

The Emotional Apocalypse: A Quick View of MISA and its Apocalypse(s)

An apocalypse is an emotional event. I am referring here not to the usual meaning of the word apocalypse, the death of mankind, the destruction of civilization, the end of our world. Instead, I am referring to the phenomenon that occurs when a sect makes the end of the world a part of its doctrine: a very specific apocalypse is prepared for and it becomes part of the mentality and everyday life of a restricted, local group of people. Benedict Anderson once explained that most communities we are part of are too large for us to personally know every other person involved in them (“Imagined Communities”) – thus we imagine communities, feeling a kinship with others who live in the same territory, speak the same language, have the same beliefs - or even share the same apocalypse.

An apocalypse is a local solution for generalized problems and desires. It connects to the fear of death, translated into larger scale death and destruction that can paradoxically make the individual feel more in control of his or her personal destiny. An apocalypse is a judgment of value that will decide once and for all who are the virtuous and who are the sinful, who was right in their belief and who was wrong. An apocalypse is a chance to fight against evil and to prove oneself a savior, a worthy person or a hero who can withstand any challenge.

While sect apocalypses are many and vary according to the specifics of each sect’s teachings, the core of the various scenarios for the end of the world remains the same and it generally forms a knot of emotions and meanings, of concepts and desires and fears. It is my belief that in order to begin defusing the concept of the apocalypse it generally will not be enough to bring proof against the pet apocalyptic theory of the group - it is also necessary to understand how that apocalypse came to be believed and what its implications are for those members.

I will be addressing the issue as a former student of the Romanian MISA yoga school - in other words, as a former sect member of an orientally-flavored group that believes it has already averted at least two large-scale disasters and is working hard to delay or stop the 2012 Apocalypse. One averted disaster would have taken place in 1996, when an asteroid would have hit the earth, and another one would have been a devastating earthquake that would have destroyed a great part of Romania - MISA yogis believe that they have managed to avert both disasters by meditating and praying against them. Now they are meditating, praying and invoking God’s grace to avert or delay the 2012 apocalypse.

To better understand the concept of this particular apocalypse and how it relates to the rest of the sect beliefs, it is necessary to have some background of the MISA yoga school. It has been established in 1990 under the name of the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute and it was one of the first sources of oriental philosophy and spiritual practices in the country, all oriental disciplines having been banned during the communist regime that lasted until the end of 1989. Yoga classes are held once a week – at the end of a year of study, those who have attended enough classes automatically graduate into a superior year (today the highest ‘yoga year’ is 23). Due to its good timing and course-like structure, it boasts a high number of intellectuals who attended or continue attending its classes. MISA also organizes yoga camps, conferences, shows, courses on traditional Indian medicine, astrology or spirituality-related

topics, as well as student groups that have as purpose the improvement of the master-disciple relationship, or the personal improvement of women. Eventually, students are led to believe that they can find the answer to most questions and life situations within the sect, that the leader Gregorian Bivolaru knows anything of all possible subjects and can suggest better alternatives than those found outside and that anything in the world can either be incorporated into the sect, or is based on false knowledge. They gradually come to believe that they are better than "normal people" and that going back to the world, back to normal interests or interacting on a normal level would maybe affect their spiritual level.

Despite the fact that MISA calls itself a yoga school, the theoretical teachings are also drawn from other traditions - the Hindu Shiva and Shakti are worshiped along with Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Other teachings are drawn from New Age beliefs or conspiracy theories, such as neo-Tantric sexual techniques, beliefs in benevolent aliens coming to the aid of humankind, a belief in freemasonry taking over the world and trying to bring MISA to its knees. Bivolaru and the higher-up circle of the sect (the big name instructors and VIPs) attempt to transform these elements into a single, coherent whole, but occasionally problems of doctrine can arise. Often, discrepancies or contradictions are smoothed over by modifying the texts of other spiritual traditions to make it seem as if MISA ideas are universally supported.

