderful and relieving things is that every rule and guideline that he set down has an explanation. The reason that all of you adults came to him was that in a world where there is so much – just because, there were no explanations, in a world where everything was done by tradition, here was a person who gave you reasons for those traditions, helped you to understand why there were things you didn't do. And for me, unless you understand that, you're not going to adhere to it.

As Sarah reports, Bawa's path was a response to the degradation of moral Traditionalism but not a reaction against it. Cultural Creatives, a term which seems to include Fellowshippers, are not interested in rejecting aspects of life that govern one's internal compass. Rather they simply need explanations. They need to understand, "Why, amongst all these messages, which I am being bombarded with, should I accept this particular message and reject this one." Bawa's path was able to provide that understanding.

At the other extreme of worldviews lies Modernism. Modernism grew out of European intellectualism and American urbanism and industrialism and is responsible for most everything seen as contemporary in the developed world. Ray and Anderson (2000) note:

Modern culture originally emerged five hundred years ago in Europe, and over the past three centuries, it has had important roots in the urban merchant classes and the creators of the modern economy, in the rise of the modern state and armies, and in the successes of scientists, technologists, and intellectuals. It invented our contemporary world, reshaping almost every place on the planet to meet its needs (70).

Modernism is attributed the emergence of scientific inquiry over religious explanation and the resulting development of the efficiently running cosmopolitan world. As Ray and Anderson (2000) illustrate, “Time-and-money worship pervades modern societies the way prayers and sacred rituals pervade premodern societies” (79). The material world – the world of external things – is the focus of Modernism. Even time itself *is* money in the modern world. While modern science and technology have been able to mollify thousands of problems relating to the external world, increasing life expectancy and improving the efficiency with which lives operate, they have a downside as well.

Ray and Anderson (2000) state that, “To be a Modern today means to live on a kind of roller coaster whose route depends on your opportunities for success” (76). Because success in the Modern world is based upon material things, which are inherently ephemeral, ups and downs come in rapid succession. They continue, “You may be expansive and ambitious in good times, but you’re likely to contract into a little ball of self-interest when times are hard” (76). The rugged individualism of material success can lead to insularity when things get rough. One of the founders of Materialist theory, Karl Marx (1978[1844]), saw this quite clearly when he found that, “production itself must be active alienation” (74). Centering one’s life on the production of things for some means other than personal fulfillment can only result in alienation of the essential self. In his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1978[1844]), Marx writes:

The fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself...and in his work feels outside himself. He is not at home when he is working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour*. It is therefore not satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it (74).

In the way work is most widely performed, the entire orientation of production is toward something external and alien to the producer. Because the worker is forcibly outwardly focused, she is given little opportunity to connect this work with her real being and those around her. Fellowshippers seem to be quite aware of this process. One Fellowship member states:

We live in a society where our identity comes in – this has a lot to do with identity. “I am so and so a doctor. I am so and so a lawyer. I am so and so the carpenter. I have a Lexus.” I have this and you know/ and what happens is that the identity of the person, somehow, intermingles with these burdens, with these weights they have and all these things that they’ve piled up. And their identity is so intertwined with it that it’s hard not to crack. Because the whole concept of who they are comes from these things, these burdens and what we have looked at as the important things in life, titles, money and things like that.

In the way work is normally performed in the modern world, one is encouraged to become one’s work. Success requires one-hundred-percent effort. As Marx describes, because of the division of labor, the worker no longer forms herself with her fellow human being and her essential self in mind, but with the things she is producing.

So, the strain on the worker’s identity is directly related to the connection she makes with the actual work she is performing. Furthermore, because this work is created in the face of the modern ideal of progress, production becomes meaningless as well. In his book *On Charisma and Institution Building* (1968), Max Weber states:

In science, each of us knows that what he has accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years. That is the fate to which science is subjected; it is the very *meaning* of scientific work, to which it is devoted in a quite specific sense, as compared with other spheres of culture for which in general the same holds (298).

The endless progression of success and betterment within scientific inquiry precludes the idea of a finished product and implies a never-ending project. “This means the world is disenchanting,” notes Weber (1968:298). In the scientific model of the world, the

meaning of the actual work that is being done is in its inability to be complete. Weber (1968) continues by saying that the sciences, “give us no answer to the question, whether the existence of these cultural phenomena [which it is analyzing] have been and are *worth while*.” Not only this but, “they do not answer the further question, whether it is worth the effort required to even know them. They presuppose that there is an interest in partaking, through this procedure, of the community of ‘civilized men.’ But they cannot prove ‘scientifically’ that this is the case” (304). Physics presupposes that understanding the laws of motion is an important endeavor, but it never explains why this is important to the scientist. Or on a more mundane level, Business presupposes that success over one’s competitor is an important endeavor, but it never explains concretely why this is so important to the sustainability of the human soul – indeed, perhaps the maintenance of the soul has nothing to do with business at all.

Through Marx and Weber, then, we see how the external, material, success driven focus of modern scientific culture can spawn a kind of separation from meaning in one’s life – this is existential alienation. A woman executive from Ray and Anderson’s (2000) study captures this feeling when she says:

I no longer make friends, because I’m constantly jerked in and out of my life. Travel’s a pain. There’s no way out of it... Whatever I do, my life feels all turned around, as if I can’t focus on what really matters to me (76).

Clearly this successful businesswoman’s successful business is what jerks her in and out of her “life” – the latter being her family and friends, not her career.

In terms of Bawa’s path, the *Sheikh* seems to have been able to remove this thorn in the side of modern man for those who followed him. Katherine, an older member, states that, “He taught us enormously about the world but he also taught us the way out.

First he would describe the world then he would say this is the way out.” As another Fellowship brother describes it, “Saying God said this, God said that doesn’t always satisfy people and that’s one of the reasons the Sufi path sometimes helps people. It explains how things work.” Bawa’s path provided a detailed and completely satisfactory outline of the material world in which these devotees lived and then gave them the reason why it was important to understand it – *la ilaha ill-Allahu*. There is nothing but God. God is everything. To simultaneously understand the material world and realize its true nature, that it is nothing other than God, is to be an *insan kamil*, a true human being.

Cultural Creatives are highly sensitive to the forces of modernity *and* tradition and are trying to forge a middle way. As a counter to the totalizing of Traditionalism and the fragmentation of Modernism, Cultural Creatives are inclined toward things like the integration of traditions, holism, connectivity, environmentalism, social activism, etc. As Ray and Anderson (2000) state, “They seem to be unraveling the threads of old garments and weaving new fabric, cutting original designs and sewing together a new one” (87). Cultural Creatives express the intense desire to talk-the-talk *and* walk-the-walk. They are not satisfied with a separation between what they feel and what they do (Ray & Anderson 2000:8). The Cultural Creatives are interested in developing an integral culture in which inner change is not separate from outer change.

Fellowshippers seem to be striving at the same task as the Cultural Creatives. The ways in which they conceptualize Bawa’s path and how it works in their lives is directly in line with the values of creativity and unification expressed by the Cultural Creatives. When I asked Jeff if one could think of Bawa’s path in terms of an outer and inner aspect, he answered:

Let's say we have a running dialogue with Bawa on the inside. Does it make sense to behave in a way that separates that dialogue as we conduct ourselves? Or, if we have such a running dialogue, does it make sense to only engage in that dialogue and not live in the world? Actions that correspond to the dialogue affirm the inner and reinforce the learning. Authentic behavior demonstrates to others (like children and friends) that there is a mercy, that selflessness is possible, that conscientious living is a choice that can work, and that the fragrance of flowers and honey of bees are metaphors for our lives.

For Jeff, he could not even conceptualize Bawa's path as separated into compartments.

The inner and the outer must co-create themselves in order for the whole to work.

Fellowshippers have found, because of Bawa's path, that a life well integrated by the Love of God leads to an unparalleled happiness. An inner change necessitates an outer change of behavior otherwise it is not authentic. More importantly, though, this personal change affects those around us and sends the message that there *is* another way to live than how our career-centered lives tell us. There is another way that can in fact enrich the modern worldview without abandoning the communal feeling of tradition. For Fellowshippers, Bawa's path is not a religion in the old sense of the word, nor is it at all secular. It feels like something else.

