

Forcing Change



CULTURE SHIFT

By Carl Teichrib

Western society is undergoing a spiritual-social transformation.

In this edition of *Forcing Change*, Pamela Frost of TruthXChange expounds on the role of Yoga and Hinduism - and examines its growing acceptance within the Christian community. It is an important essay that powerfully and critically unwraps the Hinduisation of both the public square and church settings.

The second article, penned by myself, takes you to a trance festival I attended in early July. During my time at this gathering, I conducted a survey, interacted with participants, and observed the culture first-hand. My findings are presented in this issue. **FC**



Index:

We Are All
Connected, P. 2.

The "Gospel"
According to Yoga, P.2.



Carl Teichrib, Editor.

“We Are All Connected”

A Survey in Transformational Culture

By Carl Teichrib (www.forcingchange.org)

As the days counted down to the 6th annual Dimensional Rift Music and Arts Festival, it looked to be a full event. Online tickets had sold out, and many last-minute sales were expected at the gate; a solid surge was anticipated for Saturday evening. There was talk that up to 600 people could be attending over the three days of music, art, and community.

But the crowds never showed.

After arriving early Friday evening and setting up my tent, I walked around the grounds in order to get a feel for the place. The location, not far from the village of St. Laurent, Manitoba, was a gravel quarry converted into a large and un-serviced camping area, heavily forested, with a 15-acre swimming lake and a nicely groomed private beach area.

Two electronic sound stages were set-up, each separated by some distance, and both were pumping out trance-dance music. The main stage, situated on the beach's upper edge, was still being worked on when I arrived; lighting and lasers were being installed, and there was a general busyness as staff attended to final details. A few dozen festival-goers were milling around, but most were back in the bush and trees, setting up tents and camper trailers.

Continued on page 12.

The “Gospel” According to Yoga

By Pamela Frost (truthXchange.com)

NOTE: This article was originally published in the Summer 2015 issue of *Jubilee*, an official publication of the Ezra Institute for Contemporary Christianity. It is an adaptation of a talk originally presented by Pamela Frost at a truthXchange event in 2014. Reprinted by permission. Pamela Frost is a researcher with TruthXChange.

We constantly hear the phrase “spiritual but not religious” intoned as a cultural mantra, implying a vague spiritual experience that claims more authenticity than organized religion, particularly Christianity. People like to *feel* spiritual but they don't like the idea of their accountability to God and their need for a Saviour outside themselves. They'd rather imagine the divine as a universal presence they can control and manipulate for their own desires by turning *within*. Yoga was designed to facilitate this very experience, following the principles of the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta, a form of Oneism,* which is rapidly influencing the Western mind.

*The terms Oneism and Twoism were coined by Dr. Peter Jones to describe the two worldviews contrasted in Rom. 1:25. We will either worship the God who is distinct from us (Twoism) or we will divinize nature and worship the creation (Oneism).

Continued on page 3.

The Gospel According to Yoga (continued)

We live in an era when the propositional truths of Christianity are increasingly dismissed as oppressive and outdated. Belief in the Creator God who is distinct from His creation, who in the person of Jesus Christ made blood atonement so lost

sinners could be reconciled to the Father – belief in this truly Good News is increasingly rejected as not only irrelevant, but intolerably divisive. In its place, many embrace the alternative view of the divine as a universal spirit or energy within everything. Thus, many are turning to spiritual techniques to “get in touch with their inner divinity,” in what essentially amounts to a religion of the Divine Self.

Yoga is one of these techniques.

But while yoga has been historically recognized as a Hindu religious discipline for self-realization (the Hindu version of the “gospel”), skillful marketing has rebranded it as a popular fitness program with the result that yoga has become ubiquitous in the West for the fitness of body, mind and spirit. A growing number of Christians are also turning to yoga for exercise, stress reduction and even as a means to draw closer to God, with “Christian” yoga programs gaining popularity.

One of the most popular “Christian” yoga programs is Holy Yoga; its founder Brooke Boon reasons, “We know that yoga is a spiritual discipline much like fasting, meditation and prayer that cannot be owned by one specific religion.”¹ Her justification for Christianizing yoga blurs the distinction between the Christian’s unique privilege to draw near to God by the blood of Jesus and the “spiritual but not religious” impulse to tap into a



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universal spirituality accessible to all religions. This line of reasoning is more compatible with interfaith mysticism than biblical Christianity.

As the West progressively rejects its historic biblical foundation, the wider culture is steadily exchanging the biblical distinction between Creator and creation for the divine cosmos. This is particularly expressed in the West's embrace of the Hindu religious philosophy of Vedanta (all is divine) and the practice of yoga (the art of experiencing universal divinity).

In fact, interfaith minister Philip Goldberg, author of *American Veda*, asserts that the religious philosophy of Vedanta has effectually become the new default spirituality of the West and he credits the practice of yoga as America's bridge to Vedanta. Says Goldberg, "...the yoga masters who came here, regardless of their orientations and specialties, created a foundation for the wider dissemination of Vedic teachings as a whole. *Students may come for a workout, but their minds stretch and bend too.*"²

In other words, while yoga is presented as a "spiritual but not religious" fitness program, it really functions as a slow conditioning process softening Western sensibilities toward the Hindu religious philosophy of Vedanta,³ which exchanges the distinction between the Creator and creation for the Hindu version of "god" as an ocean of impersonal, universal divinity – a kind of force, energy or essence – called Brahman.

