

About ECKANKAR

An overview of Eckankar and its teachings



ECKANKAR
Religion of the Light and Sound of God

2003

For more information contact:

ECKANKAR

Att: Public Information

P.O. Box 27300

Minneapolis, MN 55427 U.S.A.

Web site: www.eckankar.org

Phone: (952) 380-2300

Fax: (952) 380-2395

Contents

ECKANKAR, Religion of the Light and Sound of God

Basic Beliefs	1
Historic Origins	1
Spiritual Leader	2
Membership	3
Organization	3
Clergy	3

Practices

Worship and Ceremonies	4
Seminars and Holidays	4
Discourse Study and Classes.....	5
Spiritual Exercises	5
Initiations	5
Personal Ethics	5
Diet and Medical Care	6
View of Mortality	6

References

ECKANKAR Books	7
General Sources	7

ECKANKAR

Religion of the Light and Sound of God

Eckankar is a nonprofit religious organization and church with headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The spiritual home of Eckankar is the Temple of ECK in Chanhassen, Minnesota, completed in 1990.

Basic Beliefs

Harold Klemp, the spiritual leader of Eckankar, describes the basic beliefs of Eckankar as follows:

The teachings of ECK define the nature of Soul more carefully than do other current religions. Each person is Soul, a particle of God sent into the lower worlds (including earth) to gain spiritual experience. Purified by the spiritual exercises, he comes into contact with the Holy Spirit. His goal is spiritual freedom in this lifetime, after which he becomes a Co-worker with God, both here and in the next world. Karma and reincarnation are primary beliefs.

Key to the ECK teachings is the Mahanta, the Living ECK Master. He has the special ability to act as both Inner and Outer Master for ECK students. He is the prophet of Eckankar, given respect but not worship. He teaches the sacred name of God, HU, which lifts one spiritually into the Light and Sound of God, the ECK.

The ECK (the Holy Spirit) purifies one of karma (sin), making it possible for him to accept the full love of God in this lifetime. Then he gains wisdom, charity, and freedom.

Personal experience with the Light and Sound of God is the cornerstone of Eckankar. Of all the religions on earth today, Eckankar offers the most direct teachings on the Light and Sound of God. These twin pillars are missing in whole or in part from the rest. People who truly find these two aspects of God undergo a complete spiritual change. Life becomes fresh and new again, as it was in early childhood.

— Harold Klemp
“What Is ECKANKAR?”
The Temple of ECK

Historic Origins

The ECK teachings of the Light and Sound have been passed on to spiritual seekers by ECK Masters since before recorded history.

Although the ECK teachings have ancient roots, Eckankar was introduced as a modern-day religion in 1965 by Paul Twitchell. Born in Kentucky in the early twentieth century, he served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and then became a professional reporter and writer.

A seeker from an early age, Twitchell was introduced to a group of spiritual masters who would change the course of his life. These were the Vairagi ECK Masters. While they trained him to

become the Living ECK Master, he explored a wide range of spiritual traditions under many teachers. The high teachings of ECK had been scattered to the four corners of the world, and Twitchell gathered them and made them available to all. By 1965, he was offering Soul Travel workshops to the public on how to move into greater states of consciousness.¹

In his many talks, articles, books, and discourses, Twitchell emphasized personal spiritual unfoldment via direct experience with the Light and Sound of God. As the spiritual leader of Eckankar from 1965 until his death in 1971, he was the Mahanta, the Living ECK Master. Twitchell was followed by Darwin Gross, who served from 1971 to 1981. In 1981 Gross passed the spiritual and temporal leadership of Eckankar to Harold Klemp.

Harold Klemp has greatly expanded the work begun by Paul Twitchell. Under Klemp's leadership, Eckankar has been established as a growing worldwide religion with an emphasis on service to others and all life.

Eckankar is a living religion. Each Living ECK Master keeps the teachings pure and carries the works of ECK forward to new levels to reach people of the time.

Spiritual Leader

Harold Klemp grew up on a Wisconsin farm. During his youth, he attended a two-room country schoolhouse, then high school at a religious boarding school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

After preministerial college in Milwaukee and Ft. Wayne, Indiana, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. There he trained as a language specialist at the University of Indiana and as a radio intercept operator at Goodfellow AFB, Texas. Then followed a two-year tour of duty in Japan, where he first encountered Eckankar.²

In October 1981, after years of spiritual training, Harold Klemp became the spiritual leader of Eckankar. His full title is Sri Harold Klemp, the Mahanta, the Living ECK Master.³

As the Living ECK Master, he is responsible for continuing the development of the Eckankar teachings. His mission is to help people find their way back to God. He has written over forty-five books (see **References**), numerous articles, and many series of twelve-month discourse lessons (for ECK members). Among the latter are *The Easy Way Discourses*, *The ECK Dream 1 Discourses*, *The ECK Dream 2 Discourses*, *The Master 3 Discourses*, *The Master 4 Discourses*, and *Letters of Light & Sound 1 and 2*.

