

A YOGIC PATH TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

A dissertation presented to
The Faculty of Saybrook University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Psychology

by

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Oakland, California
December 2018

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A YOGIC PATH TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

This Dissertation by Pamela L. McRae has been
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Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Psychology

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Abstract

A YOGIC PATH TO PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

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This study explored how and to what extent yogic philosophy and the practice of Kundalini Yoga could be a catalyst for personal transformation without a traumatic event or an epiphany being the motivating factor. The researcher participated in a 6-month Kundalini yoga teacher training program, along with 12 other students. The background of the study delineates the researcher's personal motivation for embarking upon this journey. The literature review examines the history and nature of yoga and concludes with a discussion of the benefits, risks, and the clinical evidence for healing.

Data sources for the analysis of the lived experience of this training program and its aftermath included the researcher's field notes and personal journal, as well as semi-structured interviews of 4 participants in the class. Data were analyzed through reflective personal writing and a descriptive coding method (Saldana, 2016) to identify themes in the interview transcripts. These themes were common to all participants in this study, including the researcher: *empowerment, curiosity, positive social interaction, apprehension, and unusual experience.*

Although it is reasonable to consider that the themes that were identified from the data could be present in any positive personal experience, this lived experience was shared because of yoga. Personal transformation might have occurred because the initial feelings of apprehension gave way to feelings of empowerment and satisfaction of curiosity, while interacting in a positive social environment. However, it is also reasonable to accept that integrating the philosophies and practicing the postures of yoga contributed to those feelings directly.

This highlights the value of yoga for Western practitioners, by identifying ways in which individuals can integrate the concepts of this Eastern philosophical approach to healing into their lives. Using personal narrative as a contribution to qualitative inquiry could help in the understanding of the lived experience. Although there were several limitations to the study, after establishing five themes from the data and considering them from both a Western and Eastern perspective, the results suggest that yoga philosophy and the practice of yoga can lead to personal transformation without a traumatic event or an epiphany being the motivating factor.

Dedication

To mum, with love.

Acknowledgments

It is with much gratitude and respect that I acknowledge the members of my dissertation committee for their unwavering patience, and encouragement. Dr. Allyson Washburn, who has been my chair, my friend and my mentor, not just for this endeavor but throughout my journey at Saybrook, as have Dr. Ruth Richards, and Dr. Stephen Khamsi, who was assigned as my original student mentor when I first enrolled in this program; you have all taught me that my contribution matters, and I have come to accept what you taught me. You were always available to me whenever I needed you, not just for academic advice, but also to cheer me on when things were tough. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart. To my awesome editor Dr. Sandy Sela-Smith, thank you for turning a sow's ear into a silk purse. To my long-suffering friends, Dr. Pearlette Ramos and Cathryn Anderson whose encouragement, advice, and acceptance no matter how many times I backed out of or refused invitations, were always there cheering me on. I love you both, thank you for not giving up on me. To the greatest joys of my life, my sons, Valentine and Jordan. Thank you for your love, support, making me laugh when I wanted to cry, but mostly just for being the men that you are, you encouraged me to dream and to reach for the stars. I am so proud of you both, and I love you all the *muches*. To my mother who taught me to weather each storm with dignity but most of all with humor. Mum this is the dream you did not get a chance to realize, so I did it for you. I will always miss and love you. Finally, to the Divine spirit within me which has allowed me to serve my community with creativity, humor, and compassion for those less fortunate than myself. Thank you for my healing.

This Yogic Journey

Where do I begin to tell the story of my path?

How do I explain all my hopes, my dreams my wrath?

To put it down on paper, in just so many pages

And relive in my mind all the very different stages

Of a yogic journey...

Should I tell of a childhood that was marked with so much pain

Should I tell of the time they said I'd never walk again

Of the times that I struggled, of the times that I had fears

In just so many pages, how can I tell of these years

Of this yogic journey...

There are so many parts that I must leave unsaid

Lying dormant in my mind where I have not time to tread

But I think for the most part, I have covered myself well

As I step back through these months and in a nutshell tell

The story of this yogic journey

Table of Contents

List of Tables	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Research Question	5
Rationale and Purpose of the Study	5
The Lived Experience of Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training	6
White Tantric Yoga.....	12
Three-Day Yogic Retreat.....	14
The Rewards	16
A Transformational Experience of Breast Cancer	17
Moving Forward	19
Definition of Key Terms.....	19
Glossary of Key Yogic Terms	22
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	26
Human Motivation and Personal Transformation.....	26
Yoga in the West.....	30
A Brief History of Yoga	31
The Nature of Yoga	32
Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras: Yogic Thought.....	34
The Eight Limbs of Yoga	34
The Yamas: Universal Morality.....	35

The Niyamas: Personal Observances.....	37
The Asanas: The postures	40
Pranayama: Breath.....	41
Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana, and Damadhi: Levels of Consciousness	42
Yoga Style.....	42
Kundalini Yoga.....	43
The Benefits of Yoga	46
Yoga and Stress.....	47
Yoga and Cardiovascular Disease	48
Yoga and Diabetes	49
Yoga and Depression	49
Yoga and Trauma.....	50
Yoga and Cancer.....	51
The Risks of Physical Yoga and Practice	51
Conclusions.....	53
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	55
Purpose of the Study	55
Research Questions.....	55
Implementation of the Research	55
Participants.....	55
Yoga Teacher Training Programs.....	56
Role as Student and Researcher	57
Research Procedure.....	58

Confidentiality	59
Data Collection	59
Personal Data Collection Method	59
Participant Data Collection Method.....	60
Participant Data Analysis.....	61
Synopsis of Participant Data Analysis Tasks.....	64
Researcher Data Analysis	65
Credibility of the Data	66
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	69
Major Themes From Descriptive Coding and Discussion.....	69
Discussion Regarding the First Theme: Empowerment	70
Discussion Regarding the Second Theme: Curiosity.....	72
Discussion Regarding the Third Theme: Positive Social Interaction	74
Discussion of the Minor Themes From Descriptive Coding: Apprehension.....	76
Discussion of the Minor Themes From Descriptive Coding: Unusual Experience.....	78
Distinguishing Between Major and Minor Themes.....	80
The Participants' Stories	81
Participant: Joe (Appendix D)	81
Participant: Sue (Appendix E)	86
Participant: Liz (Appendix F).....	90
Participant: Ann (Appendix G).....	95
Analysis of Researcher's Experience.....	99
Discussion of Researcher's Experience	100

Apprehension	100
White Tantric Yoga.....	101
Yoga Retreat	104
Researcher Discussion on Themes: Analysis of Empowerment & Curiosity.....	110
Empowerment.....	110
Curiosity.....	110
Analysis of Positive Social Interaction for Researcher.....	111
Analysis of Apprehension and Unusual Experiences for the Researcher.....	111
Conclusions.....	112
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	113
Introduction.....	113
Discussion of the Findings.....	114
Reflections on the Program Content.....	114
Shared Positive Experiences.....	116
How Empowerment, Curiosity, and Positive Social Interaction Could Contribute to Personal Transformation.....	118
The Possibility of Transformation Through Empowerment.....	118
The Possibility of Transformation Through Curiosity.....	119
The Possibility of Transformation Through Positive Social Interaction	120
The Possibility of Transformation Through Apprehension and Unusual Experiences	122
Transformation, Transcendence/Epiphany, and Humanistic/Transpersonal Psychology.....	124
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study	126
Future Directions for the Study of Yoga.....	127

Implications of the Study128

Conclusions.....129

REFERENCES132

APPENDICES136

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter136

Appendix B: Letter of Participation and Informed Consent.....137

Appendix C: Interview Protocol: A Yogic Path to personal Transformation.....141

Appendix D: Interview Transcript: Participant Joe142

Appendix E: Interview Transcript: Participant Sue148

Appendix F: Interview Transcript: Participant Liz.....151

Appendix G: Interview Transcript: Participant Ann.....160

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Empowerment.....	71
Table 2: Curiosity	73
Table 3: Positive Social Interaction	75
Table 4: Apprehension.....	78
Table 5: Unusual Experience	79

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We are all on a journey with one inevitable, final, destination and the road in between birth and death will be filled for each of us with a myriad of experiences. As we leave childhood behind and enter our youth, we are curious about our future, but we have the optimism of youth riding on our shoulders. We are ready to experience what life has to offer. We are finally on our own, making our own decisions and probably closer to living in the moment than at any other time in our lives. Off we go to college, enlist in the military, start careers, and hopefully fall in love.

During our middle years, we busy ourselves with raising families, taking care of elderly relatives, or maybe preparing for retirement after reaching the pinnacle of our success. For some, it may be a daily struggle for survival, questioning the unfairness of life, and yearning for something better but never aspiring to anything more than providing for our basic needs. Those of us who have been fortunate enough to live in the fullness of life, raising families, cultivating successful careers, and enjoying loving relationships with family and friends, may begin to turn our attention to cultivating meaning in our lives as we begin to recognize that somewhere through the years, we have lost our sense of self, we have stopped growing.

The search might begin extrinsically as we involve ourselves in volunteer work, or perhaps become more active in our communities, lending our voices to philanthropic causes, attempting to assuage feelings of emptiness, and fill the void. Faith and spirituality could also be questioned and explored, for some of us change might come by way of a personal tragedy or a spiritual epiphany.

My personal journey of discovery began several years ago. However, I believe my intentional search for self-hood began the day I enrolled into a 200-hour Kundalini Yoga Teacher

Training Program. I was curious to know whether following a yogic path, could lead to personal transformation and growth, particularly from a spiritual perspective. To that end, this endeavor is a chronicle of that journey. It is an analysis of the lived experience of participating in a Kundalini yoga teacher training program through both the lens of personal narrative and that of other participants in the same teacher training program.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the initial motivation for this discourse, then, it moves on to delineate the problem, pose the research question, explain the purpose and rationalization, and discuss how this study might be of value to the intellectual community. The chapter will conclude with an account of the lived experience of participating in a Kundalini yoga teacher training, and finally an explanation of key terminology that will be used throughout this work. The methodology used for this dissertation is a transpersonal phenomenological inquiry into the possibility of personal transformation due to participation in a 200-hour Kundalini yoga teacher training program. Data was collected from my personal narrative contained in journals and field notes, along with four semi-structured interviews with participants from the same kundalini yoga teacher training program. Data will be analyzed by examining the experiences of the researcher and interviewees to establish common themes by intraparticipant analysis as described by Morse and Field (1995).

Background of the Study

Along with a yearning for change in my life, I had an experience several years ago that I believe guided both my spiritual and academic life in the years that followed, ultimately shaping the impetus for this endeavor. Although this experience produced neither trauma nor spiritual awakening, it nonetheless has had a profound effect on where I find myself as of this writing.

The deciding factor that influenced my journey of discovery on this yogic path was when I was invited to attend the Sikh practice of *Sadhana* one Saturday morning several years ago. It was explained to me that *Sadhana* is a Sikh/yogic spiritual practice that is held at an Ashram, and that attendance did not require that I be a Sikh; everyone was welcome. I was quite excited to experience something new, even though it meant getting up at 3 o'clock in the morning and driving through the worst part of town to the Ashram.

I was immediately struck by the energetic pull I felt when I entered the Ashram. There was an inexplicable sense of complete acceptance even though I had never met any of the people there before that moment. *Sadhana* was an extended version of a typical Kundalini yoga class where one begins every class by what they called *tuning in* by way of reciting a *mantra* three times, followed by a set of exercises known as a *kriya*, then a short meditation, and finally relaxation. The difference in the *Sadhana* was the reading of the *Japji Sahib*, the Sikh sacred morning prayer. An elder, dressed in white, chanted the Sikh. The sacred prayers were read in Sanskrit. I did not understand the words, but I felt their sentiment.

Afterwards, everyone was invited to participate in the cooking and sharing of *Langar*, a vegetarian meal that is said to represent equality between all men, no matter a person's caste, religion, or status in life. It was not that I felt an overwhelming sense of spiritual awareness, but rather a sense of belonging; it felt as if I had come home. The entire experience seemed to accentuate the lack of direction in my life at that point.

Statement of the Problem

In conceptualizing the ideas regarding my apparent dissatisfaction with my life, I knew that I was not the only person to ever feel this way. Over 70 years before, Maslow (1943) stated, "Man is perpetually a wanting animal," (p. 370) and that people who are satisfied were the

exception. The precarious times in which we are currently living and Western cultural ideals that most of us attempt to adhere to in today's world seem fraught with contradictions. We are careful to be politically correct to avoid offending others of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. It seems ironic that the motto of the United States, which is printed on American currency, is *In God We Trust*; however, we are fearful of using the word *God* in public places such as schools and the workplace lest we are perceived as imposing our own beliefs on others.

We are amused by gadgets, games, and explicit violence and continue to consume diets rich in fats, sugar, and salt, despite the litany of research results that point to the escalating rates of diet related cancers, heart disease, and diabetes (Campbell & Campbell, 2006; Popper & Merzer, 2013). We live in a digital age in which a cell phone and computer allows us to limit the amount of contact we have with each other. We can order food, clothes, drugs, furnish our homes, find a life partner, and completely entertain ourselves without stepping outside of our homes. We have become consumed with instant gratification, entitlement, and materialism. There appears to be a constant barrage of bigger, better, and brighter objects to feed the empty spaces as we engage in a seemingly never-ending journey in search of something that seems to remain elusive. Many people are not aware that they are living disconnected, limited lives.