Some History

According to the apostle Paul, when men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, refusing to worship the Creator outside them, the only option left is some form of nature religion (Rom. 1:18, 25). When nature is divinized, "god" becomes an impersonal energy that exists within everything, and the only way to interact with the divine is through mysticism and magic. This is evident in the four *Vedas*, the oldest of Hinduism's foundational sacred texts, which form the basis for yoga.

Veda means "knowledge," but not in the sense of education. Vedic knowledge is esoteric – that which is received directly from the spirit world. Dating somewhere between 1500 and 1000 BC, the Vedas record a complex mythology of personified nature deities and the religious rituals required to invoke, propitiate and manipulate them. These involve chanting mantras as prayers (such as "om," the divine vibration of Brahman), ritual animal sacrifice, magical prayers and incantations, and spells, charms and magic.⁴

The word "yoga" is derived from the root word *yuj*, first recorded in the *rigveda*, the oldest of the four Vedas, where it refers to the yoking of horses to the chariots of the Vedic gods. But it also conveys the metaphysical idea of yoking inner consciousness with the universal principle in order to transform humanity into divinity. A commentary on the *Katha Upanishad*,⁵ where the term "yoga" is first recorded, explains:

"...yoga literally means to join or to unite the lower self with the higher self, the object with the subject, the worshipper with God [Brahman]."⁶

Yoga represents a version of salvation that defines the "gospel" not as redemption from sin, but as realization that a hidden, inner self is "god." This gives the sense of

immortality, which is believed to secure freedom from the wheel of reincarnation as one transcends consciousness of material existence.

The Vedic sage Patanjali systematized classical yoga around AD 150 in his *Yoga Sutras* as an eight-limbed (*ashtanga*) path to mystical absorption in divinity:

1. *Yama*: moral code of non-violence, non-lying, non-stealing, sexual continence, non-attachment
2. *Niyama*: ascetic disciplines like fasting to near starvation or raising an arm for several months, Vedic study, devotion to the divine
3. *Asanas*: postures designed to still the body and mind in preparation for meditation
4. *Pranayama*: channeling the breath as divine energy to transcend distinctions
5. *Pratyahara*: meditation to suppress the senses because the body and mind are deemed impediments to higher consciousness
6. *Dharana*: gazing at a fixed point between the eyes or an image of a deity in order to “kill” the thinking mind
7. *Dhyana*: deep meditative trance state
8. *Samadhi*: absorption in universal consciousness – the mystical “gospel” of yoga

Hatha yoga emerged around AD 900 when classical yoga was synthesized with Tantrism, a religious philosophy that “joins the opposites of good and evil in order to transcend them”⁷ through the exercise of godlike autonomy. Sexual ritual is central to Tantrism and in hatha yoga it represents the union of the goddess Shakti (female principle of divine energy) and her male consort Shiva (destroyer of distinctions), joining feminine and masculine energies into androgynous divinity within the yogi’s body.

Renowned yoga scholar Georg Feuerstein elucidates:

“The sexual symbolism [of Shakti and Shiva] conceals a sweeping cosmic reality: the eternal play between feminine power and masculine consciousness, which are always united on the transcendental level but are experienced as separate on the empirical level.”⁸

Twentieth-century religion scholar Mircea Eliade recognized the same principle, explaining that during the practice of yoga, “...the union of the divine pair [Shakti and Shiva] within his own body transforms the yogin⁹ into a kind of ‘androgynous.’”¹⁰

How It Works

Hatha yoga is designed to awaken the “Subtle Body,” a transcendent Self that arises from within to take over the physical body and thinking mind through the union of Shakti and Shiva. It is not empowered by the Holy Spirit but by fallen angels masquerading as the divine energy of Hindu deities (1 Cor. 10:19-20).

According to hatha yoga theory, the physical body and thinking mind obscure an inner non-corporeal Subtle Body conceptualized as a matrix of psychic energy channels (na-

dis), which intersect the spine to form energy centers called chakras. It is theorized that the serpent goddess Shakti/Kundalini is coiled dormant at the base of the spine until activated by yoga's postures, breathing and meditation techniques. As the serpent ascends, she opens the chakras as lotuses of enlightenment, progressively silencing the mind into passivity as subject/object distinctions begin to disappear. The process culminates with the union of Shakti/Kundalini and Shiva in the crown chakra above the head. At this point, the Subtle Body is realized as the Divine Self, indicating the yogi is under the total control of Shakti/Shiva consciousness in the mystical state of androgynous bliss called *samadhi*.

Following yoga's Vedic philosophy, the postures are designed to incarnate the gods and goddesses, embody the power of sacred animals and experience unity with the divine cosmos. Mircea Eliade elucidates, "The yogin stands both for a Cosmos and a pantheon; he incarnates in his own body both Shiva and Shakti."¹¹

One popular posture illustrates the point. In performing the "Lord of Dance" posture the yogi assumes the form of the Hindu deity Shiva as he dances destruction on the "ignorance" of subject/object distinctions, joining the opposites into enlightened consciousness of universal divinity. The posture represents a radical shift in worldview from worship of the Creator to worship of creation.

Since yoga was developed as the Hindu "gospel" of the Divine Self, we need to understand how its practice has come to have such great influence in the West.