However, even when contradictions do appear, they are usually glossed over and ignored because MISA yogis are encouraged not to research matters thoroughly, but to swallow what they can of the theory - and practice according to what their higher-ups recommend. There is an enormous amount of written courses, books, brochures, conferences and articles written on a wide range of topics, but the core of MISA beliefs is actually orally transmitted, sometimes with short aphorisms attached for easier memorizing and quicker responses to issues.

For example, "one gram of practice is worth more than tons of theory": the yogi is led to believe that if he or she does what the instructors or especially Gregorian Bivolaru say, then they will evolve quickly. Then, the much sought-after evolution is judged by the "states" that the yogi has: "A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds and the yogi by his states". The elusive "state" is a mood/sentiment/condition in which the student can find oneself - the state of happiness, the state of wisdom, the super-mental state, the state of communion with God. Yogis are encouraged to become over-sexual, because "sex energy is the basic energy of life". MISA yogis are also encouraged to feel rather than to trust their logic skills - "The mind lies". They are encouraged to blindly follow Gregorian Bivolaru as well ("the chance of encountering a true spiritual master is the same as that of a sea turtle that comes up to breathe every one hundred years and even then manages to bump its head on a floating piece of wood").

In this context, all possible apocalypses can be averted by using methods proposed by Gregorian Bivolaru, which will involve asking for God's help in the matter. The success of communicating with God will be judged by the 'states' that the yogi will have during meditations/invocations (feeling better, feeling light, feeling life). Not believing in the apocalypse due to disbelief would be succumbing to the mind's lies, the mind's so-called stupidity.

MISA's concept of the Apocalypse is, like much of its doctrine, orally transmitted and made up of various elements taken from vastly different contexts. December 2012 is seen as a time when

the world will move into a new era – the Hindu Satya Yuga –, a spiritual age in which the Earth will enter the photon belt, which will kill all those who are not spiritually prepared for the event. Benevolent aliens are offering their help to mankind and must be told that their help is accepted through meditations in which an affirmative answer is transmitted to them. There will be a number of natural disasters, which will mostly happen anywhere but in Romania, but all this can be averted through the prayers and invocations of MISA yogis – the Apocalypse can be delayed and drawn out for the good of all mankind with just a gram of practice and the grace of God. At the same time, the freemasons, a group of people who wish to enslave humanity, are also aware of these imminent disasters and are building underground structures to defend themselves – but some of these underground structures were destroyed due to God’s will, which was prompted by the meditations and invocations of MISA yogis.

Even if when summarized this entire theory looks more than unlikely, the yogi comes in contact with it gradually and will be likely to believe at least part of it, if not all of it. However, the apocalypse as a whole is a somewhat secondary and optional belief in the MISA system – the topics which are universally accepted and which form the MISA doctrine are usually related to sexuality, conspiracies or the personal effort made to evolve spiritually. Even so, the half-believed in apocalypse still has an influence on the mentality of yogis, who will pray and meditate against it and mention it often enough in conversation.

The fact that they discuss and consider it even if they are not entirely convinced by it is due to the fact that the apocalypse is a ‘strong’ idea. We live in a culture where we are very familiar with end of the world scenarios due to films and other media, as well as due to a Christian tradition that speaks of the end of the world. More than that, the local apocalypse of a sect will connect to three ideas that have strong emotional attachments: 1. the personal fear of death, generalized to the picture of everybody dying; 2. a judgment of all those who die (either in the sense of somebody judging, or of only the worthy ones surviving/going to heaven); 3. the hero aspect of the cult follower, who battles the forces of evil in an ultimate setting.

As far as the first aspect, that of death, is concerned, the individual shifts the uncertainty of their own future existence (we all know we’re going to die, but we don’t know when or how or what will happen afterwards) into the certainty of an outside event that will affect everybody. This has the paradoxical potential of making personal death seem more manageable – on the one hand, major events can seem escapable; on the other hand, the person will be surrounded by many others and at least will not face non-existence alone. Still, the death-aspect isn’t the one that MISA focuses on.