Continually, we seem to be bombarded with messages that say we are only *someone* if we are young and physically beautiful, which has prompted many women, and increasingly men, to spend millions of dollars on cosmetics and cosmetic surgery to appear to remain young and, therefore, acceptable (Kwart, Foulsham, & Kingstone, 2012). If we cannot be young and beautiful, then we might be redeemed if we happen to be academically talented, athletic, and/or materially wealthy. However, despite evidence to the contrary, research points to what is of importance to most people is having a sense of belonging and some form of spiritual belief

system (De Vogler & Ebersole, 1981; King, Heintzelman & Ward, 2016;). Or, as Chopra (2004) so eloquently put it in the first paragraph of the introduction to *The Book of Secrets*:

The greatest hunger in life is not for food, money, success, status, security, sex, or even love from the opposite sex. Time and again people have achieved all these things and wound up still feeling dissatisfied—indeed, often more dissatisfied than when they began. The deepest hunger in life is a secret that is revealed only when a person is willing to unlock a hidden part of the self. In the ancient traditions of wisdom, this quest has been likened to diving for the most precious pearl in existence, a poetic way of saying that you have to swim far out beyond shallow waters, plunge deep into yourself, and search patiently until the pearl beyond price is found. The pearl is also called essence, the breath of god, the water of life ...labels for what we, in our more prosaic scientific age, would simply call TRANSFORMATION. (p. 1)

Research Question

I made the decision to experience the transformation to which Chopra (2004) referred, by swimming beyond the shallow waters and plunge deep within myself to find my essence, and to study this process with other people who have done the same to seek an answer to the following question: How can yogic philosophy and the practice of Kundalini Yoga facilitate personal transformation?

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Primarily, the purpose of this study was to explore whether yogic philosophy and practice could be a catalyst for personal transformation without a traumatic event or an epiphany being the motivating factor. My interest in yoga philosophy and psychology has long been stimulated by subjective experiences. It has been reinforced in more recent years by both formal and informal intellectual studies, in particular, by the growing body of research that encouragingly points to the power of yoga to transform lives. The more I learned, the more I was convinced that yoga was a way to enrich one's life both physically and mentally.

Secondly, this study had the potential to help illuminate the value of yoga at its most basic level and, therefore, add to the substantial volume of research involving the efficacy of this

ancient philosophy, and thirdly to help promote the significance of the lived experience, which differs from scientific enquiry, in that it helps us to understand ourselves and our world from a more sensory, subjective perspective using personal narrative as a contribution to qualitative inquiry. Adams, Holman-Jones, and Ellis (2015) suggested that, although personal narrative was not all encompassing, it granted researchers an opportunity to explore their own experience along with and compared to others who had a similar experience. Wall (2006) stated:

It is suggested that the freedom of the researcher to speak as a player in the research project and to mingle his or her experience with the experience of those studied is precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge further along. If a researcher's voice is omitted from a text, the writing is reduced to a mere summary and the interpretation of the works of others with nothing new added. (p. 3)

This endeavor is an analysis of my personal journey along with the journeys of several of my peers. I chose to participate in a 6-month Kundalini yoga teacher training program along with 12 other students. I was curious to know how participating in a program with other students, rather than designing my own solitary practice, would contribute not only to research involving the lived experience, but also to my own journey of self-discovery.

The Lived Experience of Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training

By the time I was 17 years old, I had become fascinated with Eastern literature, art, philosophy, mysticism, and practices—particularly, yoga and Tantra. However, I began my journey of discovery from a Western perspective, and most of what I read came from pop culture that was fun to read, but which I later felt was disingenuous and, at times, rather insulting to the practice and the practitioner.

In my early 20s, I began to practice Hatha yoga, but I was ignorant of the science behind it. Several years ago, I discovered Kundalini yoga. In the beginning, I was uncomfortable with some of the practices because they seemed to go against the indoctrination of the Protestant faith

in which I had grown up, although I had relinquished most of those teachings many years before. However, for some reason, they still appeared to have some influence over me; I suspected that this was because, as a child, I had been forced to attend many services where literally, I had learned to fear God.

I remember the short, balding, red faced Pastor who shouted at the young congregation from his pulpit every Saturday and most of the day on Sunday. He preached of fire and brimstone, and there were many times I was convinced he was speaking directly to me. Thereafter, throughout my childhood, there were many occasions I envisioned how I was going to burn in hell for all eternity for my transgressions. At the time of those sermons, I was *incarcerated* in a government-run British children's home and was told often that if I was a good girl my mother would come for me. It was to be several years before that would happen, and, during that time, I assumed it was because I was not good enough. I had no idea that this had been out of my mother's control.

As an adult, even though I had not moved completely away from some of the Protestant teachings, I no longer believed in the literal idea of fire and brimstone and burning in hell. When I found Kundalini yoga, intuitively, I knew I had found a spiritual home, and despite my initial discomfort, this would become important in my life.

I had come a long way in the last 47 years of my life from the Midlands of England to the desert of Arizona, from having my first child at 15, to becoming a doctoral student. I had a stimulating career working in the criminal justice system, lived in a cute little apartment in the suburbs, and had "Jasper" my Jeep, which had seen better days but had never left me stranded. I was taking belly dancing and yoga classes and going hiking on the weekends with my friends.

Life was good, I thought I had everything under control, but the truth was, while I had been busy doing, I had not been being.

I realized that my priorities had become shallow, and by the time I got to my dissertation practicum, I found myself distracted, disconnected, and emotionally hungry. It seemed that the studies upon which I had embarked—the very subject I had thought would take me on a journey of self-discovery—had, in fact, taken me further away. My studies in consciousness and Eastern philosophy were supposed to illuminate my journey, but somewhere along the way, I had become lost in the intellectual milieu. My hungry heart was aching. I was identifying with what I had and did, and not with who I was at the core of my being. I realized I wanted to change, to transform myself. It became apparent to me that I was in some sort of existential crisis, and I needed to reconnect with what gave my life purpose and meaning. I remember thinking back to that early morning *Sadhana*, and how connected I had felt; I wanted to feel that way again, not just at 3 a.m. in the morning, but all the time. I wanted to feel connected, to the world, to others, but most of all to myself. I decided to embark on a yogic journey of self-discovery, and so it was that I found myself enrolling in a Kundalini Yoga teacher training program.

My purpose was not to become a yoga instructor as such, but I considered that it would be a bonus if I came away with that kind of confidence. I had looked over the comprehensive curriculum for the 6-month program; I was satisfied that it would include all the elements that would make this the kind of immersion experience I was looking for. The program promised personal growth and exploration and an opportunity to deepen one's practice. There was an assurance of life-changing results.

Class sessions met every other weekend from January to June. In addition, there was also to be a 10-hour meditation workshop known as *White Tantric Yoga*, and a 3-day yogic lifestyle

retreat. There was also an expectation that each student would complete 50 hours of independent study, which would include three group *Sadhanas* like the one I had attended, and 10 independent yoga classes of at least an hour duration at any approved studio. Over the next 6 months we were to be exposed to the roots of yoga philosophy, psychology and lifestyle, Western and yogic anatomy, health and energy, practice Kundalini yoga basics, and awaken consciousness, through meditation, sound and *mantra*.

I vividly recall the first day of training. It was a chilly Saturday morning; I felt nervous and not a little afraid, and I had no idea what to expect. I had no idea who would be taking this journey with me. The yoga studio was a ranch-style house that had been remodeled. All the walls had been removed, excluding the bathroom, and the house was one long, large space that could accommodate about 20 people with stretched out yoga mats. At the far end of the room was a *dais*, which was covered with a white cloth and a sheepskin. There were photographs of a man in a turban, and on the wall behind the dais were various symbols; to the right was a white board. The room was painted white and most of the décor of the rest of the room consisted of photographs or pictures of the same man in the turban, who I would later learn was Yogi Bhaajan (2003), the person responsible for bringing Kundalini yoga to the West. On the wall to the far right next to an arcadia door, which led out onto a patio with tables and chairs, there was one exceptionally large framed photograph of the Golden Temple in the city of Amritsar, Punjab, India, which I would later learn is one of the most revered spiritual sites of Sikhism.

I found a spot up against a wall toward the back of the room, which became *my spot* throughout the training. The combined fragrance of lavender and eucalyptus permeated the air from a diffuser close to the dais. There was soft *kirtan* music playing, and several people were already seated on their mats, eyes closed, hands in *gyan mudra*, their thumbs and index fingers

touching, wrists resting on their knees. Most of my fellow students were dressed in comfortable white clothing with their heads covered in either turbans or little white skull caps. My nervousness began to ease a little as I tuned into the ambience of the room. I rolled out my mat and arranged my things neatly by the wall. There were to be 13 students in all including myself. The instructors were two diminutive, but imposing women who were both in their 70s. One was a former Wall Street banker, the other an engineer; both were strong, vital, powerful women, one of whom began to organize herself on the dais in front of us. We were ready to get started.

Everyone had arrived. We sat quietly waiting for the instructor to speak, I seemed to be the only one fidgeting. Her first words when they came, were to invite us to *tune in* by reciting the *Adi Mantra* three times: *Ong, namo, Guru dev namo*. Most of us knew the meaning, but the instructor explained that it was chanted at the beginning of every Kundalini yoga class, and it meant that we were calling on the wisdom of all ages, that lay within all of us and the teachers who had come before us, to be with us and to guide us.

The day began with us spending some time getting acquainted. There was such a positive vibration in the room that the nervousness I had felt when I first arrived evaporated, and I began to get excited, until we began our first set of exercises. We learned that each set of exercises was called a *kriya*, and each *kriya* had a specific purpose as it targeted certain areas of the mind/body. We were assured that this *kriya* would wake us up! The set was 45 minutes long, and to my mind as close to torture as one could get. Each posture/exercise was performed for at least 3 minutes. After the first 10 minutes or so, neither my mind nor my body wanted to cooperate. By the fourth exercise posture, I began to think about how I could get my enrollment fee refunded and began to visualize myself going home and sitting on my couch with a bowl of popcorn and watching a movie. I had prided myself on being able to do most of the exercises quite well; after all, I had

been doing yoga for years. I believed my body was quite flexible, but then I realized, I had not met anyone quite like this little 70-year-old woman.

Finally, it was over, and the first lecture began. It was an accounting of what we would be doing for the next 6 months; I was happy to be finally propped up against the wall. There were several more *kriyas* throughout the day, which were punctuated by lecture, group rapport building exercises, short meditations, and finally relaxation before the day was over. That first day felt like the longest 8 hours of my life, and the phrase, *keep up*, will be forever etched in my memory. However, I went home that night, exhausted, sore, but feeling inspired, and by the end of that first weekend, I felt as though I had found another family.

This was the format. Each session began with the *adi mantra* that tuned us into the energy around and within. The rest of the day was spent on the *asanas*, readings, lectures, either from the instructors or through video from Yogi Bhanan. We learned about the Aquarian age, styles of yoga, and Patanjali's *yoga Sutra*, with particular focus on the Eight Limbs of Yoga. I became fascinated with the first two of the *Sutras*, the *Yamas* and the *Niyamas*; they encapsulated everything I had hoped to learn about yoga philosophy. There were teachings on awakening consciousness, yogic philosophy and history, yogic and Western anatomy, and the health benefits of yoga in general. We chanted, meditated, and practiced *kriya* after *kriya*. We were also taught the code of ethics on becoming teachers, and there were many discussions on spiritual development.

I found the curriculum to be comprehensive although some of the more complex concepts were challenging. I enjoyed listening to the comments of the other students during discussions and pushing my body to places I never thought it could go with the *kriyas*. There was no judgment; if one felt the need to rest and relax, there was support. We checked in with one

another often. There was one occasion when a guest instructor came to teach a class with us, and he asked us to perform a particular *asana*. I found myself questioning whether or not he was indulging his own sense of humor. He instructed us to come into easy pose (sit crossed legged), straighten our backs, and stretch our arms up above our heads at a 60-degree angle and then through O-shaped lips to make the sound of a monkey, pulling in on our stomach muscles each time we made the sound. At first, several of us giggled; we sounded and looked so ridiculous. My humor quickly turned to annoyance, and I decided I was not going to do it. I remember looking around the room and seeing that everyone except me was participating. I began to feel conspicuous, so I raised my arms and joined in once again. This exercise lasted for over 30 minutes continuously. I felt a little light-headed when it was over, but I realized that I also felt quite energized. There were several things I learned that day about my peers, myself, and my own limitations and strengths.

White Tantric Yoga

Included in the curriculum was a meditation workshop that lasted almost 10 hours and was probably one of the most difficult aspects of the training, but it left a huge impression on me. This workshop is offered annually and was open to all Kundalini yoga enthusiasts from around the city. The venue was a large conference room in a building on the grounds of the local zoo. The workshop consisted of a series of meditations, that lasted from 10 minutes to 2.5 hours. Many of the meditations were done with chanting and some with a partner. My partner was one of our group, and fortunately for me, he had experienced the workshop before, so he knew what to expect and coached me through some of the exercises.

The day was broken up into sections, and the first few exercises were relatively easy, however, I felt somewhat claustrophobic being so close to so many people. Everyone was

wearing white and, at some point, the thought briefly crossed my mind that it all seemed quite cultish. Several times during the day, I felt an overwhelming urge to giggle, which was sometimes difficult to control. The first meditation lasted 10 minutes, and we were to sit across from our partner and hold eye contact for the duration of the meditation. I became increasingly frustrated with myself because I could not manage more than a few seconds before looking away. Even though I knew my partner, I still found it to be challenging.

The day culminated with a 2.5-hour meditation where we chanted a *mantra*. We sat in easy pose, hands in our laps or in *gyan mudra*, index finger and thumbs touching, wrists relaxed on our knees. I closed my eyes and imagined I was looking at the tip of my nose. The posture was not too difficult, as this was how I usually meditated. In the beginning, I found it hard to concentrate. I fidgeted quite a bit, there was so much resistance; I did not want to do this. The chant was *Ek ong kar, sat nam, siri, wahey guru*; we were told this means that the Creator and the Creation are one. There was emphasis put on several of the words, so this also became an exercise in controlling the breath to sustain the length of time required for each word.

After about 15 minutes, I found myself beginning to settle in to the practice, and I felt the rhythm and energy of the vibration of so many people in the room. I decided to challenge myself. As settled more deeply into it, I began to lose track of time. I noticed that the sound of the chanting seemed to echo, but at the same time seemed far away; it seemed as if the sound was coming from somewhere else. I began to see colors floating before my closed eyes; they were the colors of the chakras, —red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple/indigo, and white. I saw them all, but blue, green, and purple seemed to dominate. The colors seemed to arrange themselves into shapes of what looked to be a uterus and ovaries; as they faded, I saw clouds and

the sun shining through. The only sensation I felt in my body was a ticklish kind of feeling in the pit of my stomach.