In order to do that, we need to understand Krishnamacharya, the man credited as the father of modern postural yoga. During the 1930s and 1940s, under the patronage of the raja of Mysore, Krishnamacharya incorporated elements of British gymnastics and Indian wrestling into his yoga practice.¹² Many claim this period marks the advent of yoga as a non-religious program for stretching and strengthening intended solely for therapeutic health benefits, which is a major argument for the free practice of yoga for anyone, regardless of their religious beliefs.

But Krishnamacharya was an accomplished Vedic scholar and deeply devout Hindu of the priestly Brahmin caste who worshipped the idol of Hayagriva, the horse-headed avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu.¹³ When he borrowed from other sources, he adapted them into the style of yoga¹⁴ for the express purpose of expanding the religious techniques for union with the universal spirit. In fact, his yoga classes were really religion classes, each opening with prayers to Hindu deities before commencing the religious training of his students. Topics covered Patanjali's eight-limbed path to *samadhi* (absorption in divinity to escape reincarnation), Vedic rituals, daily *puja* (ritual worship), the proper intonation and chanting of Vedic mantras, awakening of the serpent Kundalini and opening the chakras for enlightenment of the universal. When teaching the postures (*asanas*) to his students, Krishnamacharya insisted they first offer prayers for the blessing of Adishesha, the thousand-headed serpent deity of Hindu mythology, to ensure their success.¹⁵

Every aspect of his yoga instruction was directed by his Hindu faith.

Among Krishnamacharya's most well-known and influential devotees were disciples such as B.K.S. Iyengar (right) and K. Pattabhi Jois, both devout Hindus of the priestly Brahmin caste.

Krishnamacharya's Legacy

Iyengar and Jois carried Krishnamacharya's yoga legacy to the West, giving special weight to the postures and breathing techniques for purported health benefits such as flexibility and stress reduction. While the West was not ready to embrace Hinduism, *per se*, the postures appealed to American pragmatism, opening a door of influence for yoga's religious philosophy without calling much attention to itself. Thus yoga became an effective means to spread the Hindu Vedanta in the West.



B.K.S. Iyengar is credited as the guru most influential in popularizing hatha yoga in the West through the 1966 publication of his book *Light on Yoga*. Forty-nine years later, it is Amazon's number one best-selling book on yoga. Drawing from the classic Hindu text, the *Bhagavad Gita*, Iyengar explains that the end of yoga is "a soul cleansed of sin"¹⁶ and thus liberated from reincarnation. But it takes many life times to reach such perfection and the practice of yoga is essential to the process. The book is thus replete with photos of Iyengar demonstrating over 200 postures emulating elements of nature, sacred animals, mythic heroes and "gods of the Hindu pantheon."¹⁷ Among them is the "Lord of Dance" posture in which Shiva dances cosmic destruction on the Creator/creation distinction until all is perceived as one in the state of *samadhi*, described by Iyengar as "A state in which the aspirant is one with... the Supreme Spirit pervading the universe."¹⁸

K. Pattabhi Jois is known for his brand of Ashtanga Yoga, which uses energetic flow movements between postures in what some consider an aerobic form of yoga rather than a religious discipline. Yet Jois was a religious Brahmin who followed Patanjali's classic path to realization of the "Universal Self,"¹⁹ and ascribed to some of the postures the power to overcome sin,²⁰ a clear counterfeit of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Jois' religious devotion centered on the Hindu deity Shiva and his book *Yoga Mala* dedicates his practice of yoga to Shiva with this traditional prayer, "To Shiva, the lord of the yogis...I bow again and again."²¹ The book also explains the importance of worshipping the sun god Surya through the postures and prostrations of the Surya Namaskara (Sun Salutation) sequences in order to gain the blessing of good health.²² Jois'

yoga classes begin with traditional prayers chanted in Sanskrit, said to be the language of the Hindu gods and goddesses.

Jois was also a devotee of Ganesha, the Elephant-headed son of Shiva. In fact, a statue of Ganesha has a place of honor in each of the numerous yoga shalas (studios) Jois established in Europe and America. During the grand opening of the Jois Yoga Shala in Encinitas, California, a Hindu priest performed a complete *puja* (worship) ceremony to Ganesha. During the process, prestigious guests, such as the heads of the Jois foundation (renamed the Sonima Foundation), participated in the worship of multiple Hindu deities.²³

Despite the blatantly religious nature of Ashtanga Yoga, the Sonima Foundation has a goal of introducing the practice into 100 American public school districts as a non-religious fitness program. So far, they have succeeded in getting their yoga program into fifty-five schools by claiming to have removed all the religious elements, reducing the program to simply the physical exercise of the postures. But according to Jois, the postures alone have the power to effect a deeply religious transaction by awakening an energy that changes you from within, even touching the soul “until the mind assumes the form of Brahma.”²⁴ This produces the deceptive experience of attaining immortality through yoga, which Hindus believe results in freedom from reincarnation.

Yoga really represents a path of works-righteousness, a pagan substitute for the gospel of Jesus’ blood atonement for sinners.

Christian Yoga?

Despite yoga’s deeply pagan religious nature, “Christian” yoga programs are becoming increasingly popular in many churches. “Holy Yoga” is probably the most widely practiced brand of “Christian” yoga, boasting a training program turning out hundreds of certified Holy Yoga instructors annually. Holy Yoga posts an evangelical statement of faith on its website and incorporates Bible verses into its practice. But is this sufficient to remove the underlying Hindu religious nature of yoga? Or does this represent a form of syncretism in which biblical meaning is subtly reinterpreted along more Hindu-leaning lines?