A RELIGION FOR THE MODERN AGE

COULD IT BE that Bawa's path does not appear as a religion to his children precisely because it is so well integrated with the emerging social views of its devotees? I suggest that is the case. During my interview with Mitchell, an older member, I remarked to him how Fellowshippers are hypersensitive to codifying Bawa's words and turning them into a religion. He replied, "Well he is a religion though. One of the great ironies for me – because what I'm saying [about Bawa's path] sounds really reasonable right? Sounds

very reasonable and hip. So this is the hip reasonable religion. And it's something that my mind inclines toward and you get it." Could it be that, because Bawa's path is so unobtrusive to these Cultural Creatives' aversions to staunch religious dogma and consumerist compartmentalization, it could in fact appear not as a religion but as something else? Are Fellowship members drawn to Bawa's path because it is the "hip reasonable religion"?

In his book *Society and the Sacred: Toward a Theology of Culture in Decline* (1981), Langdon Gilkey asks the question, in a scientific culture that is turning on itself "which kind of faith is *most creative*?" (118). Clearly the restraints of Traditionalism and Modernism necessitate a different looking faith that must be, above all else, a creative solution. So, what would the most creative faith for today's scientific society look like? Gilkey proposes three qualifications. He states:

First of all, a creative faith in a scientific age must be able to comprehend, shape, and deal with *all* of those basic religious issues and their corresponding religious dilemmas which a scientific culture produces: the ethical/social questions of power and of justice, the metaphysical/religious questions of the direction and meaning of history and nature, and the inward, religious questions of our estrangement or sin and of our creaturely mortality (Gilkey 1981:118).

Gilkey's first requirement for a creative faith is that it must clarify the outward looking questions that a scientific culture produces while addressing the individual inward looking questions that every person has. We have already seen that Bawa's students found endless explanations of the world around them. Simply looking at some of the specific questions they asked him can tell us this. For example, from *Questions of Life Answers of Wisdom* (1991), one of Bawa's students asks, "I work in a juvenile court, and sometimes I have to send people to jail by my recommendations. Is that passing judgment?" (99). Here the student finds an answer about justice in the modern court

system. In addition to questions like this, Bawa's students find answers to more religious questions. Another student asks, "What happens to the soul and body at the time of death?" (Muhaiyaddeen 1991:107). Here, the student has access to explanations of his mortality.

Gilkey's second requirement for a creative faith involves the issue of freedom and individuality. He states:

Secondly, a creative faith must undergird and not constrict, repress, or oppress our autonomous intellect, our autonomous decisions, our own artistic creativity and our legal/political structures and actions; it must be *theonomous* and not *heteronomous*. A scientific culture has rightly learned to prize independence of thought and speech; the freedom to criticize old formulations and inherited goals; the freedom to experiment with new hypotheses, new methods, new values; and the willingness to appreciate and to learn from viewpoints that differ fundamentally from our own (Gilkey 1981:119).

Gilkey's second point highlights the notion that, despite the compartmentalization and separation to which scientific culture has contributed, its benefits are those of healthy criticism, freedom of speech, and openness to experimentation. A creative faith will allow these aspects of scientific culture to shine forth. Gilkey (1981) states, "The creative role of religion is not to replace intelligence and technology with something else, but to enable us to be more intelligent, more rational, more self-controlled, more just in our use of them" (101). A creative faith in today's world must be a practical faith. It cannot ask us to abandon scientific culture in order to make an inner change and then return to that environment. It must tell us how to use our scientific world conscientiously. Bawa's path seems to fulfill this requirement for Fellowship quite satisfactorily. Sharon (2000) recalls from her memoirs:

There was never any question of abandoning work or family, this subtle path is not a retreat from the world in conventional terms, the retreat is inner. Bawa made a point of reminding parents, nervous visitors or the merely curious that he

had taken a rather mixed bag of hippies, had them shave and cut their hair, had them give up drugs, get married, go back to school or find jobs. There was never any question of retreating to a cave or jungle to meditate. Left right, left right, the prayer goes on with every breath, with every step, *la ilaha ill-Allahu*, nothing exists but God, You are God. Pretend to believe in the world, never pretend to believe in God (48).

Sharon sees Bawa's path as "the subtle path." It is not a halting split in her life. It is a life enhancement in every sense of the word. By connecting every breath and every part of one's existing life to God, Bawa's path gives Fellowshipers the potential to lead absolutely normal lives that are powerfully full of the meaning of God Himself.

Finally, Gilkey recognizes that while the scientific and religious must be unified in the new creative faith, it must also be gracious enough to deliver us from our towering egos. He states:

A religion that can provide the illumination, the guidance, and the grace to deal with our strange human waywardness and orneriness must be realistic enough to recognize and admit the ambiguity of even our highest forms of intellectual creativity, the bondage of even the most extravagant forms of freedom, the driving self-interest of even our idealism. Thus, it must be able to be critical of even...our highest cultural and spiritual achievements, conscious of the demonic potentialities of each of them, and capable of admitting those potentialities; and it must offer a grace that can transmute these demonic potentialities into actions genuinely creative of higher community (Gilkey 1981:119).

The ultimate creative faith must allow us to exercise our individuality while remaining graciously critical of dwelling in that space. It must be critical not of the world, but of how we personally wield it and to what ends. In short, a creative faith must be religiously as well as culturally creative. It must nurture a creative rather than a destructive counterculture, a culture that fosters unity *between* individuals *within* the world through openness of mind and conscientious living. This is the essence of Bawa's path. Jack shows clearly the connection between *intrapersonal* unity and *interpersonal* unity in Bawa's path. He states:

Those who laud ego and focus on vanity – the vanity of religious pride, the vanity of spirituality, the vanity of wealth, power, beauty, anything other than God – that’s what they get. They get what they laud. But if we abide in gratitude, then we receive grace. And in grace we receive understanding of the nature of our self, which is in the likeness of God. And when you realize the nature of your own self and it’s preciousness, then you actually begin to see that same beauty, that same value in other lives. And thus you begin to live with a sense of intimacy with people, with everybody, because you see them as part of yourself. It’s much better to live that way than to feel lonely and alienated.

As Jack describes, Fellowshipers feel that because Bawa’s path allows them to understand their true selves, it also opens new doors to understanding how to relate to those around them. Its focus is on developing a sense of inner and outer intimacy, unity of mind and world. The sacred and secular, although seemingly separate, can and should inform each other.

CONCLUSIONS

BAWA’S PATH IS a foundation for faith that is individual yet communal. While explaining in detail the problems of the modern world, Bawa’s path also lays the foundation for how one should deal with those problems – it gives a way out. It does this by awaking the practitioner to the fact that feelings of internal alienation are the result of an artificial separation between the internal and external aspects of one’s life, between belief and action, sacred and secular, individual and communal. As representatives of the Cultural Creatives, Fellowshipers seem to have been yearning to live this kind of life all along. Perhaps this is why Bawa’s path appeals to all of them so much. As Sharon says, “Joining the Fellowship was an outer confirmation of an inner conjunction that had already occurred.” In addition, perhaps because the bonds that are being formed at the Fellowship are based upon deep internal urges, having common external lifestyles is not

such a big priority to members. Thus a greater diversity of individuals seems to “fit in” with the community. As we shall see more clearly in the Chapter Three, Bawa’s path did not just create a faith for his children; it also gave them a means to connect with each other in the form of a common set of norms and values with which to conceptualize proper action in the world.

CHAPTER 3

THE POND AND FELLOWSHIP CULTURE

SINCE HIS DEATH, the Fellowship, as a community, has become the new mouthpiece for Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. With this responsibility both generations of members are now endowed with the task of reproducing not only the teachings but also the charismatic love that Bawa poured into every nook and cranny of the meetinghouse. For the older generation the challenge is to fulfill Bawa's last request, "Don't forget me. Don't forget me. Don't forget me" without becoming fixated on the loss of his physical presence. For the younger generation the challenge is to fulfill the same request although they have no significant memory of a physical presence at all. Understandably, the community is struggling with this. As I heard from several members, "We are just now beginning to understand just who that little man was and what he means to us." As we shall see, Bawa's physical absence seems to have allowed for cracks in the cohesiveness of the Fellowship community to develop. I believe that the situations in which these cracks grow and the situations in which they diminish revolve around the phenomenon of Fellowship culture.