When it was over, I felt as though I had been on a journey; the time had melted away. We were cautioned to drink lots of water, and I remember spending several minutes in *shavasana*, corpse pose. I wrote everything I had experienced in my journal while I was basking in the aftermath, not quite ready to analyze what I was feeling but wanting to make sure I remembered, although I do not think I will ever forget that sensation, or for that matter that day.

Three-Day Yogic Retreat

The yoga retreat was my favorite part of the training. Our group met at a place close to the mountains, which was about a 2-hour drive north of the city. One of the guest instructors had properties spread over several acres of land. The area where we would spend most of our time had two ranch-style houses on the grounds, one for women and the other the men. There was a large barn-like structure that served as a *Gurdwara*. When we walked across the field and passed through a large wooden gate, there was a winding lane which led to another large field with another ranch-style house; this was where we would travel each day for lunch and dinner. Two students from a previous class had volunteered to stay there and prepare our daily vegan meals for the duration of the retreat. There were tables and chairs set up outside so that those who chose to dine *al fresco* could do so.

The twice daily walk to the dining house was usually accomplished by doing a walking meditation, chanting as we walked, each taking turns to lead the chant. The first time we did this, I found myself feeling a little embarrassed when people who lived in the surrounding areas along the lane would come out to wave at us, apparently used to the sight of a group of people dressed

in white walking along the lane chanting Sanskrit *mantras*. However, after that, I just waved back and allowed myself to be as uninhibited as the others.

There was so much opportunity to get to know the other students in a relaxed atmosphere and the same non-judgement and acceptance pervaded during the 3 days we were there. Apart from one incidence where someone fell from her bunk, there were no other such occurrences. Despite much urging, the student refused to go to the hospital to be checked out; we all took turns keeping an eye on her in case she changed her mind, but after a night's sleep and a natural remedy for pain from our instructor, she seemed to be back to normal the next day.

Everyone got along, sharing together and playing together. One student had brought her tent; she preferred to sleep under the stars and took advantage of an early morning shower that was located outside beside a huge tree in the middle of the large field where the two main houses were located. If anyone seemed to need anything from toothpaste to comfort, everyone rallied round to help and share.

There was a lot of laughter and a sense of peace and total acceptance. Each of us was able to focus on ourselves, participating in activities from our own comfort level; there was no pressure or judgment. It appeared to me that everyone had left their egos at home, and there was a sense of childlike abandonment. We rose each morning at 4 a.m. and trudged across the yard to the *Gurdwara* for morning *Sadhana*; almost everyone participated. Together, we watched the sun rise, then, we had an hour to partake of the yogic tradition of a cold shower, before sharing a light breakfast usually of fruit, bagels with honey, and garlic toast. Then, it was back to the *Gurdwara* for lectures and exercises until we walked to the dining house for lunch. The afternoons were spent much the same as the morning, although there was usually a creative activity that often allowed for relaxation and a little playfulness.

There was no television, and we were encouraged to limit the use of any other electronic devices, including our phones. There were so many fun and interesting activities over those 3 days, and the collective energy was very nurturing. The entire experience was idyllic, with perhaps the exception of the cold showers at 5 a.m. on chilly March mornings. Nevertheless, I found myself wondering what it would be like to live that way permanently.

The Rewards

I think what I gained from this experience was a sense of belonging and empowerment, even though there were times when I was physically challenged. The yoga culture and lifestyle presented me with a new dimension from which to view my life. I found myself to be more tolerant of others and curious about what more there was to learn. Each of us had been accepted into a family that included people whose personal histories encompassed various cultural and professional backgrounds. People were accepting, openminded and non-judgmental; this included any former students who had come before us. Along with the knowledge gained, I found friendship, flexibility, endurance, and a sense of peace.

This change was subtle; I did not experience any great epiphanies, although there were two experiences that I cannot explain, but I have accepted. They both happened during meditations on two separate occasions. The first incident happened during a sitting meditation. After about 10 minutes in to the meditation, I heard a man's deep, baritone laughter. It seemed so loud, as if the person was sitting next to me, but I opened my eyes to see who it was, and saw there was no one there. The men who were in the class were at the front of the room. When the meditation was over, I asked the group if the laughter had disturbed anyone, but it seemed I was the only one who had heard it.

Another time, we were doing a gong meditation, which necessitates laying down and allowing the sound of the gong to reverberate through one's body. It is quite an experience. Half way through, I felt pressure on my stomach, it was not an offensive or invasive touch, but I was still somewhat disturbed by it and opened my eyes to see who it was. Everyone was in their own space and not close enough to me to have touched me. I spoke with the instructor after the meditation was over and she told me it was not unusual that when one's consciousness opened up, many things might become apparent. I have since had this same sensation on several other occasions when I have participated in prolonged meditations; I still have no explanation for it. Perhaps, it might have something to do with personal Transformation, but as of this writing, I do not know.

A Transformational Experience of Breast Cancer

Shortly after the teacher training was over, a life event happened that I am convinced would ordinarily have plunged me into a state of depression and fear. I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and ultimately chose to undergo a double mastectomy. From the day of the diagnosis, I did not perceive myself as being sick, and even though I was still somewhat nervous of many of the tests, procedures and treatments, I had no fear regarding the results. Although I was cognizant of the fact that this diagnosis could be life-threatening, I was somehow able to stay present and to use the teachings from the training to keep myself focused. I intuitively knew that, no matter how unpleasant things became, they were not lasting; I would come through this time in my life, and I would eventually be grateful for the experience. I had learned to trust my intuition.

There has not been a single time that I have felt that I was less of a woman now that I no longer have the *assets* that seemed to have defined me as feminine for so long, on the contrary, I

felt quite liberated. There were times when I would question whether I was in a state of denial or delayed shock and why was I not lamenting the loss of what society views as an essential part of femininity.

I was prescribed a course of radiation, 5 days a week for 6 weeks. When the time came for me to begin the treatments, I experienced some trepidation because I had heard horror stories of burns, nausea, hair falling out, and ghastly fatigue, which renders a person unable to manage daily life. I remember the first session, and how nervous I had been. As I was sitting in the lobby waiting to be called for my appointment with all sorts of depressing thoughts running through my mind, suddenly I was reciting the words to a *mantra* in my mind, it was the strangest thing, it was just there! I remembered that I had that *mantra* recorded on my iPod as a guided meditation.

When I was called and entered the treatment room, I plugged in my head phones and listened to the guided meditation that vocalized how a healing beam of light and angelic beings were there to protect me, that no harm would come to me. In the background the *mantra* was being recited. It was the Kundalini mantra for protection, the *mangala charan mantra*, which is said to surround the person with a magnetic field of protective light. Bhajan (2003) described mantra as the energy of sound, which has a powerful effect on the human psyche and chakra system.

I left that first session feeling more radiant than when I had arrived, and so it was that each time I went for a treatment, I visualized the healing light and the angelic beings that were there to protect me. I experienced no burning, nausea, or fatigue; in fact I felt quite energized after my treatments. While I cannot scientifically prove that it was the kundalini meditation and mantra that were responsible for the ease by which I coped with the radiation, I can attest to the power I felt within me during those times. I believe that I had tapped into the source that yoga

teaches connects all things and that talks about experiencing pain, but not suffering. (Ajaya, 1983; Feuerstein, 1998); I definitely remember feeling that connection. I was convinced that the yogic teachings I had integrated into my life, were the reason I was not suffering.

The motivation for my journey was neither the result of a trauma nor an epiphany at the time I embarked upon it. However, the diagnosis of breast cancer could be interpreted as a traumatic event, indeed for most women it is. After I had completed the program, I did not experience this diagnosis as a trauma, but rather a gradual awakening of sorts, so in this sense, it could also be described as an epiphany even though the word *epiphany* often suggests a sudden recognition of something, for me it was a gradual realization, and from this perspective could be considered as transformational.

Moving Forward

As previously stated, there are many paths one could take to affect dramatic change in one's life; I had chosen a yogic path. In order to understand what that means in terms of personal transformation, it is first necessary to understand the nature of personal transformation and yogic philosophy, both of are addressed in the literature review in Chapter two. Although my chosen form of yoga was Kundalini—the concepts of which will be discussed in more detail—yoga philosophy is basically the same for all forms.

Definition of Key Terms

The principal subject of this work revolves around the understanding of *personal transformation/personal growth*, these terms shall be interchangeable in this paper. The American Heritage dictionary defines *personal* as ‘Of a particular person, private; done in person’ (p. 629). To transform, means ‘to change markedly in appearance or form; to change in nature or condition’ (p. 865). For the purposes of this work, the term *personal transformation*

and personal growth shall mean ‘working towards creating meaning in one’s life and redefining one’s own world view’ as defined by Daszko and Sheinberg, 2005.

Yoga is a commonly understood term, however when discussing the nature of yoga, for the purposes of this endeavor it shall refer to all aspects of traditional yogic philosophy and psychology. The terms *Kundalini Teacher Training* and *teacher training program* shall refer to the Kundalini teacher training program, which is central to the idea of personal transformation in this work.

Several yogic terms that will be used throughout this dissertation are explained below; however, included at the end of this chapter are a glossary of the Sanskrit/yoga terms used. *Gurdwara, Sadhana, Kundalini, mantra, pranayama, kriya, mudra and sadhana*, are all terms that are integral to understanding the concepts of yoga and shall be explained in their context throughout this endeavor.

Gurdwara for the purposes of this work shall mean a place of reverence where we as yoga students in the teacher training program participated in the spiritual aspects of the training. However, as should be noted that a *Gurdwara* is essentially a Sikh temple and the Sikh religion is not traditionally associated with yoga. One of the most confusing things for me during this journey, and one I have not addressed in this dissertation is the controversy of yogic teachings, being primarily taught from a Sikh perspective, when most Sikh’s denounce the existence of yoga in their faith. The Kundalini yoga teacher training program is based on the teachings of Yogi Bhajan, who was a Sikh; however, yoga comes from Hindu and Buddhist teachings. The *Gurdwara* which was discussed as being the place where I first found the impetus for this endeavor means *gate of the guru* (Kaur-Khalsa, 1996,) and is where Sikhs go to worship. The two main activities here are the reading of the *Japji*, from the holy scriptures of the *Guru Granth*

Sahib, and the serving of *Langar*, which as previously noted is a meal that represents equality between all men (and women). The *Gurdwara* is open to people of all faiths. Many Sikhs take issue with the linking of yoga to their faith, Sikhs do not traditionally practice yoga. It appears that this linking of the Sikh faith and the philosophy and practice of yoga, has been created by the teachings of Yogi Bhajan, for the benefit of Western followers. I chose not to address this in depth because while worth mentioning, I considered it to be beyond the scope of this dissertation, and it also presented to me as having no relevance since I was not following a specific religion, but rather the concepts of yoga philosophy. This work is about personal transformation by way of a yogic path, not a specific guru, or religious deity.

It was interesting to me, that one of the requirements of the teacher training program was that each student should attend at least three group *Sadhanas*. *Sadhana* is a Sikh practice where one attends the *Gurdwara* before dawn and recites or listens to prayers either silently or from a reader of the *Japji*. *Sadhana* is described by Feuerstein, (1998) as “the path of spiritual realization; a particular spiritual discipline” (p. 458)

Kundalini is represented as the fundamental life energy, that resides within all beings. It is symbolized by a coiled serpent, which lies dormant at the base of the spine. The goal of Kundalini yoga is to awaken this energy and to move it upward toward the crown of the head for the *enlightenment* of the individual. This is accomplished through *mantra*, *kriya*, *pranayama* and *mudra*

A *mantra* is a phrase or word that corresponds to an energy vibration and helps with focus during meditation. *Mantra*'s have different meanings and purposes and are an integral part of Kundalini yoga, (Rama, 1979). *Kriya* is essentially an action that is used for a specific goal. A *kriya* may consist of a specific exercise, breathing technique, *mantra*, and *mudra*, either

combined or said individually. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012). *Pranayama* is a word that can be broken down into two, ‘*prana*’ and ‘*yama*’. *Prana* means energy, and *yama* means control, *Pranayama* then is control of the life energy, which is essentially the breath. (Rama, 1979). Lindsey-Wehner, (2012) described a *mudra* as “a symbolic position or gesture, usually involving the hands, which locks energy flow to the brain” (p. 223). *Mudra* helps with concentration, the most common *mudra* known to Westerners is hands together in prayer, (prayer pose).

Sutra, is a word that is most familiar to the West as suture, which we know as meaning stitches in medical terms. The Sanskrit word *sutra* means *thread*. The Sutras are aphorisms of wisdom that are linked to each other. Patanjali’s yoga *sutra* number just under 200, eight of which form the eight limbs of yoga (Feuerstein, 1998).