Holy Yoga’s founder Brooke Boon insists that her practice of yoga is entirely Christ-centred and biblical. In fact, she considers Holy Yoga to be a ministry platform to preach the gospel. But her two books on yoga, written after her conversion to Christ, reveal significant Vedic influence. For example, her first book *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, which she co-authored, tries to dispel yoga’s association with Hinduism while acknowledging that yoga is “...recognized by Hindu orthodoxy as a valid representation of Vedic truth.”²⁵ Let’s not forget that the Vedas expound a full-orbed pagan religion that



forms the basis for Hinduism. In reality, yoga is one of the six orthodox Vedic schools of Hinduism and it cannot be separated from Hinduism.

Boon's book further acknowledges that "...three philosophical traditions now form an essential core within contemporary yoga: Classical yoga, Advaita Vedanta, and Tantra."²⁶

Classical yoga is Patanjali's path to absorption in the universal spirit; Advaita Vedanta teaches that all is one and all is divine; Tantra joins the opposites of good and evil in order to attain divinity. *Hatha Yoga Illustrated* describes Tantra as the "...radical acceptance of the body and all of life as divinity incarnate."²⁷

In other words, yoga is designed to transform the yogi into a divine incarnation of Brahman. The book also traces yoga's modern lineage and popularity in the West from Krishnamacharya, Jois and Iyengar,²⁸ all devout Hindus seeking yoga's goal of absorption in divinity.

Problems arise when we try to build Christian practice on a pagan foundation. This is evidenced in Boon's second book *Holy Yoga*, which has a more Christian flavor but still follows Patanjali's path to *samadhi*.²⁹ The book also refers readers to *Hatha Yoga Illustrated* as a resource "...if you'd like to discover more about yoga...or about Christian meditation."³⁰

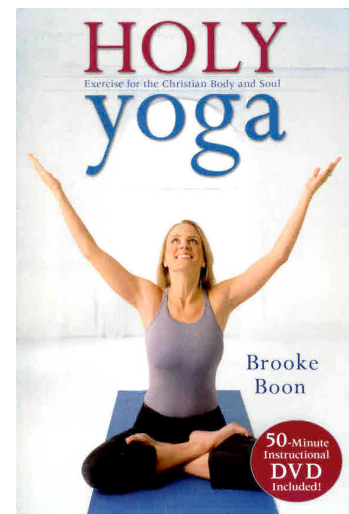
It needs to be clarified that the biblical idea of meditation is based on the meaning of Scripture studied in context. But the section on meditation Boon refers readers to suggests Hindu techniques such as chanting the mantra "OM,"³¹ which is the creational vibration of Brahman, and "...visualiz[ing] your chosen deity – a god or goddess."³²

Holy Yoga entangles Hindu techniques and religious philosophy with Christian terminology yet Boon asserts it is through the practice of Holy Yoga that "...we become more authentic people, able to hear God and experience Him in *previously impossible ways*."³³ This implies that Christ's work is incomplete, that the Holy Spirit and Scripture are insufficient, and that real depth of Christian knowledge is dependent upon yoga.

While yoga actually adds nothing to true Christian knowledge and experience, it does have the power to confuse and deceive by shifting worldviews. In a devotional video on the Holy Yoga website, Boon explains that she includes a section on the "energy portion, the chakra portion"³⁴ in her training of Holy Yoga instructors.

In yoga, the energy and chakras refer to the occult Subtle Body energized by the serpent goddess Kundalini, as already mentioned. Yet Boon bases her teaching of the "energy and chakra portion" on John 1:1-5, which she misinterprets to mean that Jesus, as the word, is the creational vibration of God, the "...frequency of how God emulates Himself."³⁵

But Jesus is a distinct person, God incarnate, not the energy of creational vibration. It's yoga that is based on the creation myth in which the divine vibration of Brahman



emanates the divine essence into creation. The pagan cosmology of yoga cannot be synthesized with the Creator who is distinct from creation.

Philip Goldberg's observation is right, that "*Students may come for a workout, but their minds stretch and bend too.*" There is nothing spiritually neutral in yoga. While the body is bending, the mind is reshaping its worldview.

Conclusion

What Christians need to understand is that yoga's claim to be a non-religious fitness program for body, mind, and spirit is a complete misrepresentation. Yoga was designed to join the opposites by transcending the distinction between Creator and creation until the divine is experienced as the universal spirit, energy, or vibration of nature. When the primary distinction between Creator and creation is destroyed all others perceptually disintegrate of necessity. Gone are the biblical distinctions between man and nature, male and female, and good and evil. From ancient to modern times, the gurus have called this yogic process the "science of consciousness." Now modern brain science is bowing to the gurus.

The new frontier of brain science believes that the true essence of being is pure consciousness beyond distinctions, just as the gurus have always claimed. Meditative techniques such as those practiced in yoga and Buddhist mindfulness meditation are being detached from their religious roots and rebranded as therapeutic models for brain health.

Sam Harris, one of the elite New Atheists, has recently come out in a "spiritual but not religious" kind of way as a practitioner of mindfulness meditation, which is also a component of yoga. A Stanford-trained neuroscientist, Harris views mindfulness as a means to evolve consciousness on a purely scientific level. He thus interprets spirituality as the "enlightening sense of connectedness" that transcends individuality as the mind evolves to perceive interconnected consciousness beyond thought.³⁶ This idea of universal consciousness is being aggressively pursued as the cutting edge in brain science.