WHY THE FELLOWSHIP WAS CREATED

IN ORDER TO BETTER UNDERSTAND the legacy that Fellowshipers are now responsible for, it is important to see Bawa's lofty vision for the Fellowship. One of Bawa's purposes for creating the Fellowship was to make it a place where individuals

who are thirsty for wisdom can come and drink. An often-quoted analogy, which Bawa's students take from him to describe the Fellowship, is the metaphor of the pond.

Grant, a younger member, recites this metaphor for me during our discussion. He says:

Bawa said the place is a pond and different animals come to the pond and they take what they need. Some animals come to the pond and they only drink from one side of it and other people only drink from the other side. And some don't care where they are in the pond as long as they're in the pond.

On one level Bawa envisioned the Fellowship more as a resource than a force. In other words, he wanted it to be a place that was open to all who seek wisdom in all of its

kaleidoscopic forms and practices, not a place to proselytize to those with closed ears.

Bawa wanted wisdom to be the center of the Fellowship, but he wanted it to be available in the diverse forms in which people feel most comfortable accessing it. Hence, he made accessible the mosque and its traditions, his room as an alternative for prayer and meditation, the meetinghouse, the Mazar, etc. Although the formal Islamic practices may appear different from the esoteric mystical teachings that Bawa espoused, they were meant to co-exist in the pond.

On another level, Fellowshipers talk about Bawa creating the Fellowship for more than just convenience. Apparently, as can be found in his published discourses and from his students, Bawa created the Fellowship as a physical entity because he wanted to give his students and the world a model for how to live together. The Fellowship is supposed to be a model environment in which seekers can nourish the personal spiritual work they are doing while putting it into practice in the form of communal duty. Bawa (1991) defines duty as "serving without expecting anything in return" (384).

Interestingly, Bawa's definition of duty is nearly identical to the definition of mutual reciprocity – giving without expectation of return in the confidence that somehow one

will see its benefits down the road. In his book *Questions of Life Answers of Wisdom* (1991), Bawa speaks directly about what the Fellowship is. He states that the Fellowship says to us:

“O man, try to understand this. Try to change into a true human being and try to live in that way, serving all lives. Let your actions fit your words. Let your speech be put into action in the form of duty. Let your outer behavior match your inner qualities. With those qualities you can rule the kingdom of God and show others how to live in the kingdom in equality, peace, and tranquility. That is a life of freedom. Realize this, O man.” The Fellowship teaches so many things. It explains what a life of human freedom is. It shows the way to realize the faults of man and to avoid them. It teaches and illustrates the qualities of God. That is the function of the Fellowship (35).

Clearly, Bawa did not intend for the Fellowship to be a selective island within the surrounding world. Rather, the goal of the Fellowship is to spread his message of unity to all those who need it. He wanted it to be a place where one’s inner speech could be exercised in an outer way in the form of duty to others. In Chapter Two we saw that the aim of Bawa’s path for the practitioner was to unify the inner spiritual side of life and the outer secular side of life with the Qualities of God. Recalling this, then, it is apparent that the Fellowship is supposed to be an ideal arena in which this kind of work can take place on a communal level. It is a physical manifestation of the path in that it is a place where one’s inner qualities are exercised through the habitual performance of mutual reciprocity, or duty as Bawa calls it – one of the major building blocks of communities.

Bawa’s intention for the Fellowship was for it to be a model spiritual community in the deepest sense. That is, it was to become a place where inner spiritual work and communal reciprocity are one. Furthermore, unlike other religious or spiritual communities, this was to be achieved while still well within society in order that those thirsting for a coherent communal way of life might come and drink from the pond. As

one Fellowship member stated one Sunday morning, “This place should be a shining beacon for all seekers of truth.”

PROBLEMS AND SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM

HOW CAN THESE everyday people, with careers and families, homework and thriving social lives, possibly fill Bawa’s commanding role and maintain the glow of this “shining beacon” that managed to gather them under the same roof? Since Bawa’s passing, there do seem to be divisions forming in the Fellowship. I argue that the central reason why these cracks are forming between factions in the Fellowship stems from the cultural forces that these practitioners are still subject to. These forces manifests themselves as something called spiritual materialism.

One of the most prevalent worries for both generations is that the community’s future is in jeopardy because it is separating into factions. While Bawa’s pond was designed to be a place where freedom of individuality could exist, this aspect has also been the source of many problems. When I asked Keye, an older member, what things are picking away at the Fellowship community, he replied simply, “Microcosm, macrocosm. What things are picking away at you?” It is important to note that, because Fellowship members have remained engaged in the workaday world, they are very much subject to the influence of American society and are by no means unaffected by their context. On the whole, Fellowshipers grew up with the same cultural influences that most average Americans grow up with. Even the younger generation, for example, although they were not engaged in social activities like dances or parties, have tasted the need for individualism and material success as they are consistently emphasized in

American culture. I argue here that when members plug into this dominant culture, which lauds qualities like separatism through success, material wealth, individualism, etc., their community begins to separate.

The most glaring example of the divisions forming at the Fellowship lies in the philosophical and spatial separations that occur surrounding Bawa's path and what parts of it should be emphasized now that he has passed. It is a well-known secret among Fellowshipers that there are "mosque people" and "Bawa people." When Bawa introduced the traditional Islamic practices with the building of the Mosque he was, in a sense, inviting an entirely new set of formal Islamic practitioners to come drink from the pond. Consequently, there is a population of members who only visit the Mosque and seldom come to Fellowship meetings yet are still considered practicing members of the Fellowship. On the other side of this divide are the Bawa people, sometimes referred to as Fellowship people or even Sufi people. These are those members who are generally nervous about the idea of traditional religion and feel that, "That's not what Bawa was all about." Consequently they tend to disagree with the idea that the Fellowship should focus on Qur'anic teachings and practices to a significant degree. It should be mainly Bawa. Of course, there are few members who seat themselves on either side of this divide. The opinions are a spectrum. Nevertheless the tension exists between the two ends of this spectrum.

Mitchell, an older member who had a very personal relationship with Bawa, gives a pithy metaphor for why this tension has come to be. He notes first that learning from the *Sheikh* was a very personal experience for each member. Bawa would say different things to different people depending on what they were ready to hear and in what way

they would most readily understand what he was saying. Mitchell likens this to being taught how to surf. He says:

You have a wall chart that says put your left foot here and your right foot here and bend your knees. But that's not it 'cause you get on the board and you fall over. And then you watch the surfing master and he's doing all kinds of things that aren't on the chart. And that was the fascinating thing of being around him.

Although Bawa would disclose widely applicable commandments to his students, his subtlety allowed him to manipulate the teachings to whatever personal position on the surfboard was right for each student. Mitchell continues:

The interesting thing is that when he leaves his body and he's not there to give the physical presence of correction, everybody remembers the particular position on the surfboard that they were given. And they say, "That's his teaching. What he really came to do was build a mosque and get us firmly on the path of Islam." Or, "What he came to do is to completely destroy all belief in Islam and get us on the path to non-duality." And so you have all these different gestalts coalescing around generally what they were elementally predisposed towards. And it gets very unpleasant because they all can go back and quote chapter and verse. They all have this memory, "Bawa said to me..."

So the apparent divisions in the Fellowship seem to stem from one of the culturally specific things that attracted them to the path in the first place – a freedom to explore without doctrine. Now that Bawa is no longer physically present to keep everyone's differing dispositions in order with the Truth of God, personal doctrines seem to be forming.