Glossary of Key Yogic Terms

Adi Mantra: The main mantra that denotes the beginning of every Kundalini yoga class. It is chanted three times. ‘*Ong, namo, Guru dev namo*’. it means we are calling on the wisdom of all ages that is within us and the teachers who have come before us, to be with us and to guide us throughout our practice. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Ahimsa: The first of the Yamas, and the most important one. Ahimsa is non-violence, non-harming. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Aparigraha: Cautions against being possessive. It means non-attachment, non-grasping, non-greediness. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Asana: Asanas are the postures and poses of the physical aspects of yoga. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Ashtanga Yoga: Another name for Raja Yoga it is a system of discipline and concentration (Satchidananda, 2012)

Asteya: Is the third *Yama* and addresses stealing. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Bhagavad Gita: The earliest and most popular Hindu scripture which chronicles the teachings of Lord Krishna to Arjuna. (Feuerstein, 1998)

Brahmacharya: One of the fundamental moral disciplines of yoga, that talks about sensory control. It is about being the practice of Chastity in word, thought and deed. (Feuerstein, 1998)

Chakras: A chakra is a psychoenergetic center in the body which is aligned along the spinal axis and also could correspond with the glandular system. (Feuerstein, 1998)

Dharana: Prolonged, focused attention. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Dhyana: Meditative absorption or contemplation, a deepening of concentration. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Gyan mudra: The thumbs and index fingers touching, wrists resting on their knees. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Gurdwara: The Sikh place of worship. (Morgan, 2001)

Hatha Yoga: Is the physical aspect of yoga and considered the basis of all other styles of yoga. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Ida: The feminine and lunar energy, located in the left nostril, it is said that when one breathes through the left nostril it can help with sleep. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Ishvara pranidhana: Is the last of the *Niyamas*, and it is about surrender and has to do with spirituality or faith and the contemplation of such. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Kirtan: Chanting most mantras have been set to music, so they can also be sung. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Kriya: Action or deed a practice within kundalini yoga that the aim of which is to reach a specific goal. A Kriya can consist of a set of poses, a meditation, certain breathing techniques, mudras and mantras or a combination of all. (Lindsey-Wehner)

Kundalini: The energy that is said to be stored at the base of the spine. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Mantra: The sacred words that are sung or chanted during meditation, (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Mudra: These are hand postures that lock energy flow to the brain. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Nadis: Channels throughout the body where consciousness travels. The three main Nadis are Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Niyamas: Five suggestions for how we should care for ourselves; they are personal observances. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Om: Is a key mantra of Hinduism, it is a sacred syllable, which is also in Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. (Feuerstein, 1998)

Pingala: Is the masculine and solar energy located in the right nostril (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Prana: Is the universal life energy of breath. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Pranayama: Is about how we use our breath and ultimately our physical energy. (Feuerstein, 1998)

Pratyahara: Control of the senses (Satchidananda, 2012)

Rig Veda: Is the oldest of the sacred books of Hinduism. (Morgan, 2001)

Sadhana: Is a Sikh/yogic spiritual practice that is held at an Ashram, and that attendance did not require that I be a Sikh, everyone was welcome.

Samadhi: Contemplation, absorption the final limb of the eight limbs of yoga. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Santosa: Is the second of the five *Niyamas* and it means contentment. This is about living in gratitude for what one has even when things are rough. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Satya: Is about truthfulness and integrity, it calls for us to live authentically (Satchidananda, 2012)

Sauca: Which is purity, this is about cleanliness of both body and mind. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Shavasana: Corpse pose, laying in a relaxed state on one's back. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Svadhya: The fourth *Niyama* is about studying the self and cultivating reflective practices and accepting our own limitations, it is about coming to know the true self. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Susumna: Is the central Nadi, which runs from the top of the head and the sacrum in line with the spine. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

Tapas: Is the third *Niyama* we find balance and we learn to share, it is also about the need for the ego to become focused and to cultivate self-control, and to move forward to accomplish our goals. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Yoga: Means *union* the practice of yoga unifies the mind, body and spirit. (Feuerstein, 1998)

Yoga: Sutra a collection of Aphorisms codified by a Sage called Patanjali somewhere between 5000 BC and 300 AD. (Satchidananda, 2012)

Yamas: Are about universal morality and describe suggestions for how one should conduct one's self with others and in the world at large. (Satchidananda, 2012)

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to acquire a sense of the cultural framework of the Kundalini yoga teacher training experience that drives the research question of personal transformation by way of a yogic path, the literature review briefly conceptualizes the idea of personal transformation and then it explores the fundamentals of yogic philosophy, particularly those that were relevant to the lived experience of the Kundalini yoga teacher training program. The review culminates with an examination of the efficacy of yoga and its potential for influencing Western ideas regarding physical and mental health and, therefore, the potential for promoting yoga as a viable modality for spiritual healing and personal transformation.

Human Motivation and Personal Transformation

When I began this journey that first chilly January morning, I did not know what to expect. Of course, I was hoping for something to happen, but I was not sure what it would be, or how it would manifest. When I was a child and was being particularly exasperating, my mother would say I had a hungry heart and that I needed to settle down. In retrospect, it appears that through the years I have used various means to assuage the apparent hunger I felt. There were several disastrous relationships, two of which ended in equally disastrous marriages, and endless hours spent filling time with meaningless pursuits. The only positive thing to come out of my mercurial mind during these years was an investment in education, first art school, where I indulged my fleeting interest in the fashion world, to eventually finding my way to more intellectual studies, culminating in my present endeavor. Regardless of what it was, it seemed I was constantly trying to fill a void. Finally, I realized that if I was ever going to satisfy the yearning I constantly felt, the solution would not come from the superficiality of my lifestyle. It did not matter how much education I acquired or how many relationships I entered, how much

weight I lost, or how many times I switched careers, if I wanted change, I instinctively knew I was going to have to look for it within myself. The impetus for change was coming from a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the way I was living. I knew there had to be more than the widely-held model of the human life-course that says we are born, go through childhood, go to school, find a career, retire, then die (Martin & Martin, 2015).

In contrast to my own motivation for change, the research regarding why many people might find themselves experiencing a defining moment in their lives often points to a life experience of either trauma or transcendence (Brockelman, 2002; Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005; Devine & Sparks, 2014; Gabora & Merrifield, 2012; Garfinkel, 2007; Wade, 1998). *Trauma*, according to Whitfield (1995), is when any act, event or experience harms or damages the physical, sexual, mental, emotional or spiritual integrity of one's true self. In discussing *trauma-induced transformation*, Wade (1998) commented on the idea of antecedents that she suggested are set in motion by a life experience that disorients and presents a dilemma, which when resolved may ultimately lead to transformation by expanding consciousness. Wade described the process as being an opportunity for viewing one's self from a new perspective and reinventing one's world view. Thought processes change, and as transformation takes place, the person experiences a renewed passion for life and a sense of power and freedom. *Transformation* involves self-reflection that leads to a broader definition of self.

The other common antecedent for personal transformation, according to the literature, is some form of transcendence. (Brockelman, 2002; Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005; Devine & Sparks, 2014; Gabora & Merrifield, 2012; Garfinkel, 2007; Wade, 1998). *Transcendence* can be described from various perspectives. It can embody wholeness, perfection, otherworldliness, divine existence, or a state of grace (Ataria, 2016; Devine & Sparks, 2014; Garfinkel, 2007;

Wade, 1998). It can be described as a rising above, an elevation of consciousness, and is often be called an epiphany, which could be anything from a spiritual awakening to the understanding of a new concept, the recovery from an illness, or the birth of a child. An *epiphany*, according to *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, is, “(a) an unusually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something; (b) an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking; (c) an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure.” (n.p.)

Since the motivation for my journey was neither the result of trauma or epiphany, but rather a quest to elevate myself to a higher level of consciousness, a third stimulus for change could come from the humanistic theories of human motivation of Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1980). Both Maslow and Rogers theorized that the goal in life is to fulfill one’s potential. Maslow (1943) called this *self-actualization* and Rogers (as cited in Boeree, 2018), *the actualizing tendency*.

Maslow (1943) hypothesized that humans are motivated by needs, which he categorized in five levels. The theory is that each level of needs would have to be satisfied before moving on to the level above it. Maslow’s five basic needs of human motivation are: physiological, safety, belonging and intimacy, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Some textbooks seem to have been ambiguous about what Maslow was actually theorizing, presenting his work as a concrete theory, of human motivation rather than a suggestion of growth. However, Goble (1970) asserted that the five need attainments of Maslow’s theory should be *relatively* satisfied in order to move on to the next level. This suggested that behavior in a given set of basic circumstances is not predictable. O’Connor (2007), for example, discussed Maslow’s hierarchy in terms of leadership. He suggested that the hierarchy was never intended to be a blueprint for human behavior but

rather a recipe for a person who is at his or her best. O'Connor stated that Maslow recognized motivation was not static and a person's behavior could be attributed to more than one motive. He made a persuasive argument regarding Maslow's intentions in that most textbooks that teach his theory do not take into consideration other cultures and the emphasis they put on certain values and needs and, therefore, motivation. The same may be said for Roger's theory. According to McLeod (2015), Rogers believed that every sentient being strives to be the best it can be. He believed that all creatures have a self-actualizing tendency. The idea behind Roger's theory of motivation appears to be much the same as Maslow's except that Rogers believed that there needed to be an environment of genuineness, acceptance, and empathy in order for growth to take place—in other words, a positive, nurturing environment.

Possibly one of the most well-known examples of a divergence from Rogerian theory of a positive nurturing environment comes from Frankl's (1959) *Man's Search for Meaning*, in which he (1946) described his experience in the German death camps. Frankl explained how every day presented itself as a challenge to survive and how difficult it was to meet even his most basic physiological needs of food and warmth. He presented his safety as always being in question, whether from illness or brutality, which seemed to mark the majority of his days. Even though Frankl had not been living in an environment that was conducive to personal growth and self-actualization in accordance with the ideas of Maslow and Rogers, he discovered that his freedom came with his choices, in particular the attitude with which he chose to greet each day. He stated that a man can lose everything, except his freedom to choose.

I had made a conscious choice to change my way of being in the world, and to that end had chosen a path that I believed would help me make that change because of the philosophy that supported it. Devine and Spark (2014) explained the nature of transformation quite eloquently

when they stated that it was “the desire to have self-awareness so profound that it makes a person shift their personality or spirit by redefining how they respond to self and others” (p. 32) This essentially is what I understood Frankl (1959) achieved in the concentration camp.

Daszko and Sheinberg (2005) described *personal transformation* as the letting go of the familiar and stepping into the unknown with the intention of finding new meaning to one’s life by challenging assumptions and beliefs, questioning, exploring, pushing beyond boundaries, and creating a new paradigm, a new worldview. Daszko and Sheinberg also suggested that there is no destination, rather an unpredictable journey that encompasses new learning and ultimately life choices based on new discoveries.

Yoga in the West

One of the most intriguing discoveries of the 20th century for Westerners was the introduction of yoga into our culture. When one hears the word *yoga*, the visual that usually comes to mind is that of healthy, young people with perfectly proportioned bodies contorting themselves into seemingly impossible poses. Yoga classes are being offered all over the country, from chic, inner city studios to suburban church halls and gymnasiums. Yoga has become mainstream and a lucrative business, generating millions of dollars through clothing, books, videos, and props. There are yoga classes for pregnancy, weight loss, back pain, and many other maladies, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Hatha yoga is the style with which most people are familiar. Among some of the other popular styles of yoga are *Zen*, *Ashtanga*, *Bikram* or hot yoga, and *Kundalini*. Yoga in general has gradually been gaining respect and recognition in the West. Western scholars are beginning to recognize the power of yoga and are acknowledging that it may hold the key to healing for many ailments of the mind and body. While the general Western perception of yoga is that it is a

form of exercise that helps one to tone the body, build strength, and become more flexible, the reality is that this is just a fraction of what yoga has to offer. Kraftsow (2002) explained that while he was excited about the popularity of yoga in the West, he suggested that few people understood the profundity of what it has to offer:

The yoga tradition is a living tradition, after all, and I applaud any and every attempt to help people improve the quality of their lives at any level, But, because most of these modern styles do not reflect the profound depth of that tradition, the deeper, inner teachings are not reaching a lot of Western students. The tradition is at risk of being lost with the rise of its popularity. (p. xvii)

A Brief History of Yoga

Most references of Yoga date back as far as ten thousand years, (Ajaya, 1983; Kaur-Khalsa, 2001). Yoga has its roots in many diverse cultures, although it is generally recognized as coming from Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and has been handed down through the *Rig Veda*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (Ajaya, 1983; Feuerstein, 1998; Khalsa, 2001).

The *Vedas* are the original sacred texts rooted in Hindu philosophy. According to Pond (2003), they were written in poetic style and are open for interpretation by the individual. The *Vedas* are dated about fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ and are said to be an accumulation of writings gathered over an immense time period. From these writings came the *Upanishads*, which Pond asserted are the internalization of the teachings of the *Vedas*. From the *Upanishads* came Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* and the *Bhagavad Gita* (Pond, 2003). The *yoga sutra* contains the eight limbs of yoga, which will be discussed at length since they form the basis of yogic teachings and are the foundation of the yoga teacher training program.

The Nature of Yoga

Yoga is considered to be a sacred science rather than a religious doctrine, a sort of addendum to any faith (Broad, 2012; Feuerstein, 1998; Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 2014). This is a technology that teaches how to care for and maintain the body, mind, and spirit. The technology was secretly guarded until the eight limbs of yoga were codified in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, somewhere between 200-800 AD (Khalsa, 2001).

The word yoga means *union* and, according to Chidananda (1997), is a practical science of self-realization. Chidananda described yoga as being a set of easily understood techniques that allow a person to discard the pollution of the body and mind in order to concentrate on divinity. In Yogic thinking, according to Ajaya (1983), philosophy and psychology are not separated in understanding all aspects of humanity; he stated that yoga seeks to free man from oppression, saying, "Yoga psychology considers consciousness to be the essence of a person, and all else to be the environment in which consciousness is embedded" (p. 181). Ajaya (1983) further stated:

Yoga psychology is all-inclusive; it deals with all three aspects of the human being. As one comes to understand karma, the way in which his past actions influence his present circumstances, he begins to accept responsibility for himself, yet he does not dwell on his past actions. Through meditation, he learns how to let go of his involvement with his past to fully experience the present moment. (p. 72)

Ajaya pointed out that from a Buddhist perspective, one's true nature is that of pure consciousness, and the objective of yoga is to help the individual reach self-realization by removing impurities and encumbrances that help disguise the true self. Yoga addresses every facet of a person's life, including helping an individual become attuned to the regulation of physical processes such as breathing and diet, while also focusing on habit patterns, emotions and states of mind, values, unconscious processes, and desires. According to Ajaya (1983), where the Western approach would employ many disciplines to address these issues, yoga

encompasses them all. On a fundamental level, yoga is not just about transforming one's body, but rather, it can lead to transforming one's life.