This camouflaging language is increasingly applied to both yoga and Buddhist mindfulness meditation as a means to slip them into schools and even churches without opposition. This is because they have been successfully rebranded as scientifically proven therapeutic techniques. As such they are Trojan horses conditioning the Western mind steadily towards the Eastern mystical worldview in which all biblical distinctions are vigorously denied. They are effective because they are not spiritually neutral but tap into forbidden occult powers set on influencing our minds.

Though yoga is packaged as a non-religious program for physical fitness and stress reduction, nothing has actually changed in yoga. It is still Hinduism's "gospel" of the Divine Self. And we have to remember that it was the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempted Eve with just such false "enlightenment."

As believers committed to the biblical gospel, we need to understand the pagan core beneath the deceptive packaging. And we need to take yoga's power to condition the mind away from biblical distinctions, and thus the real gospel of Jesus Christ, seriously. "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good," (Rom. 12:9). **FC**

Endnotes:

- ¹ <https://holyyoga.net/about/what-we-believe>.
- ² Philip Goldberg, *American Veda*, (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 209, [emphasis added].
- ³ The foundational religious texts of Hinduism are the Vedas. The Vedanta, meaning “end of the Vedas,” represents the culmination of Vedic religious thought and is recorded in the Upanishads.
- ⁴ The details of these pagan practices are recorded in the four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda.
- ⁵ The Upanishads are collectively called the Vedanta, “end of the Vedas.”
- ⁶ <http://www.yoga-age.com/upanishads/katha.html>.
- ⁷ Peter Jones, *Paganism In Today's Culture*, 2015 National Conference “After Darkness, Light,” Ligonier Ministries, <https://truthxchange.com/media/2015/03/03/peter-jones-paganism-in-todays-culture/>.
- ⁸ Georg Feuerstein, *The Yoga Tradition*, (Chino Hills, AZ: Hohm Press, 1998, 2001, 2008), 403.
- ⁹ The term “yogin” is the traditional term for a male yogi. The female counterpart is traditionally called a “yogini.”
- ¹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., Phoenix Edition, 1979), 118.
- ¹¹ Eliade, *The Two and the One*, 119.
- ¹² N. E. Sjoman, *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace*, (New Dehli, India: Abhinav Publications, second edition, 1999), 53-60.
- ¹³ A.G. Mohan, *Krishnamacharya: His Life and Teachings*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2010), 105.
- ¹⁴ Sjoman, *The Yoga Tradition*, 61.
- ¹⁵ Mohan, *Krishnamacharya*, 146.
- ¹⁶ B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, (New York: Schoken Books, 1979 edition), 52.
- ¹⁷ Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 42.
- ¹⁸ Iyengar, *Light on Yoga*, 529.
- ¹⁹ Sri K. Pattabhi Jois, *Yoga Mala*, (New York: North Point Press, 1999), 4.
- ²⁰ Jois, *Yoga Mala*, 126.
- ²¹ Jois, *Yoga Mala*, 3.
- ²² Jois, *Yoga Mala*, 34.
- ²³ <http://vimeo.com/21459292>
- ²⁴ <http://vimeo.com/21459292>
- ²⁵ Brooke Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2006), 4.
- ²⁶ Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, 4-6.
- ²⁷ Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, 6.
- ²⁸ Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, xiv.
- ²⁹ Boon, *Holy Yoga*, (New York: Faith Words, 2007), 7.
- ³⁰ Boon, *Holy Yoga*, 209.
- ³¹ Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, 22, 23.
- ³² Boon, *Hatha Yoga Illustrated*, 23.
- ³³ Boon, *Holy Yoga*, 9, [emphasis added].
- ³⁴ Brooke Boon, “To Om or not to Om,” <https://holyyoga.net/media/videos/devotions>.
- ³⁵ Boon, “To Om or not to Om,” <https://holyyoga.net/media/videos/devotions>.
- ³⁶ <http://www.religionnews.com/2014/09/10/sam-harris-wants-atheists-everyone-else-get-spirituality/>.

“We Are All Connected” (continued)

As the Manitoba summer-sun receded over the far nor'-west horizon, and the northern glow of dusk slowly faded past midnight, the stages became focal points of activity. Electronic dance music (EDM) filled the air as laser beams caressed the lake, flirting with and filtering into the surrounding leaves and trees. Stage lights illuminated the gathering of dancers and partiers, some in costumes and rave outfits. Flow artists were spinning, cyclically weaving to the rhythm of the universe – the music forming a backdrop as hoops and poi sticks circled in the sound. Others stumbled in the dark, intoxicated; some sat in the edges of the light, quietly inducing a chemically altered state-of-mind. Still, the crowds never materialized.

As the night wore on, I moved from stage to stage, observing what was happening. At some point I returned to my tent, scribbled a few notes, put on earmuffs, and tried to catch a couple hours of sleep. With ear protection on, the mid-tones and artistic layering of EDM were cancelled, leaving the muffled bass to echo in my dreams.

The purpose of my attendance was simple; conduct a social survey in order to better assess transformational culture (see the August 2013 and March 2015 editions of *Forcing Change* for more information on transformational culture). I was particularly interested in religious positions and participant's definitions of “oneness.” Granted, Dimensional Rift (DR) was a very small event, yet the interaction was beneficial.

On Saturday, armed with clipboard and pen, I began conducting surveys.

Photo of dance area from the main stage. Picture taken by OMNO.