Among mystical gurus who have taught in the West, this phenomenon seems to be well known and is often what gives Western spiritual communities their special flavor. Chögyam Trungpa, a renowned and somewhat infamous Tibetan guru who taught for many years in America, calls this phenomenon spiritual materialism. In his book *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (1973), Trungpa warns against it by saying, "Ego is constantly attempting to acquire and apply the teachings of spirituality for its own

benefit. The teachings are treated as an external thing, external to ‘me,’ a philosophy which we try to imitate” (13). Instead of letting the teachings soak into our very bones, Trungpa warns that ego wants to keep the spiritual path in the realm of the intellect where the path can be turned into whatever ego wants – whatever feels most comfortable. Spiritual materialism stems from the tendency to individualize even the spiritual path, which is in fact there to cut egoism. Trungpa (1973) continues:

It is important to see that the main point of any spiritual practice is to step out of the bureaucracy of ego. This means stepping out of ego’s constant desire for a higher, more spiritual, more transcendental version of knowledge, religion, virtue, judgment, comfort or whatever it is that the particular ego is seeking (15).

In other words, the point of any spiritual path, Bawa’s included, is to actually become the teachings, not to imitate them as a dogma to be upheld. In Bawa’s terms, the spiritual path is to become the 99 Qualities of God, not talk about them and decide which ones are the best (and most comfortable) for me and not you. To become the teachings is to let go of the idea that following the spiritual path is contained in the act of acquiring foreign titles, a guru, teachings, positions of authority, axioms to espouse, truths, etc. that are *mine*.

Trungpa seems to think that because of our obsession with materialism for physical things in the West, the tendency for spiritual materialism is much greater in these developed countries than in other countries. Therefore, this materialism must become one of the main foci of the path. He states:

I think the style in which the teachings are presented depends upon how much the audience is involved with the speed of materialism. America has achieved an extremely sophisticated level of physical materialism. At this time I do not think there would be an audience for this kind of lecture [concerning spiritual materialism] anywhere other than the West, because people elsewhere are not yet tired enough of the speed of physical materialism. They are still saving money to buy bicycles on the way to automobiles (61).

Trungpa's commentary about Western society is that because there is such a profound culture of materialism, which reinforces individuals' desire to acquire things, there is a greater tendency to plug the spiritual path into that materialist mode as well. To some extent, the New Age movement, which began in the United States, is rife with spiritual materialism. Type the term New Age into a search engine on the internet today and you will find a slice of virtually every spiritual practice available – holistic healing, holistic eating, tantric dance, tarot cards, astrology, meditation, mantra recitation, yoga, tai chi, aroma therapy. Whatever will make our lives more transcendent, more serene, and more spiritual can be externally acquired. Thus, instead of cutting ego, a new “spiritualized” ego forms around these new and exotic spiritual *things*. Mitchell actually highlighted this term and Trungpa's work in our conversation. He says:

Did you ever read a book called *Spiritual Materialism* by Chögyam Trungpa? I mean as crazy as he was he certainly nailed down a phenomena and that phenomena is so pervasive. Of perceiving your position in the Fellowship and what you – and building a new ego around your role in this sacred organization. So instead of acquiring the new BMW Roadster, we now can acquire a title and a *Sheikh* or a teacher and a spiritual community.

As Trungpa found, Mitchell seems to think that because Fellowshipers are just as engrained in materialistic culture as most other Americans, and because Bawa is no longer there to knock them off a constructed spirituality, there is now a greater tendency to plug into this culture as a secure reinforcement that their individual stances on the surfboard are more correct, important, etc. Because Fellowshipers are influenced by materialistic culture, the potential is always there for members to interpret Bawa's path from a materialistic mode. When they plug into this mode, which tells them to appropriate the path as their own philosophy, they begin to shun the idiosyncratic

differences of other philosophical interpretations of the path that make them uncomfortable.

A CULTURE OF UNITY

WHILE SPIRITUAL MATERIALISM appears to be a dividing force among Fellowshipers, their saving grace is their access to an alternative – a common set of norms and values modeled after Bawa’s teachings that focuses on mollifying separation – Fellowship culture. We saw in Chapter Two that Bawa’s teachings form the foundation for an entire way of seeing what one should value and how one should act in the world – a cultural lens. Bawa’s path essentially links the values of his internal teachings, the Qualities of God such as Tolerance and Compassion, with external actions that model those values. The Qualities of God are always connective and non-judgmental; therefore, in order to be an authentic practitioner, one’s actions should operate along these lines as well. There is the sense, then, that while the teachings are creating a way of life, that way of life is re-creating the teachings. It is no surprise, then, that Fellowship culture appears so closely linked with the teachings of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, because, in his cosmology of existence, values of thought are not separate from values of action. As we shall see, the Fellowship community is being maintained despite its internal seams because of the nature of Fellowship culture and the fact that it is consistently being reinforced through ritual and symbolic performance.

What is Fellowship culture? While members have a variety of ways in which they express Fellowship culture, they are probably most inclined to express it in statements about the world. Fellowshipers conceptualize their way of life in contrast to

“popular culture.” That is, they see that the way of life Bawa’s path creates for them does not emphasize the same norms and values that seem to be reinforced on television, in magazines, by the media and which are recreated on a smaller level in the individualistic success-driven lifestyles they see many leading today.

Jack, an older member who had a very close and rich relationship with Bawa, defines his calling in life as a direct expression of what he learned with his *Sheikh*. As one of his closest followers, Jack is now applying what he has learned with Bawa to his work with international peace-making organizations. He states, “People have spiritual poverty in the developed world. The cure for that poverty is caring for others, is compassion. Thus the cure for that poverty is dealing with other people’s poverty.” Jack feels that the counter to the spiritual poverty brought on by popular culture in the developed world is the most unifying force of all, giving to others and thus connecting with them. He adds to this saying:

When you look at the enormous amount of work that takes place that keeps the world going, the vast majority of people live lives in which devotion and caring for one another is the norm. We don’t have a public culture in which those qualities are lauded. The public forum is dominated by a pornographic dialogue of selfishness.

From his global viewpoint on the international peace-making scene, Jack is able to see that one of the major problems with popular culture is that it expresses a lifestyle that is in fact imaginary for the majority of the world and that there is no foundation for another kind of culture to be recognized. There is no outlet in today’s society to recognize that, as one member says, “There is a level of being greater than that which is described by our current culture.”

Mike, one of Bawa's oldest students and a member of the executive council, expresses more clearly the discrepancies between popular culture and Fellowship culture. He says, "In popular culture, who do we idealize? Those who have all the excesses of life. Those who are not us, who are separate from us. Rich people. Famous people. And we give them these celestial names like 'star.' We were taught quite the opposite from Bawa." As Mike hints here, Bawa's teachings never highlighted that which separates us. He continues, "Things like tolerance, justice, giving to those who are needy, seeing no differences, being grateful, being compassionate – these things are not stressed in our popular culture but were exactly the things stressed at the Fellowship." As Mike relates here, Fellowship culture is counter to popular culture in that it nourishes the important things that popular culture has forgotten. Similar to Jack, Mike emphasizes that Fellowship culture provides the platform for qualities like compassion, tolerance, understanding, and above all unity between individuals to be lauded. As one Fellowship member says, "Good goes on here because people do good things for each other, small acts. We should give recognition to these stories."

In acknowledging these qualities, Fellowship culture is not, as it may seem, shunning society. Rather it is shunning the egoistic lifestyle that society seems to think is important. Fellowship culture, from a societal point of view, simply wants to publicly recognize and reinforce the things of compassion that are already going on in the world. It wants to make the unifying things that go on daily between family members and friends habitually brought forth as qualities to imbibe into one's very soul. These qualities are certainly lauded in other communities as well, especially churches and other religious organizations. What is interesting about the Fellowship is that these seemingly

mundane unifying norms and values, instead of being seen as bi-products of upholding a more important religious doctrine, are elevated to the spiritual plane as the very traits and characteristics of God Himself. Consequently, the very act of communing with others is divine in its own right. With Fellowship culture we see that again the sacred and secular can and should be unified.