In comparing Eastern and Western philosophical and psychological perspectives, Ajaya (1983) noted that Western psychology encompasses the study of how we feel, what we say, and what we do, while the study of the human spirit is relegated to philosophical inquiry. Ajaya contended that, although approaches in modern psychotherapy can work with issues that cause unhappiness, the methods are superficial because they often do not reach the principal causes.

Welwood (2000) also considered the idea that conventional Western psychology has a narrow and limited view of human nature and potential. He stated that it focuses on the conditioned mind, which explains our way of being from the way the psyche deals with our inner conflicts and defense patterns stemming from the dynamics of our childhood that get played out repeatedly in adulthood. In contrast, the Eastern view of the psyche is much more simplistic. Eastern philosophical teachings encourage us to look within ourselves for the answers to release us from the conditioning that keeps many of us stuck living mediocre lives because we do not believe we deserve anything better.

Bharati (n.d.) echoed this sentiment when he talked about the nature of yoga being to take us beyond the limits of our mind and personality saying that the word yoga essentially means *unity*. The unity he is addressing is that which goes past the individual and encompasses mind, body, and spirit and transcends the limitations we put on ourselves, as well as our sense of self. Rao (2002) pointed to the Eastern view of the body movement as being initiated by thought and thought being generated by *prana*, which is the universal life energy of breath. Thus, thought, *Prana*, and the body are all interconnected.

Patanjali's yoga sutras: Yogic thought. The *Yoga Sutra*, contain the essence of yogic thought and philosophy. As previously mentioned, the Eight Limbs of yoga are at the heart of all yoga teacher training curriculums. The *sutras* are believed to be the work of the ancient Indian sage *Patanjali*. Although he is not credited with actually authoring the *sutras*, he organized and codified the writings that came out of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* (Ajaya, 1983; Bhajan 2003; Chidananda 1997; Kaur-Khalsa 1996; Krishna 1972, Morgan, 2001; Pond, 2003, Rao, 2002). The *yoga sutras* are written in Sanskrit and contain about 200 aphorisms. Dowdle (2009) reflected on the purpose of Patanjali's *yoga sutras* and submitted that they are not so much edicts of right and wrong, but rather, they are a way for one to avoid suffering and difficulty in life by cultivating behaviors that ultimately lead to joy, happiness, and personal freedom. The fundamental purpose of yoga is to guide the practitioner to self-realization and personal transformation. The Sutras were divided into four sections. The Eight Limbs of yoga are contained within the second section and have about 55 of the aphorisms (Feuerstein, 1998). Feuerstein noted the similarities between the eight limbs of yoga and the Buddhist Eight-Fold Path.

The eight limbs of yoga. The first two limbs of the yogic path are the *Yamas* and the *Niyamas*, and each of these have five ethical principles. The *Yamas* are about universal morality and describe suggestions for how one should conduct one's self with others and in the world at large. The *Niyamas* have five suggestions for how we should care for ourselves; they are personal observances. The third limb is the *Asanas*, or postures; this is what most Westerners are familiar with and recognize as being yoga. The fourth limb is *Pranayama*, which is about how we use our breath and, ultimately, our physical energy. Limb five emphasizes how we control our senses; limb six speaks about concentration and awareness, which is essentially meditation. Limbs seven and eight are about devotion and cultivation of the Divine and ultimately union with the Divine (Devi, 2000; Feuerstein, 1998; Jakubczak, 2004; Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 2014). Each limb is discussed individually below.

The Yamas: Universal morality. The *Yamas* are restraints and contain five precepts for social interaction, delineating how we should treat other sentient beings (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011):

- *Ahimsa* is the first of the *Yamas* and teaches non-violence; we should not harm another sentient being, or ourselves with thoughts, words, or deeds. It is about showing compassion to all living things. There have been so many interpretations of what *Ahimsa* really means and how one can incorporate it into one's life. Lee (2016) invited us to "proactively cultivate peace and reverence for all beings" (p. 28), while Adele (2009) proposed that the way to a life of non-violence is through finding our own courage, creating balance in our lives, working through feelings of powerlessness, and cultivating self-love and developing compassion. Simply put, "Whatever we find ourselves engaged in, this jewel of Ahimsa, or non-violence, asks us to step lightly, do no harm, and to honor the relationship we have with the Earth, with each other and with ourselves" (Adele, 2009, p. 39).
- *Satya* is about truthfulness and integrity; it calls for us to live authentically, conjointly it is about keeping one's own counsel if speaking the truth could harm another. Lee (2016) explained *Satya* is also about considering what and how we say things, essentially to avoid gossip, and to take responsibility for keeping our word. *Satya* addresses lies of commission and omission along with criticism and cynicism, whether we are dealing with ourselves or with others. *Satya* says if we are not living authentically, then we are living a lie. (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015)

- *Asteya* is the third *Yama* and addresses stealing. *Asteya* is not just about not taking things that do not belong to us, but also about not taking advantage of others, including taking their attention, time, ideas, or participating in community or cultural activities that may become detrimental to others. It speaks to stealing from others by manipulation of emotions, particularly fear and anxiety. *Asteya* also talks about stealing from ourselves, when we rationalize or normalize behavior we know to be detrimental to our health and wellbeing. *Asteya* addresses such things as jealousy, greed, feelings of inadequacy, and arrogance. *Asteya* invites us to give freely of ourselves to others. (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015) The following paragraph seems to contain the essence of the principle of *Asteya*:

When nurturing our inner Self takes priority over satisfying our outer desires, we realize that by giving, we receive, and vice-versa. Shifting the way we think about giving and receiving can transform our consciousness and enable us to avoid future suffering based on expectation. Being generous with others without expecting anything in return nurtures our heart-mind and promotes loving-kindness. Giving is a sacrifice, an offering to another, and a letting go of something. In giving, we open ourselves up a bit and share our heart with another person. (Bachman, 2011, p. 155)

- *Brahmacharya*, the fourth *yama*, is about sensory control, particularly when it comes to sexual energy, which is considered from a yogic perspective to be the most destructive of all desires because of its potential for manifesting in destructive and manipulative relationships. However, *Brahmacharya* is not a call for celibacy, but rather the mindful expression of our sexual urges. It is about using sexual energy to connect on a spiritual level so that we can avoid causing harm to others by indulging in sexual relationships that are not honest.

From a holistic point of view, *brahmacharya* speaks to the conserving of vital energy from all sensual desires, the avoidance of overindulgence, which can lead to

depletion of energy, and ultimately, addiction and emotional and physical stress (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015). Adele (2009) captured the essence of what is expected of us regarding *Brahmacharya* when she advised, “In yogic thought, there is a moment in time when we reach the perfect limit of what we are engaged in. It is this moment of “just enough” that we need to recognize” (p. 78).

- *Aparigraha* is about non-attachment. *Aparigraha* cautions against attachment and the suffering that ensues. *Aparigraha* invites us to share, to enjoy the moment, without trying to hold on to it for fear another like it will not come again, to be grateful for what we have, not to monopolize a conversation, or another’s time, but rather to listen, and to avoid exploiting others. It encourages us to accept what is and to appreciate what we have, and to recognize the impermanence of all things. With *Aparigraha*, we learn to let go of what does not serve us, whether that be possession, emotion, or person. *Aparigraha* is about avoiding dependency, overcoming envy and fear of lack, to acknowledge the blessings and value the opportunities for growth in every experience. It asks us to recognize our motivation in acquiring things (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015). Lee (2016) stated, “suffering is inevitable as long as we grasp outwardly for things to fill us up and to make us feel better” (p. 78).

The Niyamas: Personal observances. *The Niyamas are a set of personal ethical principles that are lifelong suggestions for how we should treat ourselves with integrity. They are a way for us to explore inner harmony and emotional strength. When we treat ourselves with care, we invite ourselves to a path of positive awareness and spiritual transformation.*

- *Asuca* is the first of the *Niyamas*, which is purity; this is about cleanliness of both body and mind, inspiring freedom from emotions such as hate, anger, lust, greed, and pride. We are also invited to purify the body through cleanliness and by keeping toxins from invading by consuming a clean diet. *Sauca* encourages us to create space in our lives by eliminating physical and emotional clutter. It is about slowing down and living in the moment, cultivating mindfulness, living intentionally, and appreciating the little things (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015)
- *Santosa* is the second of the five *Niyamas*, and it means contentment. This is about living in gratitude for what one has even when things are rough. It is about being able to accept that there is purpose to everything and about being content with what we have rather than lamenting for the things we do not. Although *Santosa* is about contentment, it is not encouraging complacency; it teaches us to value the moment as it is, but to continue to move in a positive direction. Rama (1979) spoke of the insatiability of man's desires and cautioned that our efforts in doing something should be for the pure joy of it and not being attached to the outcome. *Santosa* is about accepting our own limitations and not judging others for theirs; it is also about not trying to live up to what others expect of us. Although we may not have control over some events in our lives, we do have control over how we respond to them. *Santosa* is essentially about cultivating an attitude of gratitude and counting one's blessings (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015) "True freedom and contentment begin to find their way to us when we can see things as they are, neutral, and not spend so much energy manipulating things according to our preferences" (Adele, 2009, p. 123).

- *Tapas*, which is the third *Niyama*, presents balance and we learn to share; it is also about the need for the ego to become focused and to cultivate self-control, and to move forward to accomplish our goals. Lee (2016) stated, “With *Tapas* we need to be fully alive, and we must be on ‘fire’ with purpose. We need to bring passion, diligence and devotion along with non- attachment and life will be a grand adventure.” (p. 113) *Tapas* encourages us to allow ourselves to discard old thought patterns that have sabotaged us in the past, to eliminate self-doubt and to redirect ourselves towards getting rid of behaviors that have kept us enslaved. It is about creating new behaviors and learning to trust the process. *Tapas* invites us to keep the body fit by watching what we eat and paying attention to posture and breath. When we cultivate a daily disciplined practice of *Sadhana* and make the commitment to follow through, *Tapas* will help move us towards spiritual and personal transformation. (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015).
- *Svadhyaya*, the fourth *Niyama*, is about studying the self and cultivating reflective practices and accepting our own limitations; it is about coming to know the true self. With *Svadhyaya*, we can put ourselves in a position to look at our lives from a more realistic perspective, seeing what is there and not what we wish was there. It is about letting go of old paradigms, cultivating intuition, and becoming spiritually aware. When we cultivate *Svadhyaya*, we are inviting learning and the pursuit of knowledge (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015).
- *Ishvara pranidhana* is the last of the *Niyamas*; it is about surrender and has to do with spirituality or faith and the contemplation of such. This is when we become spiritual seekers embracing a higher purpose in our lives. It is about allowing and not being

attached to outcomes, but rather making the most of whatever comes our way. However, that does not mean we are to be held hostage to our negative choices or experiences; we get to choose how we react to the events of our lives, and in those choices, we allow for growth even if the choice was not one that immediately served us. *Ishvara pranidhana* is about faith and our willingness to persevere with integrity. With *Ishvara pranidhana*, we are striving to let go of the ego and surrender to a higher power. (Adele, 2009; Bachman, 2011; Lee, 2016; Rama, 1979; Sarbacker & Kimple, 2015).

The *yamas* and the *niyamas* are not commandments as such, but rather a code of moral ethics one strives towards during the course of one's lifetime. Perfection is not expected, but growth and the cultivation of physical, emotional, and spiritual contentment are the goals.

The Asanas: The postures. The third limb of the eight limbs of yoga is *Asana*, which are the body postures and, as previously stated, are what most Westerners recognize as *yoga*. These postures have many benefits, both physically and mentally. They promote flexibility, balance, and strength of the body and help challenge the practitioner to calm the mind and cultivate focus. The purpose of the *asanas* aside from promoting physical well-being, according to Rama (1979), are to arouse the Kundalini energy, which is said to reside at the base of the spine and to prepare the practitioner for concentration and meditation. Bachman (2011) discussed the purpose of the *asanas* as being to help the practitioner to learn to be still and erect in order to help the flow of breath.

Frawley (1999) stated the purpose of the *asanas* quite eloquently when he said:

Asana is the main yogic tool for balancing the physical body. It consists of various postures and physical movements performed to release tension, improve flexibility, maximize the flow of energy, and remove friction. The purpose of *Asana* is to create a free flow of energy in order to help direct our attention within. (p. 208)

Although much of the research that has looked at the practice of the yoga Asanas as being beneficial to the body, as with any form of body movement there are risks of injury. Broad (2012) discussed some of the likely causes of injury while practicing yoga, the most common being that a person should know his/her own limitations, practicing obsessively, or practicing in large classes with inadequately trained teachers. Broad talked about how in recent years this has been recognized and there have been efforts made to address it.

Pranayama: Breath. *Pranayama*, the fourth limb of Yoga, is about controlling energy in the body. The yogic term for energy is *prana*. Specific conscious breath techniques prepare the practitioner for meditation (Kraftsow, 2002; McCall, 2007; Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 2014.) Breath control is an important aspect of yoga, particularly when practicing the *asanas*. When doing both simultaneously, they are considered in the Yoga Sutra to be the highest form of self-discipline. The respiratory system and nervous system are both soothed, cravings are reduced, and as previously mentioned, the mind is prepared for the concentration of meditation (Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 2014). Breathing is the only function of the human body that is both voluntary and involuntary. The benefits of breath concentration are many, including the release of stress, building physical endurance, pain management, and the improvement of mental concentration. Correct breathing also correlates with correct posture (Lindsey-Werhner, 2012).

According to yogic teachings, energy is distributed throughout the body by controlling the breath through the conscious breathing techniques that affect energy pathways called *nadis*. Yoga tradition accounts for 72,000 *nadis* throughout the body (Lindsey-Werhner 2012; Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 2014). These energy pathways meet at centers known as *chakras*, which are found along the area of the body corresponding with the spinal cord. According to yoga tradition, there are three main *nadis*: the *susumna*, which is analogous to the spine, and *ida* and *pingala*.

