Eckankar is a new religious movement founded by Paul Twitchell in 1965. It is a non-profit religious group with members in over one hundred countries. The spiritual home is the Temple of Eck in Chanhassen, Minnesota. Eckankar is not affiliated with any other religious group.

The movement teaches simple spiritual exercises, such as singing “Hu”, called “a love song to God”, to experience the Light and Sound of God and recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit.

### Etymology

The word Eckankar is a transliteration of the phrase Ik Onkar, which is used in Sikhism. According to the Eckankar glossary, the term Eckankar means Co-Worker with God. ECK is another word for the Holy Spirit, also known as the Audible Life Current, Life Force, or Light and Sound of God.

Eckankar’s headquarters were originally in Las Vegas, Nevada. Under the leadership of Darwin Gross, the organization was moved to Menlo Park, California in 1975. In 1986, Harold Klemp moved the base of operations to Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The leader of Eckankar is known as the Living ECK Master. Some leaders, Twitchell and Klemp, for example, also hold the title ‘Mahanta’ which refers to the inner aspect of the teacher. The leader functions as both an inner and outer guide for each member’s individual spiritual progress. Twitchell’s spiritual name: Peddar Zasko was the movement’s spiritual leader until his death in late 1971. Gross (spiritual name: Dap Ren) succeeded him until October 22, 1981, when Klemp (spiritual name: Wah Z, pronounced Wah Zee) became the spiritual leader.

Some scholars believe that Eckankar draws in part from the Sikh and Hindu religions, and the Sant Mat movement. Other influences include Rosicrucianism, Edgar Cayce, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, whose ministry Harold Klemp once trained for.

### Beliefs

One of the basic tenets is that Soul (the true self) may be experienced separate from the physical body and in full consciousness travel freely in other planes of reality. Eckankar emphasizes personal spiritual experiences as the most natural way back to God. These are attained via Soul Travel shifting the awareness from the body to the inner planes of existence.

Certain mantras or chants are used to facilitate spiritual growth. One important spiritual exercise of Eckankar is the singing or chanting of Hu, and is viewed in Eckankar as a ‘love song to God’. It is pronounced like the English word “hue” (or “hyoo”) in a long, drawn-out breath and is sung for about half an hour. Eckists sing it alone or in groups. Eckists believe that singing Hu draws one closer in state of consciousness to the Divine Being and that it can expand awareness, help one experience divine love, heal broken hearts, offer solace in times of grief, and bring peace and calm. Eckists believe this practice allows the student to step back from the overwhelming input of the physical senses and emotions and regain Soul’s spiritually higher viewpoint.

Dreams are regarded as important teaching tools, and members often keep dream journals to facilitate study. According to followers of Eckankar, dream travel often serves as the gateway to Soul Travel or the shifting of one’s consciousness to ever-higher states of being.

Eckankar teaches that “spiritual liberation” in one’s lifetime is available to all and that it is possible to achieve Self-Realization (the realization of oneself as Soul) and God-Realization (the realization of oneself as a spark of God) in one’s lifetime. The membership card for Eckankar states: “The aim and purpose of Eckankar has always been to take Soul by its own path back to its divine source.”

The final spiritual goal of all Eckists is to become conscious Co-Workers with God.

The Shariyat-Ki-Sugmad which means “Way of the Eternal”, is the holy scripture of Eckankar. It comprises two books that tell of spiritual meaning and purpose as written by the Mahanta. There are also a series of Satsang writings, that are available with yearly membership in Eckankar. There are Satsang classes available to study discourses with others, as well as individually.

Some of the key beliefs taught in the Shariyat-Ki-Sugmad include Soul Travel, karma, reincarnation, love, Light and Sound, and many other spiritual topics. Eckists believe Sugmad is the endless source from which all forms were created, and that the ECK, the Sound Current, flows out of Sugmad and into lower dimensions.

Primary to the teaching is the belief that one may experience the perspective of soul beyond the limits of the body. Also, the concepts of karma and reincarnation help to explain situations in life as the playing out of past causes.

The beliefs that individuals are responsible for their own destiny and that their decisions determine their future are important concepts to Eckankar. Eckankar students meet in open public services and classes to discuss personal experiences, topics, books and discourses.

### Worship

Eckankar emphasizes personal spiritual experiences as the most natural way back to God. These are attained via the Spiritual Exercises of ECK. Eckankar offers a Spiritual Exercise of the Week on its website.

An ECK Light and Sound service generally includes a HU Song and contemplation, a talk or panel discussion from members of the Eckankar Clergy, and often includes creative arts and group discussion. Eckankar hosts a Worldwide Seminar in October and a Springtime Seminar every year. Eckankar also hosts annual seminars in countries around the world. EOK seminars include speakers, creative arts, workshops, discussion groups and other activities.

### Current status

The Eckankar “EK” symbol appears on the list of Available Emblems of Belief for Placement on Government Headstones and Markers by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Sources estimate that there were around 50,000 followers in the 1990s.

In February 2018, Iranian agencies reported the execution of an Eckankar member for “establishing fake institution”. Karim Zargar, the former Iran TV’s channel one broadcast manager, general manager of IRIB’s international section, head of the Faculty of Radio and Television, and owner and managing director of Film Reports magazine (Gozarest-e-Film), was hanged at Rajai Shahr Prison. Marjan Davari, Mr. Zargar’s former spouse, is also kept in prison and is sentenced to death for being a member of Eckankar. Ms. Davari’s family has stated in the media...
Ceremonies and rites

There are few personal requirements to be an ECKist; however, certain spiritual practices are recommended. Chief among these is daily practice of the "Spiritual Exercises of ECK" for 15-20 minutes. The most basic ECK spiritual exercise is singing the word Hu. A wide variety of spiritual exercises are offered, and members are encouraged to create their own. There are no dietary requirements, taboos, or enforced ascetic practices. Eckankar does not require potential members to leave their current faith to join.

There are a number of ceremonies an ECKist can experience as part of the teaching, including a Consecration ceremony for initiating the young and infants, a Rite of Passage into adulthood (around age 13), a Wedding ceremony, and a Memorial service.

ECKists celebrate a spiritual new year on October 22, the birthday of Eckankar founder Paul Twitchell, although the group claims there is no organizational celebration of personal anniversaries, such as birthdays of the leaders.

ECK Masters

ECKists believe contact with Divine Spirit, which they call the ECK, can be made via the spiritual exercises of ECK and the guidance of the living ECK Master. It is held that the ECK Masters are here to serve all life irrespective of religious belief. The main Eckankar website includes a list of Masters.

Criticism

In Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America, David C. Lane writes:

This lineage, known as the Vairagi masters in Eckankar, allegedly traces its genealogy back through some 970 Living Eck Masters to Rama, an avatar of Vishnu in Hinduism. In other versions, the teachings go even further back to Gakko, a spiritual essence that traveled from the city of Retz on the planet Venus to Earth six million years ago...In addition, Sudar Singh and Rebazar Tarzs are not genuine historical personages but literary inventions developed by Twitchell to conceal his past associations.

References

7. *This sound develops through ten different aspects... until it finally becomes Hu, the most sacred of all sounds. This sound Hu is the beginning and end of all sounds... the echo of bells or gongs gives a typical illustration of the sound Hu. The Supreme Being has been called by various names in different languages, but the mystics have known him as Hu, the natural name, not man-made, the only name of the nameless which all nature constantly practices.* The sound Hu is necessary for the awakening of the soul and to make it aware of its own ability to spread love. It is similar to the sound of bells and gongs.

Further reading


External links

- [Official website](http://www.eckankar.com)

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