Another way in which members often describe Fellowship culture is that it focuses on “the heart.” This term has deep symbolism at the Fellowship and stems directly from the language used by Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. Mitchell, in describing what unites Fellowship members despite their differences begins, “One of Bawa’s first commandments was, and he put it this strongly, ‘If someone is doing something wrong and another person points it out and judges him for it, whose sin is the worst? It’s the second person’s.’” One of the foundational axioms of Bawa’s path is that judging others is one of the primary means by which worlds break down between individuals. By stopping judgment before it arises, Fellowship members are better able to focus on what they share rather than on fabricated opinions. Because of this, Mitchell says, “What we’re left with is really the only place we can all agree on, the heart. Which really is disinterested in theories and theology or anything like that. It’s just interested in the heart, in the heart space.” Stemming from Bawa’s commandments to shun doctrine and judgment, Fellowship culture focuses on the heart. The heart is that space of non-judgmental acceptance that dwells within all of us. It is the soft place of compassion between individuals that is constantly being asked to come to the forefront at the Fellowship. As Keye says, “It’s a heart thing that brings us together.” There is the sense, then, that the

heart is in fact the exact opposite of the things that break down communities. Jeff illustrates this in an email correspondence. He writes:

The downsides of community are 1) the repression of individual freedom, 2) judgmental gossip (backbiting) and the excessive compliance to norms (including racism, classism, or ethnocentrism in some form) because of fear of sanctions. In a group of people who share visions of life without these downsides and who try to become more perfect exemplars of this vision, these downsides diminish over time as processes of mutual teaching and support emerge and prevail.

As Jeff notes here, the shared vision of life, the culture of the Fellowship, is one in which all that can remain is the heart of each individual. The focus of the heart is pointed upward toward the qualities of God, which do not include the “downsides” of community such as backbiting, racism, or separatism of any kind, but do include acceptance, compassion, and unity. Again, as we saw with Bawa’s teachings, we see that the focus of the heart, which I am suggesting is synonymous with Fellowship culture, is to nourish the qualities of unity and acceptance and to diminish the qualities of separation and judgment.

Whether described in a comparative way with popular culture, or in a positive way as the heart, we see that Fellowship culture, as a way of being in the world, aims to be exactly like Bawa’s teachings. Its aim is to provide a platform for living an authentic communal life in which there is no discrepancy between one’s thoughts and actions, between the love of oneself and the love of others. To put it in Bawa’s words, the aim of Fellowship culture, as with his path, is to “Separate yourself from that which separates you from your fellow human being.” The Fellowship community maintains a greater degree of cohesiveness because its members have at their disposal a set of norms and values, alternative to egoistic values, which aims to reinforce the very qualities that create and sustain communities. Furthermore, these qualities, while existing on the secular

plane, are simultaneously seen as divine. It is certainly true that maintaining common values in any form can create a feeling of connectedness between individuals. However, I emphasize that the root orientation of Fellowship culture, that it is a culture of divine unity, is what makes it such a deeply meaningful and effective tool for nourishing a cohesive community.

EXPRESSING FELLOWSHIP CULTURE

WE HAVE SEEN how the nature of Fellowship culture provides a platform for acting out the very qualities that keep communities together. But what do these actions look like? How do Fellowshipers publicly act out, rather than simply talk about, Fellowship culture? There are many symbolisms, rituals, and habits that seem to emphasize the central values of connectivity at the Fellowship. When members greet each other, for example, they make a symbolic touch to the heart with the palm of their hand and say in Arabic, “May peace be with you.” This gesture is “all Bawa” and reinforces their most basic connection as if to say, “We are both just children of this little man, this Godly man who touched us both right here.” It is as Sharon says as she sits doing duty at the foot of her Father’s bed, “When I’m walking down the street in Philadelphia and I happen to run into someone from the Fellowship, like once every year, it’s like wow! Here is this light. It’s then when you realize that you’re a child and I’m a child and... And that’s when disposition *and* doctrine just fall away.”

Even in the mosque, which is sometimes typified as the center of traditional Islam among members, Fellowship culture thrives. A ritual unique to the Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Mosque, as opposed to other Islamic mosques, is, after prayers have ended, to embrace

each individual with whom one has prayed, look him in the eye and say, “Peace be with you.” Try this custom at a mosque outside the Fellowship, as Sarah made the mistake of doing, and one is likely to get strange looks. “The embrace at the end is more important than the prayer itself,” Bawa often said. Each person’s individual act to praise God is combined with the celebration of connection between individuals.

The heart is one of the most prevalent symbols seen around the Fellowship house. The upside-down heart, which adorns the cover of this manuscript, is a common example of such symbolism. Bawa often used this symbol in his paintings as a way to remind his children that the heart within the heart – the space of compassion in the heart in which God’s Qualities dwell – is the focus of the Fellowship. And, although all of us were born with this heart, it is our duty to make sure that it is always pointed upward toward God.

Even in just holding Fellowship meetings, members reinforce Fellowship culture by making public Bawa’s teachings and his vision for the Fellowship. This message came most strongly from Katherine, a founding member of the Fellowship, one afternoon during the anniversary celebration of the Fellowship. She says:

Can we get a glimpse of divinity from each other? Sometimes people think we worshiped him [Bawa]...there was no him. We worship God’s Qualities. Look at us! We have so much in common. We have everything in common. I don’t know why we talk about what we don’t have in common. We should just throw that part out if you ask me. Imagine if all we had here was the unity and nothing else! The roof would probably lift off this place!

When Fellowship members sit on the dais at the front of the meeting room, the opportunity is there for unity to hang on their lips. There is an understanding that the mystical can and should be emphasized. Fellowship culture can and should make members realize that, as Sharon emphatically told me, “Our differences are dispositional, not doctrinal.” In other words, Fellowship culture is there to habitually reinforce the

same focus of the teachings – that no divisions come from true doctrine because the only doctrine that exists is God’s Truth of no divisions. Differences are merely dispositional manifestations of the same integrated whole.

I wish to emphasize that what I am calling Fellowship culture here, although it can be approximated in words just like any other culture, is also an experience that is created in the *feeling* of its collective performance. To some extent culture resides in the actions, words and conceptions of the lens that it is, however, it is also a feeling. The Fellowship provides good evidence of this. The feeling of Fellowship culture is often likened to the energy Bawa seemed to radiate to all his children when he was present.

Amina, a second generation member, says:

Bawa produced that energy which everyone was drawn to, which was then absorbed and reproduced between each other. It still exists without him just not as often. Every now and again it pops up in a variety of ways, sometimes weepy, sometimes happy and funny, sometimes strong and solid...

That energy that Bawa used to produce between his children now seems to manifest as the by-product of the kind of environment they are creating through their communal activities. They report that this can actually be felt physically. Keye seems to feel Fellowship culture very strongly. He says:

It’s still there. When you walk in you can feel it. Every time I walk into that kitchen I can feel it. There’s no racial problem. It’s in the air. You walk into his room and put your head down on his bed out of respect. You say a prayer. It’s there. The people who stayed know that. So in a sense nothing has changed.

Although Bawa is gone physically, the feeling of the heart, which members report is the same uniting energy they claim Bawa produced, is still present at the Fellowship. It dies when they begin to orient their relationships in an egoistic way. It flourishes when they focus on connecting at the space of the heart, when they act out Fellowship culture. It

appears, then, that the heart is the answer to Bawa's last request, "Don't forget me. Don't forget me. Don't forget me." By focusing on the heart, they are remembering not the powerful physical presence of Bawa but the feeling that his physical presence gave them – a feeling of unity.

CONCLUSIONS

AS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY, the Fellowship seems to exist on two different levels. On the spiritual level it can be understood as a profoundly open center for the upkeep of one's individual spiritual work. One can pray in a mosque, meditate in Bawa's room, research Bawa's discourses, and essentially tailor the spiritual practice to whatever one is predisposed to doing or is most comfortable with practicing. The internal work of waking up to the true nature of oneself is certainly a focus there. On another level, however, the Fellowship is deeply communal. It is a community that nourishes the norms and values of connectivity that keep communities together. In light of Durkheim's essential description of religion, this is as it should be. He states:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim 1915:62).