Ida and *pingala* are represented by two serpents which begin to curl along the *susumna* starting at the base of the spine and moving up through the *chakras*. The ultimate goal of yoga is to move the energy from the base of the spine up through the *chakras* to activate the kundalini energy (Devi, 2000; Finney, 2004; Kaur-Khalsa, 1996; Kaur-Khalsa, 2001; Kraftsow, 2002; Lindsey-Werhner 2012; Rama, Ballentine & Ajaya, 2014). It is interesting that if one were to visualize the movement of *ida* and *pingala* along the *susumna*, it would be comparable to the caduceus symbol of Western medicine.

Pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi: Levels of consciousness. The preceding four limbs are the preparation for learning to control the senses progressively through deeper levels of focus and concentration; the last four limbs of yoga are basically about meditation. In *pratyahara*, the fifth limb of yoga, we begin to learn to withdraw the senses from external objects. There are many methods of meditation; the methods taught in the Kundalini Teacher training program were third eye focus, *mantra* and *mudra*, sound current (gong). When the senses are not functioning in their normal manner, they become more defined. Each of the last three limbs are levels of sensory withdrawal. First there is *dharana*, which is the sixth limb of yoga; the seventh is *dhyana*, and *samadhi*, the eighth and final limb. The ultimate goal of yoga is to go deeper, and deeper until one reaches *samadhi* where one merges with the divine, reaching a state of ultimate bliss where one is no longer separated out but becomes part of the collective whole (Bhajan, 2003; Broad, 2012; Frawley 1999; Feuerstein 1998; Khalsa, 2001; Kaur-Khalsa, 1996; Khalsa and O'Keefe, 2002; Krishna, 1972)

Yoga Style

There are several styles of yoga that are popular and practiced in the West, which are worth mentioning for differences to be appreciated. Broad (2012) listed several styles of yoga that he contended have morphed out of the ancient traditional styles. The five most popular are

briefly discussed. The concentration in the majority of Western yoga practices are on the postures, breathing techniques, and meditation. The style most people are familiar with is *hatha* yoga. The goal is to perform the postures with concentration and grace, to stretch the muscles and skeletal system of the body. Broad described *Ashtanga* yoga as being more physically demanding as the person focuses on making the movements flow with the breath. *Vinyasa* is described as being almost a form of dance, with flowing continual movement using the breath. *Bikram* yoga has become quite popular. It is also known as *hot yoga* and utilizes 26 postures that the practitioner works through in a heated room; Broad described this as challenging. *Kundalini* yoga is the yoga taught in the teacher training program and is described by Broad as having the purpose of awakening the Kundalini, which is the energy that is said to reside at the base of the spine. Since Kundalini yoga is the subject of the teacher training program, it will be discussed with a little more detail.

Kundalini Yoga

Khalsa and O’Keeffe (2002) described Kundalini yoga as a spiritual technology that is powerful and transformative. Kundalini yoga comprises four elements; they are postures (*asanas*), breathing (*pranayama*), meditations (*pratyahara*), and chanting (*mantra*). Simply explained, each posture is used with the breath and is designed to have a specific effect on an area or system of the body/mind. A set of postures form a *Kriya*. Each *Kriya* addresses a certain spiritual or physical need. The second element is conscious breathing. The two main breathing exercises used in Kundalini yoga are long, deep breathing (diaphragmatic) and breath of fire. In long, deep breathing, as one breathes in, the belly is pushed out, and when letting go of the breath, the belly is pulled back toward the spine. The breath is drawn up through the lungs and then allowed to return back to the belly on the out breath. Breath of fire is rather like the

breathing that is taught in birthing classes, where one pants rapidly through the mouth. In Kundalini yoga, it is primarily done through the nose, using the same force to let the breath out, as drawing it in. The third element of kundalini yoga is meditation, which is often coupled with the fourth element, the chanting of a *mantra* (Kaur-Khalsa, 2001; Kaur-Khalsa 1996; Lindsey-Wehner, 2012).

A *mantra* is a prayer or poem written in Sanskrit that is recited over and over again. Mantras are essential practices of the Buddhist and Hindu faiths. In Kundalini yoga meditations, the mantra may be recited continually, usually for 3, 11, or 31 minutes or up to 2.5 hours (Bhajan, 2003). Two of the most recited Mantras in Kundalini yoga are *Sat Nam*, which loosely translated means *truth is my identity* (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012). This mantra is also used as a greeting and as a way of breaking down the *in* and *out* breath (breathing in to *Sat*, and out to *Nam*). The second most common mantra is what is known as the *Adi Mantra*, *Ong Namō, Guru Dev Namō*, which means I bow to the creative wisdom, I bow to the divine teacher within, and all those who have come before me (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012). It is used to *tune in* at the start of each Kundalini yoga session and is recited three times. Each session begins with the practitioner in a seated position, usually with legs crossed, with hands in prayer pose while the *Adi Mantra* is recited; then, the hands come down to the knees in *Gian Mudra*, which is the classic pose of touching the thumb and forefinger together and resting the wrists on the knee. (Bhajan, 2003; Kaur-Khalsa 2001, Lindsey-Wehner, 2012). A *Mudra* is a hand position. One of the most universally recognized *Mudra* is Prayer pose (Kaur-Khalsa, 2001).

Through yogic postures, conscious breath, deep meditation and chanting, Kundalini Yoga aligns the body, mind, and spirit, giving the practitioner access to the incredible powers and wisdom stored within. It is a non-denominational yoga practice for everyone. The practice of

Kundalini Yoga is said to balance the glandular system, strengthen the nervous system, and help control the energy of the mind (Bhajan, 2003; Kaur-Khalsa, 1996; Lindsey-Wehner, 2012).

Originally, these techniques were passed down verbally through the ages, and it was forbidden to teach them to outsiders until Yogi Bhajan defied tradition and began teaching them to Westerners in 1969 (Khalsa 1996).

Sadhana is a personal spiritual practice that is part of the Kundalini experience and also the Sikh faith. It is usually done first thing in the morning before sunrise, a time that is known as the *amrit vela*, the ambrosial hours, which are between 4 a.m. – 7 a.m. when it is said that one is closer to the Divine (Kaur-Khalsa, 1996). *Sadhana* can be done alone or as a group at an *ashram* or *gurdwara*. *Sadhana* is a practice of discipline, and in the Kundalini yoga teacher training program, each student was charged with completing 40 days of personal *sadhana*, along with attending several group *sadhanas*.

There are six parts to a *sadhana* practice and in the *ashram* or *gurdwara*, the practice would usually take 2.5 hours. However, for personal *sadhana*, one can complete the six parts in as little as 30 minutes. First, one tunes in with a *mantra* called the *adi mantra*; then there is the physical preparation, which is called a *kriya*. A *kriya* is a set of exercises that are designed to move the practitioner toward a specific outcome (Kaur-Khalsa, 2001; Kaur-Khalsa 1996; Lindsey-Wehner, 2012). Once the *kriya*/exercises have been completed, a *mantra* is recited for several minutes, followed by deep relaxation, then meditation, and finally a closing prayer. If one is attending group *sadhana*, the meditation takes the form of listening to the reading of the *japji*, which is a scripture from the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

Tantric yoga is an aspect of Kundalini yoga, and each student was required to participate in this intensive one-day meditation workshop, which was integrated into the curriculum. There

appears to be no specific peer-reviewed research regarding this meditation technique, possibly because it is unique to the practice of Kundalini yoga and, as such, a product of the 3HO organization. White Tantric Yoga is completed in pairs as a series of group meditations. One sits facing a partner; there are between six and eight meditative *kriyas* throughout the day. As previously mentioned, a *kriya* is a meditation incorporating a yoga posture or hand position (*mudra*) a mental focus and or *mantra*, sometimes accompanied by music. *Kriyas* vary in length from 11-62 minutes with breaks between each *kriya*. White Tantric Yoga is an intense, challenging meditative experience.

The Benefits of Yoga

Although it is not the focus of this endeavor to advocate for the efficacy of yoga, it would be remiss to ignore the implications of current research. While the results of much of the research is preliminary, and there appears to be resounding calls for more rigorous analyses regarding indiscriminate variables, current research appears to be yielding encouraging results indicating that yoga may have positive effects on health and well-being.

It has been well documented in scientific research that physical exercise is beneficial to health. However, it may be that yoga has specific qualities in addition to the utilization of the physical aspects that make it particularly attractive, and why it is being increasingly recognized—particularly by holistic and naturopathic health profession—as being a viable complementary therapy to enhance treatment and contribute to overall well-being. Indeed, McCall (2007) pointed out that one of the differences between yoga therapy and allopathic medicine modalities is the Western reductionist view in contrast to the holistic yogic approach regarding treatment. Although he acknowledged that allopathic medicine is valuable when it comes to treatment in the case of accidents and emergency situations, he suggested that it is

found to be lacking when it comes to treating the whole person. McCall (2007) noted that when there is an absence of symptoms, the Western doctor has nothing to treat, whereas in the yogic tradition health is defined by the overall physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of the person. McCall suggested that yoga therapy is suited to treating chronic health problems due to accumulated effects of regular practice and that the person is encouraged to be fully engaged in his/her own healing process, in contrast to the doctor-controlled Western treatment mentality.

According to *Forbes* magazine and Yoga Alliance (2016), over 36 million people are practicing yoga in the United States. A study conducted by Yoga Alliance found that of those who are practicing, 72% are women. They cited the top five reasons given for practicing yoga are to increase flexibility, reduce stress, improve general fitness, improve health and enhance physical fitness.

The practice of yoga has been linked as possibly being beneficial for many health problems such as pain management for conditions such as arthritis, back pain, fibromyalgia, headaches, and carpal tunnel syndrome. Other disorders that researchers have considered are obesity, insomnia, chronic fatigue syndrome, multiple sclerosis, irritable bowel syndrome, cancer, and even in the treatment of HIV/AIDS and stuttering. Yoga has also been found to be beneficial in helping to alleviate some symptoms of Menopause. (Kaufman, 2016; McCall, 2007). The following is a brief look at some of the examples of the kinds of research that has been conducted regarding the value of yoga as a complementary treatment modality for several of society's most common ailments, both physical and mental.

Yoga and stress. The connection of stress to overall well-being is well documented. Stress has been attributed as the precursor to many illnesses and diseases, both physical and mental (McCall, 2007). There is preliminary supportive evidence that the practice of Yoga may

be beneficial for the management and reduction of stress because it helps moderate the effects of the hormone cortisol (Hopkins et al., 2016; Pascoe & Bauer, 2015; Riley & Park, 2015; Sharma, 2014). Though it was acknowledged that there were several limitations in the studies, including small sample size and not knowing which aspects of yoga were helpful, the researchers appeared to find the results to be encouraging. Sharma (2014) conducted a systemic review of the literature involving all styles of yoga using 17 articles from around the world and found that yoga was a *promising* modality for stress management, despite the limitations previously mentioned.

Yoga and cardiovascular disease. Barrows and Fleury (2016) conducted a review of the literature with the objective being to provide an evaluation of yoga interventions that reduced cardiovascular disease risk for older adults. They searched four databases for randomized control trials of yoga interventions and found that there were significant health benefits, including favorable changes in blood pressure body composition, glucose, and lipids. However, they noted that their study did not delineate the specific components of yoga interventions. They advocated for further research that would identify the specific aspects of yoga—either physical, mental, or spiritual—the sequence of selected poses, the length of time each pose was held, the style of yoga practiced, and the protocols for different yoga traditions.

McCall (2007) also discussed the merits of yoga as an intervention for cardiovascular disease when he noted that heart disease is the leading cause of death in the industrialized world. In discussing studies from around the world, which ranged in their depth of investigation from being anecdotal to meticulous, he suggested that the arguments were persuasive and in favor of yoga as an intervention. Broad (2012) directed attention to one study, which was conducted at the University of Pennsylvania in 2009, where 26 participants practiced Iyengar yoga for 3

months, and it was found that they lowered their levels of blood pressure. However, no other details were given about this particular study, so it is difficult to ascertain to what degree the lower levels of hypertension could be attributed specifically to the practice of yoga.

Yoga and diabetes. Another disease that in recent years has seen troubling rates of growth is Type 2 diabetes. There have been studies conducted on the efficacy of yoga in treating the symptoms of diabetes. Sharma and Knowlden (2012) conducted one such study over the course of 18 years. Although Sharma and Knowlden admitted that there were limitations with the study such as small sample size, they found that there was a significant decrease in blood sugar levels. They suggested that the rates of diabetes are expected to increase in the future, and they believed yoga-based therapies have much potential for use in treatment; however, they cautioned that more rigorous research needs to be undertaken with larger sample sizes, over longer periods of time, although 18 years would appear to have been substantial.

Broad (2012) also made note of the benefit of yoga in treating diabetes. He suggested that it may temper the impact of symptoms of diabetes by helping to regulate elevated levels of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol, which he stated are known to raise blood sugar levels.

Yoga and depression. Mehta and Sharma (2010) conducted a review of the literature and found that yoga as an adjunct therapy was beneficial for people suffering with clinical depression, particularly for people with cancer diagnosis and older adults dealing with issues of aging. As with many other studies, they found that the studies did not define which aspects of yoga were most helpful, although they discussed the merits of both the meditative and movement aspects of yoga. Given these limitations, Mehta and Sharma advocated for additional studies to be conducted that consider diversification in variables such as socioeconomic and ethnic groups and other conditions besides cancer; they also advocated for studies conducted with children, and

the use of specific styles and aspects of yoga. Other limitations that they noted included the fact that they had only used studies that were published in English and the timeframe only spanned 5 years. However, regardless of the limitations, Mehta and Sharma's study once again appeared to produce encouraging results.