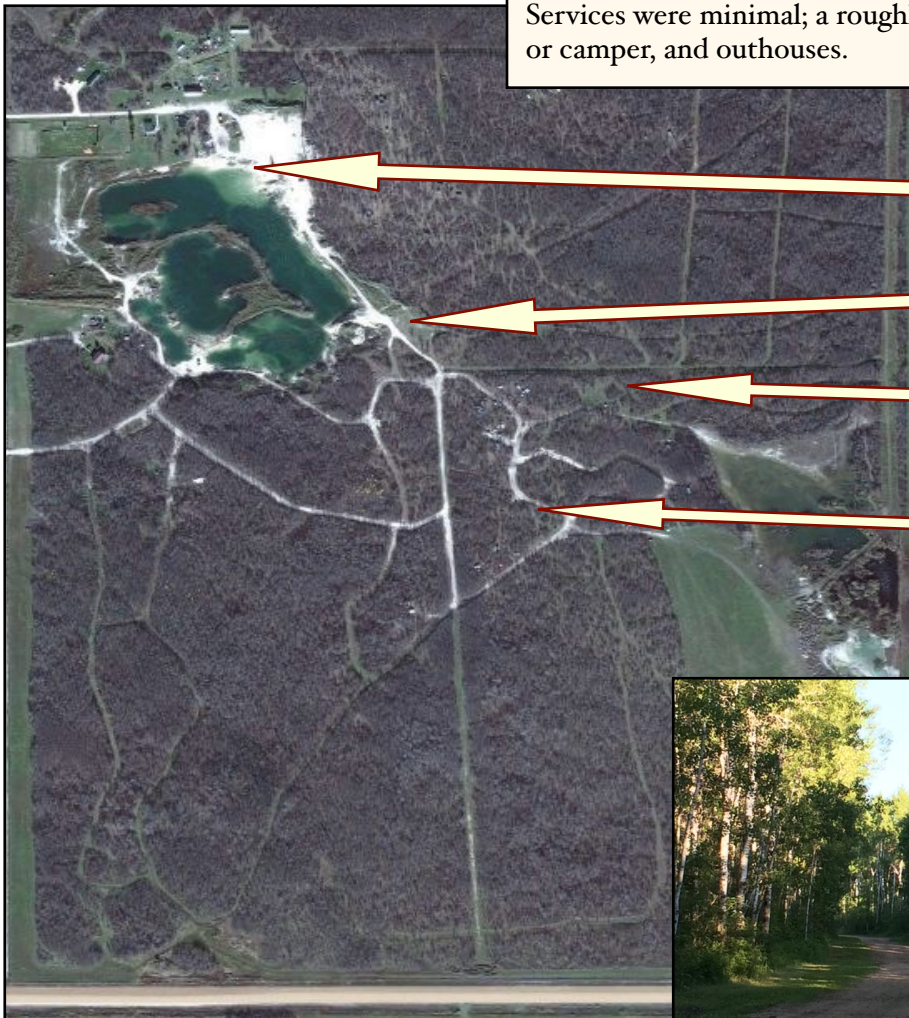


Survey Participation and Questions

The percentage of those surveyed was not as high as I would have liked, and the situation wasn't always conducive. Obviously, nighttime surveys were high impossible, yet that was when most of the festival activity took place. Realistically, the window of time to approach festival goers was from lunch until mid-afternoon on Saturday. Lunchtime: Because that's when people were moving again after a night of partying. And mid-afternoon: Because that's when a series of rainstorms effectively ruined the event.

Around 2:00 PM, Saturday, I was told that 250 people were in attendance, with more to arrive later in the day – 300 in total would be the upper number for the festival. But as my survey was conducted during the first half of Saturday afternoon, I used the 250 figure as my baseline.

Left: Arial view of the campground and festival location.
Below: One of the roads through the camping area.
Services were minimal; a roughly cleared spot for a tent or camper, and outhouses.



Main Stage area.

First-Aid Station &
Harm Reduction Tent

Second Stage area,

My camping spot.



By the time the first thunderstorm swept upon us, I had surveyed 16 people, or 6.4% of the population, and had conversed with others. However, I really needed a higher percentage, and was initially hoping to hit 15%. If the storms hadn't rolled through the site, the final tally would have been more acceptable. Nevertheless, the survey – as small as it was – had a two-fold effect.

1. It provided a basic data-point into understanding the transformational worldview.
2. It allowed myself to better grasp the culture, in particular, its scope and meaning.

The first section of my survey (Part A) was basic demographic data – age and gender, including a space for “gender other” – education level attained, and festival participation information; are you an attendee, artist, vendor, media, staff/volunteer or organizer? Part B charted a person's political identity by ideology. Past and present religious and philosophical identifiers made up Part C, providing the recipient with a list of 25 possible choices and a space for “other.” Part C also had four statements that could be responded to by selecting the following: “Disagree,” “Somewhat Disagree,” “Neutral,” “Somewhat Agree,” or “Agree.”

The four statements were:

1. Religion and spirituality is the same thing.
2. God is separate from nature and me.
3. Humanity is valued above nature.
4. Earth is a living organism.

Part D asked about Global Citizenship:

- “Do you see yourself as a world citizen?”
- “If yes, what does being a world citizen mean to you?”
- “What do you consider the gravest threat to humanity?”

Part E was about festival viewpoints and participation:

- “What sets this event apart from a concert?”
- “What is your purpose in attending?”
- “What other events like this have you attended?”