The second aspect is that of judgment – whether the apocalypse is the Christian one in which good men go to heaven, or the photon belt one in which only spiritual people survive, there will be some sort of measuring by which the individual is weighted and his or her value is established. The reward at the end would justify present problems and give a meaning to all suffering or discomforts that may arise on the way. For example, the image of MISA in Romania is that of a sex-obsessed, pee-drinking group of pseudo-yogis worshiping the guru (which is not that far from the truth) and adepts have to live with the unpleasant labeling. Some yogis have experienced health problems or mental problems, but they are considered tests which will make them all the better and stronger at the end. Sometimes adepts are asked to do things like

working for free or near-prostitution (pole dancing and erotic videochat for women), or they are urged sternly to go through difficult practices on a daily basis. However, to members these can appear not as degradations or abuse, but as stepping stones to achieve a spiritual level that will eventually have divine validation when the yogi survives the apocalypse or defends himself from freemasonry-related disasters or becomes enlightened. The deeper the yogi goes in these practices, the more likely he is to keep believing in the system, in the apocalypse, in the guru in order to give a meaning to difficulties, ascetic practices and suffering. The desire to have all of these things be true grows as time goes by in order to maintain the person's inner equilibrium and to validate their lifestyle.

The third aspect is the heroic aspect: MISA yogis are always meditating, praying and invoking forces to help the planet or mankind. They can see themselves as noble heroes that save the world even if the world doesn't know it. More than that, they see themselves as battling their own lower aspects and evolving in the face of demonic influence, the apocalypse, the difficulty of living in what they think is a fallen, materialistic age. Not only are they validated, as we have seen above, but they can see themselves as people who are to some measure pure and good.

The apocalypse now established, there are two further issues to be taken into consideration: how to react to it and what happens if the apocalypse does or does not occur. Due to the fact that MISA believes that any destiny can be changed if one knows how to act, MISA yogis attempt to avert the death aspect through a ritual technique described by Gregorian Bivolaru ("the supreme and efficient method") as part of a long program stretching over years: the "Planetary Program of Urgent Action: No to the Apocalypse!!!" (also published as a brochure) Persuasion is used to convince students to do the technique at home or at work.

The technique contains invocations of angels, the Holy Ghost and a prayer-like invocation directed towards God which asks him to forgive the sins of humanity. Sample invocation: **"I invoke, here and now, with a full, profound and strong faith, the mysterious manifestation of God's grace in my being and I strongly aspire to feel ever more clearly and intensely its accumulation in my inner universe. I am profoundly and fully convinced that this is happening due to the miraculous help that the heavenly father - God - is offering to me."** (Bivolaru 95)

On MISA's official website, there is an article called "10 reasons to perform the Supreme and Efficient Method", signed by Maxim Hongell that enumerates ten reasons for involving oneself in the program:

1. The love for our planet and for humanity.
2. The privilege and responsibility granted by the fact that one knows about the technique and the apocalypse.
3. One's faith in God – if the disciples believe in God, then they should believe he can save the world as well, if asked to do it.
4. Assuring the continuity of life.
5. A good impact on the general state of the planet and of humanity – since disciples are praying for the forgiveness of sins.
6. Elevating the vibration level of the planet and of humanity.
7. The excellence of the Supreme and Efficient Method – it is so good that it should be practiced at least twice a day and should have priority in one's spiritual practice.

8. Doing what the spiritual master says – and thus evolving spiritually
9. The efficiency of group action
10. Personal spiritual evolution due to helping out the rest of the world.

We can see here that the death–aspect is mentioned, but only through negatives: the technique will abate death. The heroic aspect is underlined: yogis will be able to save the world. Also, they will become better people by doing so. An interesting addition is the fact that by doing the technique one follows the master, thus evolving more rapidly.

One can ask why yogis would willingly go through a time–consuming technique even if they're not certain that the end for which it is employed is actually real. This question is actually connected to why yogis – and sect members in general – would follow techniques and orders and allow somebody to dictate their lives. A scholar of emotions, William Reddy, suggests that they do so in order to avoid emotional conflicts: strict regulations sacrifice freedom, but allow the individual to become more stable and less vulnerable when they are confronted with problematic issues (125, 126). In this case, MISA yogis can feel that they are less vulnerable in the face of death and social failure – if they fail in the 'normal' world, they can always make up for it by following a few easy steps to become heroes in the MISA world.