As Durkheim describes and the Fellowship shows, the essential aspects of a religion are that it unifies belief and practice and that it necessarily implies a unified community whose individuals strive for a moral life. Bawa and Durkheim seem to agree, then, that religion is inextricably linked to action. Thus religion implies *interaction*. Therefore, religion must result in a religious community in order to be authentic. Unlike

Durkheim's definition, however, the Fellowship seems to eliminate the forbidden-ness and separation of sacred things. God's sacred qualities are already within us and all around us. Furthermore, Durkheim's definition hints that those who are welcome as members of a religious community must necessarily adhere to the very same ideals that everyone else in the community adheres to. As we have seen, although the Fellowship does attract a certain kind of individual, it also habitually reinforces the idea that stringing together the hearts of each individual one sees, no matter what his or her personal disposition, is a thing that should be done on a mass communal level. The Fellowship shows that one of the most effective ways to satisfy individuals within themselves and between each other is to establish a center where the seemingly non-existent connections between sacred and secular, spiritual and communal, individual and group are revealed to exist.

CONCLUSION

THE QUESTION THAT REMAINS of the Fellowship, then, is whether it can last. Is the culture of unity that Fellowshipers share exclusive to older members and their children or can “outsiders” access it? If so, what does this say about the future of the Fellowship? Furthermore, how does the Fellowship reflect wider phenomena surrounding spiritual and religious communities? What is the message that the Fellowship is sending to society? The answers to these questions can be found most clearly in an interview with Allen conducted by Keye, an older Fellowships, on his weekly radio broadcast *The Sufi Path*.¹² What is unique about Allen’s perspective is that he *is* an “outsider.” A computer specialist in his forties, Allen came to the Fellowship just a year ago. Allen’s spiritual journey, how he found the Fellowship, his observations of the community, and how it has changed his life summarize the most important points explored in this project. His story encompasses the archetype of the Cultural Creative, the need for inner/outer unity in one’s life, Fellowship culture, and the feeling of the heart.¹³

Allen’s background speaks directly to the idea of the Cultural Creative discussed in Chapters One and Two. The path he took to get to the Fellowship closely resembles that of the older generation, however, unlike them he was not drawn to the Fellowship by

¹² For several years, Keye has been conducting public radio interviews with members of the Fellowship from both generations. The interviews mainly focus on the topics of Sufism, spirituality, Bawa, and the Fellowship.

¹³ I am presenting extensive uncut segments of Allen’s interview in this section because I feel it is important to give representation to the way Fellowshipers interact with each other and how they use language to describe their experiences.

Bawa Muhaiyaddeen himself. As we shall see, he was introduced to the Fellowship through a group of members he met in a local coffee shop. Before we see how this process occurred, however, let us first look at Allen's spiritual history.

Allen: I would never have considered myself a particularly religious person. When I was 26 I had an experience of God that left me with a particular understanding or knowing of the existence of God and one that I knew of God's existence beyond belief. It was an undeniable thing and yet I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't have a religious background in which to deal with this.

Key: You spent some earlier portion of your life looking?

A: In the 70s I went to a course and got some value out of that. After I had this experience of God, I began to search religions for some meaning of God somewhere. I tried some exotic religions because I knew that the mainstream Christian religions didn't hold a great deal. I had tried and I didn't find it there. So I looked at South East Asian religions and so forth. Out of the mainstream things like Sabot is the one that I found fascinating. Yet I didn't find what I was looking for there and put everything aside to become married, start a career, have a family, buy a big house, three cars or four cars, all that kind of stuff. And one gets caught up in that. Yet underneath the surface there must have been something there that drew me to these men [in the coffee shop]. There must have been an under conversation of, "This is not it" as I was accumulating the trappings of life. It suddenly appeared and when I walked into the Fellowship I knew I was home and I wanted more of whatever it was. I'm not a particularly religiously oriented person, I'm not a scholar in that sense, but I knew that that was it. I would describe myself as a spiritual person but not a religious person. And in fact I did not like to hear people talk of religious things. I did not like to hear people in a particular spiritual way. So this is tremendously unusual or odd for me to have walked into this thing unknowing six months ago and suddenly my heart opens, God's light shines in and I'm spouting words of love and truth and peace and actually being a different person than I was before. And I don't make a big thing of a particular religious experience; it is just the honor of person-to-person, the respect of person-to-person that's important.

Allen is a Cultural Creative. He does not consider himself a religious person and found no fulfillment in the mainstream religions of the West. Instead, he considers himself a spiritual person and automatically felt attracted to Eastern spiritual traditions. He found them "fascinating" but never found "what he was looking for." Consequently, Allen got lost. He became caught up in a life of materialism before he began to see how

dissatisfying that was to his inner voice. As we shall see, the turning point for Allen, which finally delivered him to his suitable spiritual home, was not a charismatic figure like Bawa, but the charm of a group of Fellowship members in a coffee shop.

Key: *How actually did you come into contact with the Fellowship or people in the Fellowship?*

Allen: *Coffee addiction I guess is the way I'd have to describe it. I like to go to a coffee shop and have a cup of coffee in the mornings and so forth. And on the weekends I noticed that there was a group of men that were there and they were talking in a particular way. It was not what they were saying but the particular way that they addressed the topics of the world that intrigued me. There was some depth to their conversation that was extraordinary in what we find in this secular world. And I was drawn into it. It was unlike anything I had heard before in my life and yet they were very casual and I could tell that there was something inside their conversation that was real. It wasn't particularly intellectual. It wasn't particularly stilted. It wasn't particularly anything. It was just common people talking about – I noticed that these guys were mostly in their fifties so I labeled them the Geezer Club. And in fact talked to my wife about that. I said, "These old guys are in the coffee shop; and, boy, some of the things they discuss are really interesting." Well one day I wormed my way into their conversation. I just said something – a smart comment or something – and the next week they asked me a question, my opinion on something. And I don't even remember what it was, but it was actually a delight to say something because the question was a question of depth and not an ordinary cocktail party kind of question. And I gave my answer and the answer came from the heart. And I guess they sensed that in a particular way and they could tell that there was something in me that was drawn – and so they began to draw me into the conversation. And I wondered what these people were and they said they were just a bunch of friends. After about six weeks they told me they were Sufis. And at that time I remember thinking, well I know everything I need to know about Sufis, they're Muslims and they put on long robes and whirl around for hours and hours and hours at a time and not anything I want to be a part of, but, boy, they sure are neat people to talk to.*

K: *Well you say there is something about the way they were discussing. Is it possible to grab an adjective that describes that?*

A: *Umm...open hearted. I guess. Or a particular seriousness on light topics and a lightness on serious topics. Without having a particular position, without having the ordinary complaints that most of us express on a day-to-day basis. There was none of that there. There was a real love of mankind that you could hear just in the tones of their speech. It's hard to describe because when one encounters one with a lightness of heart, it's an experience it's not words. So it wasn't the words it was more the way they dealt with each other and the way they dealt with the world. And particularly to be this open in a coffee shop just really intrigued me.*

K: What was the result of your – I gather you were drawn into the group and joined it fairly regularly after that point. Where did that lead?

A: Well I was sitting there on a Sunday morning and I remember that one of the guys there said, “We have a meeting on Sunday mornings. Would you like to come? It’s at ten o’clock.” Well I said, “Gee that would be really interesting.” And so I contained my enthusiasm, but it was really fascination, because this was a way that I could, without making a commitment, find out more about where they were coming from. And so I went to that meeting and I remember I walked in the front door of the Fellowship in my street shoes. And I walked across the room and there was a big strapping guy there and he looked at me and said, “Brother, Bawa asked us not to wear shoes in the Fellowship.” And instead of hearing a correction or an instruction or something from my past, what I heard was, “I love you.” It was something particular in the tone of his voice that woke me up and at that instant I had the total experience of being home. Again it’s an experience and words fail to describe the truth of the experience, but I knew I had arrived someplace that was not like any other place I had ever been.

K: What I’m hearing, correct me if I’m wrong, is that even in that small interchange there was a lack of judgmental stuff – an acceptance of you as a person where you were.

A: That’s right.