Finally, Part F asked one question: “What does oneness/we-are-one mean to you?” As the festival theme was “Together. We Are One,” this was a suitable way to conclude the survey.

Findings

Demographically, half of those who took the survey were 25-34 years old. An almost equal number were from 18-24, and 35-44. Gender identities were well balanced between male and female, with one extra female in the mix. Nobody chose gender “Other.” In terms of education, 10 participants indicated higher learning; six had some college and university, two had Bachelor degrees, and two held Masters.

In Part B – “Political Identifier” – participants could use a left/right ideological scale, with left representing “maximum government” and right being “minimum government.” A political party label was placed above the line as an aid to correlating identities, although it was noted that party names didn’t reflect the membership or affiliation of those taking the survey – it was simply a means to help clarify a person’s position. Two people declined to fill this section out; one person didn’t believe in politics, and the other was too stoned to know what to do.

Of those who filled out Part B, ten indicated left-of-center and far-left leanings, with one person adding he was “Anarchist/Marxist.” Three placed themselves on the Libertarian and “minimum government” line.

Part C was the most intense, and the results of the first section surprised me. Here, participants checked off their “past” religious/philosophical identity and their “present” position. Nearly half claimed “Christianity” as their prior belief system, and one person checked “Christian” as their current stand. Having this many claiming a past-Christian connection was unexpected, as Canadian society has been chiefly secular in outlook for decades.

Could it be that festival-goers chose Christianity in a generic sense? For some this may have been the case, but as the surveys were often filled out in a small group setting, I could listen-in as they talked amongst themselves. It was evident that for many, Christianity meant something at one time. Later, I discovered that a number of participants had a Mennonite heritage. Nevertheless, such a strong admittance of past Christianity caught me off guard – it was something I would have expected in parts of the United States more than Canada. Before I draw any conclusions from this, I really need to do more survey work at other festivals... but it was interesting!

What had these people turned to after rejecting the Christian faith?

The highest percentage claimed to be Spiritualist, followed by Buddhism and Wicca, Atheism, New Age and Esoteric, Agnostic, and Transhuman. Most who chose “Spiritualist,” I’m sure, took this to mean “Spiritual” – after all, that’s the popular generic position for those who don’t commit to a religious identity. A *Spiritualist*, however, is a person who communicates with the dead and with other spiritual entities through séances and medium techniques. In the future, I’ll be re-configuring this part of the survey to more accurately differentiate the two positions.

The other half not claiming a Christian background was strongly flavored by Atheism as a present stance. Others considered themselves Buddhist, Taoist, Agnostic, Indigenous, Animist, and Transhuman.

Often multiple religious/philosophical positions were acknowledged. For example, one person – rejecting her Christian past – now considered herself a “Buddhist-Atheist-Spiritualist-Wiccan.” Another individual described her journey away from Atheism as moving to Agnosticism, Paganism and Wicca, before finally embracing Buddhism. One young man said he believed “in everything,” so he wrote “Higher Power” on the bottom of the page to reflect his view. Of all the participants, only one person refrained from filling out this section.

The second half of Part C – the four statements – explore paradigms.

To the statement, “Religion and spirituality is the same thing,” over half “disagreed” or “somewhat disagreed.” Two remained neutral, two agreed, and one person didn’t commit to anything. This was an important starting point for two reasons: 1) it offered a fairly neutral entry into the next set of statements, 2) it pointed to our culture’s shift from accepted absolutes to experiential relativity.

The next line, “God is separate from nature and me,” reflects the question of ultimate reality. With the exception of a Taoist, all who identified as religious – including the sole Christian – either disagreed or somewhat disagreed with that statement. Two Atheists were in the same camp. In taking this position, they asserted the oneness of nature, humanity and God: that there is no fundamental differentiation. Five people, however, responded differently: Two Atheists and an Agnostic/Taoist chose “neutral,” two agreed (one Atheist and the other who wouldn’t identify), and one person didn’t respond at all.

Similar findings followed with the statement, “Humanity is valued above nature.” Ten disagreed or somewhat disagreed, two checked “neutral,” and one person didn’t respond. However, one individual refrained from checking any box, but took the time to stroke out the line and write, “Humanity is part of nature.” Only two agreed with the statement (one atheist and the other who didn’t identify), recognizing that humanity is ultimately valued above the natural world.

The last statement, “Earth is a living organism,” was met with resounding agreement. Only two people remained neutral – an Atheist, and, once again, the single person who wouldn’t religiously identify. All of the rest affirmed this idea.

Taken in aggregate, the surveyed participants of Dimensional Rift held to the paradigm of oneness – that nature is divine.

The first question in Part D on Global Citizenship, “Do you see yourself as a World Citizen,” elicited an almost equal split. A little over half agreed, and the rest were “unsure.” When asked what this means, the responses were varied. Here are a few:

- “We all live on one planet together and have a responsibility to care for it and each other.”
- “No separate governments and all are equal.”
- “[An] overview effect – looking at Earth from above.”
- “Eliminate the borders.”
- “We all have collective issues...”

One person who was “unsure” wrote: “Consciously contributing to the betterment of our planet and community.”

When asked what the “gravest threat to humanity” was, the answers typically followed these themes: humanity itself, capitalism and money, and power in the hands of others. One male participant wrote, “Nothing. Whatever will be, will be.” Another couched it in the paradigm of oneness: “Thinking we are separate.”

