



## The New Panths: Shabdism in North America

David Lane

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There are now several popular religious movements in North America which owe their existence, either partially or wholly, to the Radhasoami tradition of India. The spectrum ranges from immediate connections, as in Eckankar and the Divine Light Mission whose founders have taken initiation from one of the Satgurus, to associative influences where sects have borrowed (and, in some cases, plagiarized) writings and spiritual lineages from Radhasoami.

All of these new panths, though, have one thing in common: they give significant emphasis to the Shabd, the transcendent power which is believed to be the creative and sustaining force of the universe (it is also known as the Audible Life Stream or the "Music of the Spheres"). And though there are groups which speak of this Sound Current which are both anterior and exterior to the Radhasoami tradition, all of the new movements under discussion have based their knowledge and writings on Radhasoami's own particular interpretation of Surat Shabd Yoga, the practice of uniting the soul with the internal sound energy.

In this article, I will describe the relationship of these American religious movements to the Radhasoami tradition and then will examine the reasons why there is such a strong tendency in these new panths to deny their living religious heritage.



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