Before Allen had even set foot in the Fellowship house, he seems to have detected the way of being in the world that Fellowshipers practice – a “way of lightness,” an “open-heartedness.” He was drawn into the Fellowship directly through witnessing Fellowship members interact with each other and interpret the world. He was drawn to the communal way in which they act out their cultural lens. Allen noticed clearly how differently these Fellowshipers conduct themselves in comparison to what he sees everyday. How the men interacted in the coffee shop woke him up to an “under conversation” that seemed to already be within him conversing on this level. He had simply never witnessed it before. Consequently, once Allen came to the Fellowship he suddenly realized that he felt more comfortable there than he had ever felt anywhere else.

Allen was taken aback by his first experience at the Fellowship and he realized that it was a place he wanted to reorient his life around. The observations he makes about the community and Bawa's path show the reasons why he decided to stay and illustrate more clearly the communal qualities that are being nurtured there.

Key: Bawa passed away in 1986 and some people speak of Bawa having died. Your experience, having come on the scene 15 years after he was not here physically, was somewhat different.

Allen: Yes, it was my experience. And I was amused that people in the Fellowship would say Bawa died in 1986 and I looked around and I could not see evidence of death. In fact all I could see is evidence of ongoing life and existence and a presence that is held collectively in the hearts of the people of the Fellowship. In fact, before I even walked through the doors of the Fellowship I had experienced that with the people I had met. And I had said something to them about, "When this holy man died he must have sent shards of pottery into your hearts that kept his presence with you at all times. Some of you have forgotten that but I can see that they're still there." Then later I was amazed by a discourse that Bawa gave that was something very similar to that. The experience was exactly the same, that Bawa's physical passing was no diminishment of his presence on this earth.

K: The word Muhaiyaddeen, loosely translated, means the one that lights the light in the heart. And this tiny little being, and tiny in physical stature, who came here, and then out of this tiny structure came this amazing grace that did just that. It opened the hearts of those people and of course it did not cease with his passing.

A: The evidence that I see is that it didn't just open their hearts, it literally transformed their past and their future. Opening a heart is so easy to say but if you look at the people and talk to the people that I'm around in the Fellowship and the people that I encounter that don't go to the Fellowship and so forth but have been in contact with it in some form, there's a transformation that happens that made the past be okay and the future perfect. That's an extraordinary thing in this life.

I don't really know how to put this into words because it's just now coming off the top of my head but there is a graciousness and reverence for each person that meets each person there. When two people come together, there's not a pulling apart. If I look at the world around me, what I see is that when people meet each other for the first time, that they pull away, that they want to remain separate. At the Fellowship what I've noticed is that people want to pull together because they feel that they already are together and they feel that it is the natural thing to be – to embrace each other. To touch each other's lives in very special and honored ways.

Even though Allen has never physically met Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and is not a child of one of Bawa's students, he reports that he can and does see Bawa at the Fellowship. This presence seems to be constituted in the fact that what feels most natural to Fellowshipers is being together. Whereas others feel naturally compelled to see differences and uniqueness between each other, Fellowshipers are naturally compelled to feel unity between each other. This sacredness in the mundane, above all the lofty ideas of attaining God's Qualities and becoming a true human being, is what Allen finds most compelling about the Fellowship.

Allen has come to the Fellowship to imbibe this divinely mundane atmosphere and, as a result, his life has changed. The reason why Allen's life feels so different is because he has been deeply affected by what seems to be the central theme of Bawa's path and Fellowship culture – things that seem separate are actually unified.

A: Before I walked through those doors, I firmly believed that there was no religion that fit my belief. I knew everything that I needed to know about religion having had this prior experience of God, and I had come to the end that there was nothing there. Since that time I have been able to hear my scientific mind speak and know that there is a – that that is inadequate for me, that there is a God, that there is something beyond this world. That I fit in that place, that I am one with mankind and one with God. I have no question about that. And it brings up – so that being fact for me, not belief but fact, then it brings the question what do I do next. What is the next step? How do I take this knowledge forward?

K: So what is the next step?

A: I don't know (laughs). More searching obviously. And I'm enjoying that because I find that I can still hear the way I thought prior to October of last year and I hear things in a new light now. And it's very exciting to know that something can happen in one's life that literally changes the day-to-day existence that one exists in or "be"s in. It transforms the fabric of one's life. Yet if you look at the outside of life it's pretty much the same. I live in the same house, I still drive the same kind of car and so forth but there's a richness there that had not existed prior. And I didn't find God, what I found was fellowship. And that's a particular thing on this plane to find and be in touch with.

K: *How one deals with another person.*

A: *That's right. In fact I would describe myself as a sophisticated loner before I began talking with these people. In fact I was embarrassed about joining any kind of group and yet suddenly here I am looking to make new acquaintances and actually getting to become tremendously involved in people's lives whether they be here around me in my community or half way around the world and people that I don't really know.*

K: *Would it be fair to say that you as a sophisticated loner found that suddenly you were surrounded by a lot of other sophisticated loners?*

A: *No, I would really say that I was really swimming in a sea of humanity and could not distinguish the humanity from the cars and the jobs and the other trappings of success.*

K: *You said an interesting thing before off-mic, which was that – you said something I think that is a really important phrase, which was, “the spiritual world is not disconnected from the secular world.” And I wonder if you could just enlighten me a little on that.*

A: *If beliefs didn't translate into actions, then there would be little reason to believe. That the fact that the love of God, the grace of God, the patience of God, can be present in the world through me is, to me, literally a miracle. It has transformed the productivity of my wife's business, it has transformed my relationship with my children, it has transformed the way I work with people at my job. And it's not something that I wanted or needed or anything, it's something that has occurred out of the presence of the people around me literally and the presence of God in my life. Literally God's light flows through my body and into this world, and if it weren't this way, then, it wouldn't be good for – it wouldn't be exceptional, it would just be ordinary, but this is extraordinary.*

Allen's life has been made extraordinary because he has found a place that integrates every aspect of it. Before coming to the Fellowship, he believed that there was no religion in existence that could suit his needs – no mainstream religion or esoteric mystical tradition. He found solace in the path of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen because it seems to speak to him in an entirely new way that is nevertheless religious in nature. In addition, Allen observes that this brilliant awakening highlights the naïve separatism of his “scientific mind.” That he could have somehow believed that there was no truth in the sacred for his secular soul now rings false to his changed ears. Much to his surprise,

however, Allen did not come to this realization by seeing God. Rather, he realized the Fellowship's most important lesson: that "the spiritual world is not disconnected from the secular world" and that a life of true freedom is unexpectedly found in its dependence on others. If Allen is at all indicative of how most spiritual seekers feel when they come in contact with the Fellowship, I predict that the community does indeed have a healthy future.

ENTERING HEARTSPACE

COULD IT BE, as Allen seems to have found, that the Fellowship is representative of a very particular kind of religious-like community-like place? That is, does the Fellowship and Bawa's path taken as a well integrated whole represent a middle way or compromise between the varieties of other religious communities and traditions that are currently available in today's society? Is the reason why the Fellowship works because it manages to bridge the gap between our traditional past and our secular future? Does it work because, as Allen suggests, it "makes the past be okay and the future perfect?" I argue that this may be the case.

There is the sense that the Fellowship is a religious place because it fulfills some sort of deeper yearning for a force higher than oneself. At the same time it is not a religious place because the activities that go on there are not strictly enforced or proselytized like a doctrine. In addition, the Fellowship is a community because it encourages deep reciprocating bonds to form between its members so that caring for someone else's life has just as much meaning as caring for one's own. At the same time, the Fellowship is not a community as we may think of the term because it is mysteriously

engaged in the outside world such that any are welcome to come and drink from the pond.

The Fellowship is a “heartspace.” That is, it is a kind of spiritual community or space, where, when one walks through its doors, the potential to harmoniously integrate one’s heart and mind, internal feelings and external actions, is greatly increased through the process of polishing the little jewel that lurks within each individual and cries out for something deeper than what jobs and cars and convenience have promised – the space of the heart. Its focus is the quality of connectivity within human beings and between human beings. For those who are ready, those who have searched but have not found, the Fellowship is patiently waiting to say to them, “Another way *is* possible.”