Part E was geared to understanding participant’s interaction with transformational culture. Question one – “what sets this event apart from a concert?” – was answered with “community,” “it brings people together,” and “collective attitudes and atmosphere.”

The second question – “what is your purpose in attending?” – was answered with words like “have a great time,” “music,” “to connect,” etc. This was expected; after all, the event was billed as a music and arts festival. People were coming to party.

The last question in Part E was very helpful for myself in understanding the broader scope of transformational festivals: “What other events like this have you attended?” Festivals that attendees had been to included Burning Man, Connect, Shambhala, Rainbow Gathering, Eclipse, among others. One female in the 25-34 age bracket wrote, “So many, I’m old.”

Interestingly, in discussing this culture, participants who had been to Burning Man, Connect, Shambhala and others, explained that it wasn’t the size of the event that mattered – nor whether the festival had workshops and sacred spaces – rather, what counted was the *intent of the event*. Was it seeking to elevate consciousness? Does it bend the arc of reality, allowing for higher expressions of being? Is there a feeling of intentional community and connection? Am I drawing closer to nature and the universe?

One couple that had been to transformational gatherings in Canada and the United States explained that Dimensional Rift was a micro-event, contributing at a “village level” to the greater evolutionary shift. An individual who had been to Burning Man affirmed this analysis. Therefore, even though DR didn’t have the crowd-energy and range of activities like Evolve Fest or Symbiosis or Burning Man, it was still was part of the broader movement.

The last section of the survey, Part F, asked; “What does oneness/we-are-one mean to you?” Answers included:

- “Being apart of your surroundings.”
- “We are all connected.”
- “We can all share one consciousness.”
- “An injustice to one is an injustice to all.”
- “We all share a common spirit.”
- “Global culture” and “no division.”
- We all come from the “same material and spiritual sea.”



Re-iterating the DR theme: “Together. We Are One.”

On the Ground

Most people I approached were cordial, but not all agreed to participate. Some simply said “no thanks” and walked away. However, at the First-Aid Station and “Harm Reduction Tent” – a place spread with Yoga mats – two groups eagerly took the survey.

Both groups provided valued feedback as they discussed their past-and-present religious positions. Furthermore, the “disagree-agree” statements in Part C made them think, and it opened discussions between them. Unfortunately, I couldn’t jump into the conversation, for to add my input would potentially skew the results. One younger man did ask my position on a certain matter, but I told him that as I was the one conducting the survey, I couldn’t participate. His friend – another man who evidently had some university experience – explained that he had done social survey work in the past, and acknowledged the fact that I couldn’t involve myself or else the findings would be invalid. It was a little awkward, as I wanted to join in these worldview discussions.

Another awkward moment came when, as three ladies were taking the survey, they decided to go topless. There already had been some public nudity earlier in the day, but this episode had a surreal effect.

Alcohol and drugs were evident, and I tried to shy away from asking people who were under the influence. At a campsite close to mine, the switch was being made from marijuana to psychedelics – but a couple who were interacting with the group were clear-eyed and quick to do the survey. These two, both professionals in the workforce, were a fountain of information on transformational culture as they compared and contrasted DR with other events.

By mid-afternoon the thunder was starting to roll, and I was just finishing a survey when the rain started to fall. Trying to keep my papers dry, I struck out for my tent and remained under cover for about twenty minutes. As soon as the rain let up, I was back outside looking for another person to survey, but it didn’t matter. More rumbling could be heard. In minutes, a deluge hit the campsite and I was driven back inside. After sitting for almost an hour in pounding rain and lashing winds, and with water coming through the tent and wetting my papers, it was apparent I had to leave.

Packing the tent and gear in the downpour, I loaded my soggy belongings into my truck – an early ‘90s Mazda – and, soaked to the skin, lurched through campsite and back to the main road. I’m glad I did. In places, the bush trail out was almost swamped to the floorboards. Along the way I lost my muffler, ripping it out as I plowed through a deep rut under the water. Others too were trying to leave.

Dimensional Rift was wrecked.

The storms continued for the rest of the afternoon and into the evening. In fact, it was so intense that it ruined the DR sound system on the main stage – even though it was roofed over. The damage was extensive enough that, a week later, DR announced it was financially finished. The cost of replacing everything was too great. However, as I’m writing this, a fund raising event is being planned, and there’s renewed talk of Dimensional Rift 2016.

Conclusion

My purpose in attending, as stated earlier, was to interact with transformational culture in order to better understand the movement; its appeal, its paradigm, and its part in the social-spiritual shift now underway. To that end it was a success, even though the survey numbers were too low for my liking.

In the future it's my hope to attend other events in Canada and the United States. By conducting social surveys in the spectrum of evolutionary culture, a fuller picture will emerge of this spiritual-social phenomenon. Such data would be valuable in ascertaining the reach into Christian culture (it's already happening), the religious composition of those attending and the spiritual platform being accepted, along with the worldview being embraced in our post-Christian, Western world.

In writing this report, I trust it has opened your eyes to the transformation we now face. But let's not put this aside. For the paradigm shift evident in these festivals, I believe, are simply mirroring the spiritual change already happening in our communities and families. **FC**

Below is a map project I started one year ago - plotting transformational events in Canada and the United States. Almost 250 locations are pinned with descriptions. Attendance size ranges from a few hundred to over one hundred thousand. More festivals will be added to this map soon, and another 50-or-so events have to be vetted to see if they qualify for inclusion. When this project is complete, it will be a powerful tool in helping to understand the movement.