¹ Details on Twitchell and his life are found in several books published by Eckankar, among them *The Secret Teachings*, *The Golden Heart*, and *Cloak of Consciousness* by Harold Klemp. For more information about Paul Twitchell, the ECK Masters, and the history of Eckankar, see www.eckankar.org/history.html on the Internet.

² Harold Klemp describes his formative experiences in *Autobiography of a Modern Prophet*.

³ In Eckankar *Sri* is a title of spiritual respect, similar to reverend or pastor, used for those who have attained the Kingdom of God. It is usually reserved for the Living ECK Master of the time.

Harold Klemp regularly speaks at major Eckankar seminars (see **Seminars and Holidays**). The talks are then broadcast via the Internet. More than one hundred and sixty of these talks are available as audio or video recordings.

Membership

Eckankar has members in over one hundred countries, and facilities in North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Membership in Eckankar is renewed annually. At the time of membership renewal, a donation is requested to help support the general works of ECK. Members of Eckankar are known as ECKists or ECK chelas (students).

Organization

Eckankar has a hierarchical structure. As noted above (see **Spiritual Leader**), the Living ECK Master is the spiritual and temporal leader of Eckankar. Volunteer regional spiritual leaders, known as Regional ECK Spiritual Aides (RESAs), report to the parent church in Minneapolis. A RESA is an ECK cleric appointed to oversee Eckankar activities within the state(s), province(s), or country(ies) assigned to him or her, assisted by an organization of volunteers who coordinate regional and local ECK activities.

Subordinate churches chartered by the parent church have been established in almost every state in the U.S. and other countries. These subordinate churches, each led by a RESA, are known as Satsang Societies. Satsang Societies have ECK centers and ECK temples where worship services and other Eckankar events are held.

Clergy

ECK clergy are ordained after many years of training and service. Ordination is documented by an ordination certificate issued by Eckankar. An ECK cleric leads ECK Worship Services and officiates the four ECK celebrations of life (see **Worship and Ceremonies**).

After an additional period of service, an ECK cleric may be appointed as an ECK Initiator, able to conduct ECK initiation ceremonies (see **Initiations**). After serving as Initiator, the cleric may be appointed as an ECK Spiritual Aide (ESA). An ESA conducts ECK Spiritual Aide sessions. An ESA session, though not counseling, can help an individual find his own answers to spiritual questions and life situations through the aid of Divine Spirit. An ESA does not offer advice but simply listens as a vehicle for the Holy Spirit.

Eckankar's clergy is notable both in that it is a volunteer rather than paid service and for the rich and diverse backgrounds of its members.

Practices

Worship and Ceremonies

The ECK Worship Service is a one-hour service. Typically a service begins with a brief reading from one of the ECK books, followed by singing HU (pronounced like the word *hue*) for a few minutes. HU is an ancient and holy name of God and is sung as a love song to God. Next is a brief period of silent contemplation and often an open discussion of a spiritual topic. Many services also include music, group singing, and talks. An ECK Worship Service is led by a member of the ECK clergy.

Another regular ECK event is the HU Song (HU Chant), which consists simply of singing HU for fifteen to thirty minutes, followed by silent contemplation. The HU Chant is mainly for ECK members.

There are four ECK celebrations of life, which are conducted by ECK clerics:

- The ECK Consecration Ceremony, for infants and very young children. It celebrates new life and the beginning of a new phase in Soul's journey home to God.
- The ECK Rite of Passage, for youth on the threshold of becoming adults, at about age thirteen.
- The ECK Wedding Ceremony, which celebrates the marriage bond and commitment of the couple to bring a deep spiritual awareness to their life together.
- The ECK Memorial Service, which honors the journey of Soul and celebrates a loved one's life and passage to a new life in the spiritual worlds.

Seminars and Holidays

Eckankar offers public seminars ranging from half-day events to major three- or four-day international seminars attended by several thousand people. ECK seminars are spiritual gatherings that feature talks, workshops, worship services, and creative arts. The Living ECK Master often speaks at major ECK seminars, in person or by live remote telecast and via the Internet.

October 22 is the spiritual New Year in ECK. The annual ECK Worldwide Seminar is held on or close to this date and is a time of reunion and spiritual renewal for ECKists around the world. A second annual celebration is the ECK Spiritual Skills Seminar, usually held on Easter weekend. Outside the United States, large ECK seminars are held in Canada, Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa.

Eckankar also observes its Founder's Day on September 17, honoring Paul Twitchell and his mission to establish the modern-day teachings of Eckankar. A day of gratitude and thanksgiving, it is observed on the anniversary of Twitchell's physical passing.

Discourse Study and Classes

Members of Eckankar study spiritual lessons written by the Living ECK Master. These discourses are sent to ECK members annually and studied one lesson per month.

ECK Satsang classes are monthly or semimonthly group study of the ECK discourses. Eckankar also offers public discussion classes on ECK books and ECK roundtable discussions. These events are listed in local ECK newsletters and regional Eckankar Web sites. Some ECK book discussion classes are conducted on-line.