Yoga and Trauma. Yoga has been suggested for use in the treatment of trauma and as a coping tool for the effects of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In a meta review Macy, Jones, Graham, and Roach (2015) questioned whether there was any evidence that yoga could be an effective treatment for the effects of trauma, and what recommendations could be made for its use for people who have been exposed to trauma. Macy et al. discovered a large literature advocating for the use of yoga in the treatment of trauma and examined the findings. After pointing out the limitations of the studies, which included 13 reviews that had examined 185 studies. Macy et al. conceded that although the findings were preliminary and lacking consistency, and also admitted that yoga was used as a supplementary therapy, they found the results to be encouraging. However, they pointed out that the studies did not delineate which aspects of yoga were especially helpful. Macy et al. speculated on the meditative component of yoga therapy as being most helpful for depression. Mehta and Sharma (2010) also conducted a systematic qualitative review of literature related to the benefit of yoga in treating clinical depression.

Yoga and cancer. Shannahoff-Khalsa (2005) described Kundalini yoga techniques as *highly effective* in helping cancer patients. However, they acknowledged such limitations as a steep learning curve for the techniques and challenges that could inhibit an individual's ability to utilize the techniques, possibly because of a particular cancer diagnosis. Shannahoff-Khalsa also

noted that the role of the therapist and the interaction between both therapist and patient was important, along with the willingness of the participant to practice the techniques.

Yoga and personal transformation and relationships. Ross, Bevans, Friedman, Williams, and Thomas (2014) commented on the plethora of research discussing the efficacy of yoga for many major health conditions but noted there was a paucity of information regarding how yoga affected personal relationships, particularly those between the yoga instructor and students. Ross et al. suggested that research on how yoga affects relationships might lead to positive benefits for one's overall health. In light of the present enquiry, their study was of avuncular interest. Ross et al. used content analysis to qualitatively analyze written comments made regarding yoga improving interpersonal relationships. Four themes emerged that suggested that yoga led to personal transformation and spiritual transcendence, increased social interaction, and provided coping mechanisms when people suffer loss of or difficulties in relationships. Those who participated in the study appeared to believe that practicing yoga together changed their way of being in that they became more patient, kind, mindful, and self-aware.

Although this study produced one of the larger sample sizes the results relied on the interpretation of answers of an on-line survey from participants who were at least 18 years old and had been practicing at least weekly for a minimum of 2 months. The original number of individuals who were randomly selected to participate in this study was 4,300 from 15 studios around the country. Of those who responded, a final sample of 1,045 was acquired, which was less than 25% of the original random selection.

The Risks of Physical Yoga and Practice

Despite the fact that the majority of research findings were positive, there were several that did not advocate for the practice of yoga. Patwardhan, (2017) acknowledged that, whereas

yoga may have beneficial effects in mitigating the impact of certain diseases, he talked about substantial shortcomings in the practice, policy, and research of yoga and suggested that these undermine its optimal use. Patwardhan suggested that much of the research on the benefits of yoga are misleading firstly due to the demographics of the “typical” yoga practitioner who he projects as being young, white, female, college educated with good health, and a high income. He suggested that benefits might not be due to the exercises, but rather to the breathing and meditative qualities of yoga; he stated that without these, yoga would be no better than any other exercise modality. Patwardhan questioned the risks, particularly in doing certain poses and advocated for protections from the risks of injury due to inadequate training and expertise of the instructors. He also appeared to have an issue with possible conflict with specific faith systems.

Even though Broad (2012) is an advocate for yoga, since he cultivates his own practice, he also cautioned against some of the dangers of the physical aspects of yoga, discussing severe injuries from strokes to nerve damage, which he suggested mostly came from inexperienced instructors and over-zealous practitioners, and many times, from preexisting injuries from other forms of exercise. Broad talked about several postures such as head stands and body twists as being responsible for many injuries. Broad’s research into possible factors for injury are described in the following paragraph:

The biggest was the changing nature of students. The poor Indians of yoga’s past normally squatted and sat cross-legged, the poses thus being in some respects an outgrowth of their daily lives. Now yoga had become a Western fad, swelling its unskilled ranks. Urbanites who sat in chairs all day now wanted to be weekend warriors despite their inflexibility and physical problems. Amateurish teachers ruled like drill sergeants and pushed cookie cutter agendas. Such factors became all the more deadly with the distractions of modern vanity which kept students and teachers from focusing on the importance of the here and now, from listening to their bodies and understanding when they were about to cross the line from wholesome stretch to excruciating harm. (p. 109)

McCall (2007) discussed the risks of injury and talked about how some of the most common ones such as neck injuries, hamstring tears, shoulder injuries, joint strains, knee injuries, and ankle and wrist injuries are sustained. McCall suggested most injuries could be avoided by acknowledging one's own limitations, being particular about one's teacher, and being mindful when practicing.

Conclusions

There are many levels from which one could talk about yoga; this short study has barely scratched the surface of the wealth of information that is available. It is easy to see that when one considers the epistemological underpinnings of the sheer volume of work that has been published on yogic philosophy one could easily get lost down the rabbit hole. It is unfortunate that so much of the research appears to focus on the physical aspects of yoga, which are only one of the Eight Limbs of yoga. From this perspective, only those who have the physical capacity to participate in these studies would be eligible. Yoga has so much more to offer than physical exercises and meditation.

Breathwork, chanting and the cultivation of a yogic diet are important aspects of yoga, and add to cumulative effects of this technology. While there is a plethora of information and research regarding yoga, there seems to be no agreement on which aspects may be the most beneficial. In exploring the idea of the possibility that yoga, as an ancient scientific technology, could be a catalyst for personal transformation, it is clear there is much wisdom to be found in the philosophical literature that is rooted in the teachings of the *yoga sutras*, *Upanishads* and other sacred writings.

In contemplating personal transformation, we must let go of the familiar and move toward the unknown, with the journey being the motivation, rather than a perceived destination.

The process of transforming requires one to question and challenge beliefs and assumptions, to create new paradigms, to push beyond familiar boundaries, and thereby, change one's world view. Yoga presents as a comprehensive system for addressing issues of the mind, body, and spirit, and, therefore, I confidently argue that a yogic lifestyle may be the perfect means by which an individual may transform his/her way of being. Growth may occur in any given moment, perhaps from a chance meeting, inspirational literature, a few words uttered by a spiritual leader, or from engaging in a course of study such as the ancient science of yoga.

To peruse the volume of information regarding the complexities of this ancient philosophy is beyond the scope of this short study. However, this review has offered a brief exposition into this extensive body of knowledge to help clarify an understanding of the motivation behind this endeavor. In exploring the influence of yogic philosophy and psychology as it relates to personal transformation, a clear argument regarding the potentiality for self-exploration and spiritual growth has been established.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research project was to explore whether the participation in a course of study involving yogic philosophy and practice could lead to personal transformation without a traumatic event or an epiphany being the motivating factor for change. Data was collected from my personal experience using field notes, personal journal, and memory. Data was also extracted from the experience of other participants from qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Research Question

The following research question was addressed: How can the experience of participation in a Kundalini Yoga teacher training program facilitate personal transformation?

Implementation of the Research

Participants

Prior to searching for and registering participants from whom initiating the collection of data for this research occurred, approval from Saybrook's IRB was obtained. Potential participants were recruited by posting an inquiry of interest on the class's private social media page. (Appendix A) The recruitment inquiry asked those who were interested to contact the researcher personally. Contact information was included with the inquiry.

Due to there being considerable diversity among the 13 students who shared the teacher training program experience with me, the only criteria for participation was that they had completed the program. The selection of participants was accomplished by accepting the first four students who expressed their interest and responded to the inquiry. Although all of the students in the teacher training program had expressed an interest in helping with this work, I

chose the first four who replied to the recruitment note that was placed on the class social media page in order to limit the possibility of personal bias by unconsciously choosing participants with whom I had spent more time during the program.

During initial introductions at the beginning of the program, motivations and personal reasons for participating in the program and what we hoped to come away with were shared. I disclosed that the main reason for my being there was to write about my experience for my doctoral dissertation. There was general acceptance and encouragement from all of the students, and all expressed an interest in sharing their own experiences with me. I chose only four of the twelve applicants, because I wanted to keep the data manageable.

Having spent time with each of my peers during the course of the program, along with observing everyone's participation from my vantage point from the rear of the room, it became clear to me that any combination of the twelve students would be representative of our group. All of the students seemed to approach the program with the same level of curiosity and anticipation. Since the conclusion of the class, there have been many reminiscent anecdotes about our time together from other students posted on the group social media page. Many of the members have shared how their lives have unfolded since the training. Several of the students, including one who was a participant in this study, are actively continuing their journey by attending other training programs. In fact, one of the participants in this study recently returned from a month-long program in Bali, Indonesia that she chronicled on her personal social media page. There have also been several occasions where those of us who were able have met for dinner or to attend Kirtan concerts or attend classes that were being taught by students from the group.

Yoga Teacher Training Programs

The yoga teacher training program I attended was doable for everyone, since each person was encouraged to participate from their own comfort level. However, it may have been challenging and somewhat confusing for a person who had no prior knowledge of yoga or its concepts and philosophies. It was clear from the outset of the program that all who enrolled had done so because they specifically wanted to immerse themselves in kundalini yoga, either out of curiosity, or because this was the style of yoga in which they were most interested.

There are many types of yoga teacher training programs. If one were to Google the term *yoga teacher training*, within seconds there are over a million results. If one is interested in yoga, and/or becoming a yoga instructor, there is a training program for everyone, from basic instruction in the asanas (poses) to the more acetic and spiritual retreats. There are trainings close to home, in almost every city and town in America, or one may opt for somewhere more exotic, or meaningful, such as India, Bali, or Greece. Kundalini yoga teacher training is a specific type of yoga, where the emphasis is on meditative practices such as chanting and breath work to facilitate the movement of energy and ultimately the rising of the kundalini.

Role as Student and Researcher

As previously mentioned, during introductions on the first day of the training, the group was notified of my intention to use my personal experience as the subject of my doctoral dissertation. It was explained to the group that, although I would be monitoring my own experience, and my own perceptions of the training program, I would not be commenting specifically on others' participation without their permission. I also explained that I was interested in comparing experiences after the training was over and that I would like to interview anyone who was interested in sharing their experience. I let the group know that when the time

came, I would be making a formal request that was in keeping with the requirements of the dissertation research process.

It was interesting to note that throughout the training program, although everyone was aware of my intention to document my personal experience and those of others who were interested in sharing, there was curiosity, but no intrusions, regarding my activities. The other students expressed interest and offered of help if I needed it. The instructors were also particularly helpful, always answering my questions and finding answers for the ones they could not answer immediately. While I observed and made note of group dynamics in general, I did not make note of specific behaviors involving other students, unless the observation affected me personally.

At the culmination of the training program, it was agreed that we would form a closed social media group that was only open to the participants of this class so that we could continue to encourage, inform, and support each other. Everyone who completed the teacher training program joined the group, and we have remained in contact since that time to the writing of this dissertation. The group has served as a positive venue to allow us to remain connected, sharing life events, invitations, and wisdom. As previously noted, it was to this platform that the recruitment letter for participation in this research project was posted.

Research Procedure

Participants who responded to the inquiry were contacted by telephone and/or email. The confidentiality of each participant was maintained during recruitment by limiting communication to email and/or telephone with each person individually. Each recruited participant was asked to meet with me for a private interview to answer questions about his/her experience in the yoga

teacher training program. Each participant was advised that the interview would require no longer than a 1-hour time commitment.

The venue and time for each interview was the public library that was most convenient for the participant. The interview was conducted either in a quiet corner of the library or a private room when one was available. Informed consent was discussed before the interview was conducted, and each participant was encouraged to ask questions before signing the document. Participants were informed that they were under no obligation at any time to participate in the study and could withdraw their permission to use any information they had shared with me at any time. Participants were also informed that each interview would be auditorily recorded (See Informed Consent Form; Appendix B). The interview was conducted using nine semi-structured, open-ended questions that allowed for the participant to share his/her own story. The questions were simple and short and carefully constructed so that each participant could answer from his/her own understanding. The questions asked the participant to describe their own experiences with aspects of the program and how they felt about them. (Appendix C).

Confidentiality

A pseudonym was assigned to each participant to preserve confidentiality of their identity. All demographics that could possibly identify a participant were removed, including the geographic location of the training. This is an annual training that is limited to few participants, which becomes highly immersive and personal. It is possible that participants could be identified by other students who participated in the same class should they read this dissertation.

Data Collection

Personal data collection method. Throughout the training, my notebook and journal were my constant companions. To help me to put experiences into perspective, I developed a

strategy of using one descriptive word or phrase to describe my emotion regarding the activities we engaged in or the concepts being shared. I placed an equal sign next to the emotion and wrote a word that would remind me of the activity with the time and date. While driving home in the evenings, I reflected on the day, and once home, I recorded my thoughts in my journal to capture the essence of each day. As previously noted, my field notes reflected general observations involving other group members only if I found that I was personally affected by their activities or conversation. For example, I had noticed that one of my peers was struggling to keep up with some of the physical exercises, as was I. In my field notes, I wrote about my thoughts regarding what I was feeling as a result of the observation.

After I had completed the interviews, I also answered the same questions I had posed to the participants. When reflecting on each question, I wrote down the first thing that came to me. I then set this aside and did not revisit it until after I had analyzed the interviews from the participants.

Participant data collection method. Data were collected using a qualitative interviewing style. A conceptual interview, according to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), could be a “joint endeavor to uncover the essential nature of a phenomenon” (p. 153). The questionnaire was constructed as suggested by Kvale and Brinkman so that the questions were not leading, but rather conducive to eliciting information based on what the interviewee really thought about a certain concept, in this case their participation in the various aspects of the Kundalini Teacher training program.

Each interview was conducted face-to-face. Although I asked the participants each question, each participant also received a copy of the questions at the time of the interview. Once the question had been asked, I refrained from speaking again until each question had been

answered by the participant. I wanted to be careful not to influence the participant's answers in any way. I was particularly interested in how each person interpreted the questions. The hope was that the perceptions of the participants regarding the meaning of the questions would yield valuable information as to their thoughts and feelings regarding their personal experience.

As suggested by Krueger, (2002) at the conclusion of each interview, I checked the recording and made notes regarding participants perceived demeanor, body language, eye contact, and general attitude, also any themes that initially seemed prevalent, along with hunches and ideas. Each interview and set of notes were immediately assigned a letter and number for identification and to protect the confidentiality of each participant.