It is emotions, and not beliefs, that make them go through the motions of averting the apocalypse, or meditate with the guru, or work for free for MISA, or even, in the case of women, prostitute themselves because Gregorian Bivolaru asks them to do it. As Nico Fridja put it, “What is wrong with death, other than it is disliked?”(qtd. in Reddy 21). What is wrong with any course of action, in fact, other than we like or dislike the outcome? Even if we proceed in a rational manner, weighing options and collecting data, then acting upon the information we have, what we are trying to achieve is determined emotionally.

Conversely, our emotions can make us prioritize the information we receive - we can take or leave data, believe it or disbelieve it, at least to a point, depending on our emotions connected to that data and to data that would contradict it (Yudkowsky). Even worse, we may have a tendency to look at a conclusion and then find evidence to support it, therefore rationalizing our favored data. So, even if MISA yogis can see that we are in October 2012 and people are not yet dying the way they were supposed to according to doctrine, they can rationalize the situation. They can conclude that the reason the apocalypse does not seem to happen is that they averted it, like they made an asteroid change course and a devastating earthquake disappear. They can also look for signs of the apocalypse and interpret anything unpleasant they discover in that key: if there are unidentified lights in the sky, they must be alien ships. If there is a new epidemic (like swine flu), it is a sign of impending doom and the one of the Biblical signs of the end of the world. They have taken steps concerning the end of the world: now whether anything happens or not, it can confirm their belief - if they want it to. The question that arises is whether they are sufficiently attached to the apocalypse to desire that to be the outcome of their reasoning.

The apocalypse will change the individual's world view - it depends on them if they are willing or able to change it back. Whether the MISA yogi believes wholeheartedly in the apocalypse or not, the idea of impending doom modifies their perception to the point where disasters and sudden deaths would not be unexpected. They come to see MISA techniques as being very powerful and

they believe that they can do anything with them, but "they do not work enough". This means that in case anybody becomes physically or mentally ill, the situation is blamed on their not using the techniques enough or properly.

For example, two MISA yogis, Cristina Gaina and Diana Dobrin, who were famous enough and who had starred in MISA porn films that were supposed to 'sexually educate' the world, died of breast cancer. Their getting ill was blamed on emotional issues (Cristina Gaina was known to be somewhat harsh, while Diana Dobrin had had relationship issues with one of the MISA VIPs) and they sought medical advice from Gregorian Bivolaru, who warned them against going to normal doctors and getting the common treatment. When they died, it was believed to be because they did not manage to resolve their emotional and spiritual issues – as I have mentioned about, 'states' are the measure by which the evolution of a MISA yogi is judged and it is supposed that a perfect yogi is safe from all physical harm. Also, two other yogis killed themselves – Attila Nagy and Mihaela Diaconescu. Their deaths were mostly glossed over and blamed on 'demonic influences'. Also, there are numerous other yogis who have many physical or psychological problems, but their problems are seen as arising from their spiritual imperfections. There are few questions asked about their cases because they are considered 'atypical' of yogis.

There are many 'hooks' that can play on the fears and desires of sect members and make them wish to believe in what they are told. The solution, in my opinion, would not be to prove that each hook is false: after all, there will always be some hook that can catch the individual, whether it is the religious one, or the materialistic one (the basis of gambling games), or any other one. The solution would be to go to the heart of the matter: the apocalypse, like the sect, is mostly an emotional phenomenon – we must solve that. It is a battle of what we want to believe against what we should believe in. If we want to believe something, then we will rationalize in order to prove to ourselves that the situation is as we picture it to be. Therefore, an approach to resolve this issue would be to attempt to convince people to seek to believe what is true, not to seek proof that what they believe is true. The solution is not an attack against the apocalypse – it is a local phenomenon, an emotional phenomenon and it can be fought against again and again without getting very far, but an attempt to convince individuals to test and retest what they believe in before they commit to it. A healthy dose of looking at one's emotional triggers can help 'vaccinate' against apocalypses, sects - and all other unhealthy hooks that catch emotional attachments.

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