I think that this is an extremely important development in light of the fact that a significant group of people in America and elsewhere are feeling alienated by the seeming contradiction between the communal connectivity they yearn for inside and the pervasive need for individualism in their modern lifestyles. Perhaps the Fellowship is successful because it presents a solution to a deep-seated problem of the American character. Writers from Tocqueville, in his treatise *Democracy in America* (1969[1835-39]), to scholars like Mary Waters, in her book *Ethnic Options* (1990), have found that the essence of the American character is in its contradictory emphasis on “a quest for community on the one hand and a desire for individuality on the other” (Waters 1990:147). Americans treat freedom of choice and individualism as sacred. However, in the end, they find no authentic sacredness in that egoistic attitude, only a desire for more connectivity in their lives.

Perhaps the reason why the Fellowship appears to be so successful is because it is an answer to a trend of individualistic and communal yearning within society that speaks to our religiosity *and* our secularism. Perhaps the significance of what is currently happening at the Fellowship is that its members are conscientiously nourishing a way of living life that is of utmost timeliness. In *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Bellah et. al. conclude that:

Perhaps life is not a race whose only goal is being foremost. Perhaps true felicity does not lie in continually outgoing the next before. Perhaps the truth lies in what most of the world outside the modern West has always believed, namely that there are practices of life, good in themselves, that are inherently fulfilling. Perhaps work that is intrinsically rewarding is better for human beings than work that is only extrinsically rewarded. Perhaps enduring commitment to those we love and civic friendship toward our fellow citizens are preferable to restless competition and anxious self-defense. Perhaps common worship, in which we express our gratitude and wonder in the face of the mystery of being itself, is the most important thing of all. If so, we will have to change our lives and begin to remember what we have been happier to forget (295).

To each of these statements the Fellowship answers, “Yes, perhaps it is.” It asks us to remember these things that “we have been happier to forget” and then actually put them into practice in our lives. It affirms a new way to live from the inside out. Our new lives need not *look* like new lives. They must simply *feel* like new lives. By changing cultural lenses the outside will look brand new.

While the Fellowship holds innumerable lessons for the individual, I think it also has a very important lesson to teach the world – change must be creative. The impressionist painter Paul Cézanne once said that when he puts down a color that seems not quite right, he does not scrape it away and put a better color on top of it. Instead, he goes somewhere else on the canvas and puts down a new color that is in harmony with this “mistake” so that both colors can sing in their own uniqueness. In the same way, the

Fellowship does not ask us to change anything about other people or the world outside. Instead, it asks us to create something new right here inside ourselves. It asks us to find within ourselves something more connective, more compassionate, and actually more accepting of that which may ring mistaken to our ears. Lasting change does not come from a dramatic, destructive, negative protest of the outside world. Rather it comes from something small, internal, and, above all, positive. Making peace can come from something much more graspable – creating something new. In *The Cultural Creatives* (2000), Ray and Anderson quote David Spangler, who says, “A positive vision of the future challenges the culture to dare, to be open to change, and to accept a spirit of creativity that could alter its very structure” (341). As a heartspace, the Fellowship is accepting this challenge.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

OLDER GENERATION QUESTION SET:

- How did you come to the Fellowship and how has it affected your life?
- What was your relationship with Bawa like?
- What is your practice like now? Has it changed since Bawa passed on?
- Has the Fellowship changed since Bawa passed on?
- Were you raised in a specific religious tradition? Have you experimented with other religious or spiritual traditions other than Sufism?
- What is the relationship like between the younger and older generations at the Fellowship?
- What do you think the future of the Fellowship will look like?

YOUNGER GENERATION QUESTION SET:

- What was it like being raised in the Fellowship and how has it affected your life?
- How would you characterize your relationship with Bawa? Did you ever spend time with him before he passed on?
- What is the relationship like between the older and younger generations at the Fellowship?
- Do you think it is harder or easier for you to follow this path than it is for the older generation?
- Have you experimented with other religious traditions? If not, have you ever wanted to?
- What are your plans for the future?
- What do you think the future of the Fellowship will look like?

GLOSSARY

ashram or *a'srama* (Sanskrit) Hermitage for spiritual practice; a stage of life. Usually associated with Hinduism.

dhikr (Arabic) The remembrance of God. It is a common name given to certain words in praise of God. Of the many *dhikrs*, the most exalted *dhikr* is to say, “*La ilaha ill-Allahu* – There is nothing other than you, O God. Only You are Allah.” All others relate to His actions, but this *dhikr* points to Him and to Him alone (Muhaiyaddeen 1991:319).

insan kamil (Arabic) A perfected, God-realized being. One who has realized Allah as his only wealth, cutting away all the wealth of the world and the wealth sought by the mind. One who has acquired God's qualities, performs his actions accordingly, and contains himself within those qualities (Muhaiyaddeen 1991:320)

Sheikh or *kamil sheikh* (Arabic) Perfect spiritual guide; the true guru; the one who, knowing himself and God, guides others on the straight path, the path to Allah; one who has developed the three thousand gracious qualities of Allah (Muhaiyaddeen 1991:321).

Sufism (Arabic) Sheikh Ahmad Zorruq (d. 1475) defines Sufism as, “The science by means of which you can put right the ‘heart’ and make it exclusive to God, using your knowledge of the way of Islam, particularly jurisprudence and its related knowledges, to improve your actions and keep within the bounds of the Islamic Law in order for wisdom to become apparent. Its foundation is the knowledge of Unity, and you need the sweetness of trust and certainty, otherwise you will not be able to bring about the necessary healing of the ‘heart’” (Haeri 2000)

swami (Sanskrit) monk; often used as a generic term for guru or spiritual guide among western spiritual seekers. Usually associated with Hinduism.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, Steven M. Tipton
1985 *Habits of the Heart Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.
Berkeley: University of California Press, Ltd.

Bloch, Jon P.
1998 *New Spirituality, Self, and Belonging How New Agers and Neo-Pagans
Talk about Themselves*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Clark, Elmer T.
1949 *The Small Sects in America*. Rev. edition. New York: Abingdon-
Cokesbury Press.

Durkheim, Emile
1915 *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Joseph Ward Swain, trans.
New York: Free Press.
1951 *Suicide A Study in Sociology*. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson,
trans. New York: Free Press.

Ellwood, Robert S.
1999 *Mysticism and Religion*. 2nd edition. New York: Seven Bridges Press.

Gilkey, Langdon
1981 *Society and the Sacred Toward A Theology of Culture in Decline*. New
York: Crossroad Publishing.

Haeri, Sheikh Fadhlalla
2000 *The Elements of Sufism*. Electronic Document,
<http://www.nuradeen.com/Reflections/ElementsOfSufism1.htm>, accessed
April 22.

Marcus, Sharon
2000 N.d. *My Years With the Qutb A Walk in Paradise*. Unpublished MS.

Marx, Karl
1978[1844] *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. *In The Marx-
Engels Reader*. 2nd edition. Robert C. Tucker, ed. Pp. 66-125. New York:
W. W. Norton & Company.

Muhaiyaddeen, M.R. Bawa
1976 *The Guidebook To The True Secret of the Heart*. Philadelphia: The
Fellowship Press.

1980 N.d. Unity Between Parents and Children. Unpublished discourse, The Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Fellowship.

1991 Questions of Life Answers of Wisdom. Vol. 1. Philadelphia: The Fellowship Press.

Putnam, Robert D.

2000 Bowling Alone The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ray, Paul H. and Sherry Ruth Anderson

2000 The Cultural Creatives How 50 Million People Are Changing the World. New York: Harmony Books.

Tocqueville, Alexis

1969[1835-39] Democracy in America. J.P. Mayer, ed. George Lawrence, trans. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Trungpa, Chögyam

1973 Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism. New Delhi: Shambhala Publications, Inc.

Waters, Mary

1990 Ethnic Options Choosing Identities in America. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weber, Max

1968 On Charisma and Institution Building. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wexler, Philip

2000 Mystical Society An Emerging Social Vision. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Other Works Consulted:

Reisman, David, with Reule Denny and Nathan Glazer

1953 The Lonely Crowd A Study of the Changing American Character. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Tomasi, Luigi, ed.

1999 Alternative Religions among European Youth. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing.

Weber, Max

1930 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. Talcott Parsons, trans. New York: Routledge.