Spiritual Exercises

Members of Eckankar do spiritual exercises, usually for twenty to thirty minutes each day. In these quiet contemplations one builds a spiritual foundation based on personal experience with the Light and Sound of God. Similar to prayer, the spiritual exercises increase one's spiritual strength and understanding.

ECKists regard Soul Travel as another means to experience Divine Spirit. Soul Travel can be a general expansion of awareness and knowingness or a conscious experience of the heavenly worlds.

The ECKist also places a high value on the spiritual insight to be gained from dreams, and many ECKists keep dream journals to record dream and Soul Travel experiences.

Initiations

Individual spiritual progress in ECK is reflected in a series of initiations spanning many years. Especially significant are the Second Initiation, at which the individual makes a personal commitment to ECK, and the Fifth, when one becomes a High Initiate, or Mahdis. Each initiation from the Second through the Eighth is marked by a ceremony conducted by an ECK Initiator (see **Clergy**).

Personal Ethics

In personal decisions, ECKists follow their inner perception of the guidance of God and Divine Spirit, aspiring to live by the highest spiritual attributes: total awareness, responsibility, and divine love. ECKists act within the laws of man while keeping attention upon the worlds of God. At the same time, they live a responsible, involved existence, paying their own way, serving a useful function in society, and fulfilling commitments to family, employer, and country. ECKists do not embrace a communal lifestyle. The ECKist accepts full responsibility for all personal acts and decisions.

Eckankar considers such matters as abortion, divorce, or sexual orientation to be individual decisions, and as an organization takes no stance. The use of tobacco and alcohol is discouraged; the use of drugs other than for medical treatment is seen as a step backward in spiritual unfoldment and is strongly discouraged. Because the ECKist understands life is a gift from God, suicide is viewed as contrary to spiritual law.

Eckankar regards military service as a matter of individual choice and responsibility and does not encourage or condone resistance to service in the armed forces. Many ECKists either currently serve in armed forces or are veterans of past service.

A central ECK teaching is that human experience is governed by the Law of Karma, the spiritual law of cause and effect. Thus individual Souls have shaped their life today by their past actions. An ECKist views everyday experiences as gifts from God, given to Soul for Its spiritual unfoldment.

As a practical guide for actions in harmony with God's law, Harold Klemp has suggested the two spiritual laws discovered by author Richard J. Maybury: *1) Do all you have agreed to do, and 2) Do not encroach on other persons or their property.*⁴

Eckankar acknowledges the important spiritual role of other religions and religious leaders, such as Jesus, Buddha, and Muhammad. Members are expected to respect the privacy, beliefs, and religious freedom of others.

Diet and Medical Care

Eckankar considers diet a matter of personal choice. ECKists who have received the Second Initiation are encouraged to fast on Fridays but may choose the kind of fast that best suits them. Rather than a full fast, one may eat lightly or simply keep one's attention on God and the Holy Spirit throughout the day.

Treatment of illness and injury is likewise left to the individual. The church encourages its members to seek the advice of physicians or other licensed health practitioners as needed. All decisions related to medical treatment are a matter of individual choice.

View of Mortality

ECKists believe that each of us is Soul, a spark of God sent to this world to gain spiritual experience. In recognition that Soul survives physical death, they often refer to death as *trans-lation*. Many ECKists prefer cremation to burial. The ECK Memorial Service honors the journey of Soul and is performed by a member of the ECK clergy. (See **Worship and Ceremonies**.)

⁴ Maybury, Richard J. *Whatever Happened to Justice?* Shingle Springs, Calif.: Bluestocking Press, 1993.

References

ECKANKAR Books

Among the many books published by Eckankar:

Past Lives, Dreams, and Soul Travel by Harold Klemp

Autobiography of a Modern Prophet by Harold Klemp

A Modern Prophet Answers Your Key Questions about Life by Harold Klemp

The Art of Spiritual Dreaming by Harold Klemp

The Living Word, Books 1 and 2, by Harold Klemp

The Spiritual Exercises of ECK by Harold Klemp

How to Survive Spiritually in Our Times, Mahanta Transcripts, Book 16, by Harold Klemp

The Secret of Love, Mahanta Transcripts, Book 14, by Harold Klemp

How to Find God, Mahanta Transcripts, Book 2, by Harold Klemp

Journey of Soul, Mahanta Transcripts, Book 1, by Harold Klemp

35 Golden Keys to Who You Are & Why You're Here by Linda C. Anderson

General Sources

Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America, Second edition, by Robert S. Ellwood and Harry B. Partin. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988.

For biographical entries for Harold Klemp:

International Authors and Writers Who's Who, Seventeenth Edition, Cambridge, England: Melrose Press Ltd., 2001.

International Who's Who of Intellectuals, Ninth edition, Cambridge, England: Melrose Press Ltd., 1992.

Who's Who in America, Fifty-fifth edition, New Providence, New Jersey: Marquis Who's Who, 2000.