Participant Data Analysis

The next step was to download the recorded interviews onto my computer after which I manually transcribed them verbatim. Once the interviews had been transcribed into text and I had listened to them several times for accuracy, they were erased from the digital recorder; however, the transcribed interviews were also saved on a backup drive. The transcripts were printed, and a photo copy was made of each, one for highlighting and making notations, and the other to be used later in the analysis process for cutting and pasting ideas onto a poster boards for easier viewing.

A five-subject notebook with colored tabs was purchased and a tab was assigned to each participant. The fifth tab was used for miscellaneous notes. Each transcript was carefully examined to look for meaningful themes. Initially, I read each transcript through several times making handwritten notes in the respective participant's tab in the notebook of thoughts and ideas as I went along. I then typed and printed these notes.

A descriptive coding method for identifying themes in the data was used as described by Saldana (2016) who suggested that descriptive coding is a basic and straightforward method that could be applied to most qualitative research and was especially suited to inexperienced researchers. Descriptive coding analyzes the topic rather than the content; this means that when a major theme is identified, it may have several subtopics that the researcher has identified as fitting in with the main theme. Rather than analyzing each subtopic individually, the main heading is analyzed contextually. A code or short phrase that has descriptive meaning in context to the subject matter is pulled from the data. Saldana described the nature of a code as, “A word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and or evocative attribute for a portion of language based or visual data” (p. 4). An example of this might be *unusual phenomena*.

Codes are eventually organized into categories or themes, which may stimulate further coding throughout the analysis process. Coding is subjective; its value lies in the meaning ascribed to it by the researcher. Saldana (2016) did not recommend this method for group interviews or case studies because he stated that it does not reveal individual thought processes.

I first reduced each interview to several short hand-written paragraphs of first impressions. These paragraphs were set aside to be compared with later analysis after I had completed the coding and I was satisfied that I had extracted as much information as I possibly could.

The next step was to print four additional copies of the transcribed interviews and to begin reading the answers to each question asked of each participant. I highlighted phrases and words that presented to me as being significant. Each word or phrase was assigned a code word in the margin. This continued for all nine questions, and the codes were entered in each

participant's tab in the notebook. At this point, it was important for me to step away from the research and to let it *rest*, as suggested by Krueger (2002) when he talked about not being able to see the *big picture* because of over immersion.

While leaving the written data to rest, I again listened to the auditory interviews and made notes regarding tone and voice inflection. I then compared these notes with notes made during the interviews and coded for each participant and added these notes to the respective tabs. After going back to the note book and re-examining the questions, if more ideas emerged, a second list of codes was noted for each question.

Each question, along with the initial codes that went with it, was cut out and pasted onto 22 x 28 white poster boards and pinned to a wall for easier viewing. Each question for all 4 participants was examined in this way, beginning with question one. If similar themes or patterns began to emerge, they were coded as either *primary* or *secondary*. Primary codes were words that could have several meanings. For instance, an example of this would be a word such as *empowerment*. There are many descriptive words that could be interpreted as empowering; however, one also needed to consider the context, the experience being described, and the person's body language when describing it. This was how I made the distinction between primary and secondary themes. This work was again left to sit for several days before going over the data and repeating the process several more times for new ideas or thoughts that might be revealed.

Comprehension is the first stage of a four-part strategy of data interpretation suggested by Morse and Field (1995). At this stage, a picture was beginning to emerge, and I needed to metaphorically *soak up the data*. The next step was to *synthesize* the words and phrases that had been extracted from the data. As the themes began to become familiar and were able to be

narrowed down further to units of meaning, stories for each participant began to develop, along with commonalities and variations on the themes.

The third step in this process is *theorizing*. I continued to explore the data, and to question and reason until I was satisfied that the most sense-making meaning had unfolded. This was where I began to recognize that there were themes that were common to all participants including myself. The last step was to *re-contextualize* by re-exploring the data to look at whether it reflected the stories that had developed from the data and to discover whether there could be alternative explanations.

After narrowing down ideas that I considered to be important, I moved on to create a single list of themes. Throughout this process, I kept notes of thoughts and ideas that came to me in the “miscellaneous” tab of the notebook.

Synopsis of Participant Data Analysis Tasks

- Digitally recorded interviews downloaded onto a computer
- Interviews manually transcribed verbatim by researcher
- Interview audio transcriptions listened to several times to ensure accuracy of transcription
- Several copies of transcribed interviews printed
- Initial thoughts and ideas noted in a five- tabbed notebook labeled ‘data analysis’
- A precis of each interview transcription written and entered into the respective tabs for each participant
- Preliminary ideas and notes made regarding summaries of interviews
- Descriptive coding method used to reduce data to themes, primary and secondary themes listed

- Answers to questions cut out and pasted onto poster boards in the numerical sequence that each was answered
- Coding continued until researcher was satisfied that no more data could be extracted
- Final themes listed

Researcher Data Analysis

The data collected from my personal experience were analyzed similarly to those for the other participants. Upon completion of the teacher training program, I had written a narrative of my experience using the field notes and journal entries I had made throughout the training program. I also incorporated my own answers to the interview questions. I had filed this narrative and had not revisited it until I began my personal data analysis. I then followed the same analysis procedure I used for the participants; my goal was to remain as objective as possible when reviewing the data of my own experience.

I found that fidelity was a challenge. I had purposely left my own story until last, so that there was a significant amount of time between the recording of the data and analyzing them. I was curious to see if when revisiting them, I was presented with the same images and memories. I repeated the process I had used for the participants. I gathered my field notes, journal, and the narrative I had written from the interview questions and read them over several times. I began pulling out words and phrases that jumped out at me. I then made lists of the terms by hand in the miscellaneous tab in the notebook I had reserved for initial coding. When I was satisfied I had a complete list, I transferred the list to the computer.

From the words I had written down, I began to form a picture of the various experiences I had during the program and wrote a short synopsis. I then began to categorize the words I had written down into themes. There were several things that stood out for me, the main one being

that I had something in common with all of my participants. I also began to recognize that the major themes I had extracted for the participants applied to me too: however, they applied in different ways.

Synopsis of Data Analysis for researcher:

- Gather data sources; journal, field notes, questionnaire narrative
- Begin coding for themes and record in tabbed notebook under miscellaneous notes
- Type up a precis of impressions for clearer understanding
- Apply the four-part strategy for analyzing data used for participants
- Allow notes to ‘rest’, revisiting after several days for further clarification
- Note differences and similarities between researcher and participants

Credibility of the Data

Establishing credibility in qualitative research can be problematic. According to Lock, Spirduso, and Silvermen (2000) and Cresswell (2003), accuracy of information, researcher’s personal biases, and the reaction of the participants to the interviewer are three important concerns. One of the issues that raised concerns for me while conducting the interviews for this study was that the participants were known personally to me. We had formed connections and friendships during the course of the training. The shared experience and various social group activities that continued after graduation of the program could suggest the possibility of over-familiarization, and perhaps lead to researcher bias. However, when considering the relationship between myself and the participants, it is also possible that the interviewees were more relaxed and comfortable with me, thereby allowing for more candid expression.

Although it was favorable that the participants could have felt more comfortable sharing with me because of our familiar relationships, I needed to consider the possibility of that

familiarity creating bias and contamination of the data. I wanted to be careful that I did not inadvertently prime the interviewee by engaging in familiar conversation before the interview. Upon meeting with each participant, I avoided engaging in familiar conversation until the conclusion of the interview and the recording device had been turned off. Other than greeting each participant, I purposefully kept the initial conversation brief and focused on explaining the procedures of the interview. The interview questions were carefully crafted to help limit misunderstandings as to what information was being requested. Each interviewee received a copy of the interview questions, which were rated at an eighth-grade reading level. I encouraged the participants to answer each question from their own understanding. While each interviewee was sharing his/her story, I refrained from interrupting; neither did I ask qualifying questions. There was the possibility that the interviewee may have perceived my asking more questions as leading them to answer a question in a specific way. Since I was present for the same experience, it was important for me to understand the same events/activities from the participants perspective. As previously noted, engaging in conversation about those shared events could possibly have influenced the participants' answers. When recording my own experience, I relied on the field notes and my journal, which had accompanied me throughout the training and subsequently served as recorded data aiding in helping me to retrieve details from my memory that I may otherwise have forgotten.

It is important to note that information gathered in interviews and from memory might not necessarily be an accurate portrayal of the experience because it is streamed through the interviewee's own views and perceptions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Creswell, 2003). Leedy & Ormrod advised that the human memory is very rarely accurate and often distorted to reflect what could or should have happened rather than what did happen. It should be noted as well that,

although I had recorded my thoughts and feelings regarding events throughout the teacher training, as Leedy & Ormrod suggested, these thoughts and feelings would be subjective.

Another important thing to note here is that, although there is no guarantee that the information gathered from the participants is credible, the data that were recorded is my subjective interpretation of the information that was imparted to me. Mendez (2013) suggested that in qualitative research methods reality and truth are basically produced from the perceptions and experience of the researcher and, therefore, as in traditional research methods cannot be validated by measurement. However, he also acknowledged that this approach to inquiry is valuable as it provides researchers with tools to find answers to perplexing questions. This research approach also helps the reader to have a better understanding of particular phenomenon or culture from the perspective of the personal experience of the researcher. Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed the merits of qualitative research when they talked about the richness of the data and its potential to reveal the complexities of the lived experience with vivid descriptions that often leave a strong impression on the reader.

It is hoped that in allowing the participants to tell their stories without interruption with their own perceptions of the intent of each question and by not asking qualifying questions, the data that were obtained have yielded insight into motivations for embracing a yogic path and the possibility for personal transformation.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In seeking to answer the research question of whether following a yogic path could lead to personal transformation, I have explored both the essence of my own lived experience and that of 4 other participants in a Kundalini yoga teacher training program. This study used a descriptive coding method to analyze the results of the data collected to address this research query. Five themes emerged from the data. *Empowerment*, *curiosity*, and *positive social interaction* were labeled as major themes because they were pervasive throughout the training program. To a lesser degree, *apprehension* and *unusual experiences*, although not as prevalent, were found to be significant themes since they both occurred to some extent for all participants including myself.

Major Themes From Descriptive Coding and Discussion

The most significant theme presented from the data was the sense of empowerment each participant related that manifested differently for each of them. There was the sense of overcoming physical barriers, working through emotional issues, personal achievement, and new-found confidence, feelings of being unconditionally accepted, and of expanding spiritual awareness. Participants also spoke of more effective decision making and alluded to higher self-esteem and self-confidence.

Empowerment presents as a Western concept in that it approaches experiences from a feelings and action point of view that seems to reflect much of Maslow's (1943) theories regarding self-actualization. Each of the five levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs requires one to act in order to attain the rewards of the next level, in contrast to the Eastern perspective. This seems to be reflected in the examples in Table 1. In Eastern philosophical thinking, the emphasis is on being, rather than feeling. Indeed, Ajaya (1983) posited that the teachings of yoga are about

the integration of mind, body, and spirit and that the realization of our own unlimited consciousness is the way out of suffering. This idea is reiterated by Welwood, (2000) and Bharati (n.d.) in Chapter 2 in the discussion of how Western psychology is limited and narrow and how yoga philosophy helps one to transcend self-imposed limitations.

Discussion Regarding the First Theme: Empowerment

There appeared to be a sense of working towards a different kind of consciousness in the expressions of empowerment that the participants in this study shared and a recognition of aspiring to a higher ideal even if they were not thinking in Eastern terms. For example, one of the participants stated he or she, “approached things from a more grounded, centered place” (See Table 1). I labeled this from a Western perspective of being decisive; in the Eastern perspective, this idea of being grounded and centered may mean that the person has a deeper connection to his or her authentic self.

Table 1

Empowerment

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
EMPOWERMENT	Proud Acceptance Confidence/Trusting Higher Self-Esteem Energy Grounded/Centered Spiritual Growth Feeling Balanced Decisive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The happiness that you feel when it's done • To teach something I want to teach, is empowering to me. • Build that confidence in who I was • I don't see myself facilitating someone else's healing process; I'm not doing it, I'm just making it easier; that feels great. • I can just go out in the day with a different 'energy' feel more energetic, more alive! • I felt more grounded and centered • Calling on the ascended master, archangels. I feel more connected to source • Now I feel the connection from within. • I approach things from a more grounded, centered place

Discussion Regarding the Second Theme: Curiosity

Curiosity was expressed by all and was attached to the nature of Kundalini yoga, which was related to the spiritual and mystical aspects of what is essentially an ancient science. Whether it was from the perspective of gaining new knowledge regarding the history and psychology of this form of yoga or understanding how certain exercises and practices would personally impact the practitioner on both a physical and emotional level, each participant presented as open-minded and looking for new experiences. This cultivation of knowledge, whether it was motivated by a search for self or was academically driven, seemed to be pervasive.

One of the expressions of curiosity that I found intriguing was the example from Table 2 about *New Experiences* and the statement about breaking the rules, because one needs to know what the “other side” is about. This presented to me as curiosity without fear and approaches the ideal of being able to trust one’s own intuition. Again, from a Western perspective, talking about breaking rules may be viewed as being about rebellion rather than fearlessness; however, in this context from this participant, when this was stated, I remembered thinking how freeing it must be to be this trusting. The statement, rather than cause me to question her integrity, led me to think about how she could be closest to the Eastern ideal of perhaps experiencing pain, but not suffering, because of allowing herself to trust the process of whatever it was she was exploring.

Aparigraha is one of the tenets of the Yamas, from Patanjali’s yoga sutra, and is about non-attachment. There was much in the curiosity of the participants, that seemed to indicate that their curiosity was without attachment to outcomes. The statement that is an example of this in Table 2 is from the description “choice making”; opening one’s mind and allowing also suggests an attitude of fearless exploration.

Table 2

Curiosity

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
CURIOSITY	<p>Choice making</p> <p>Open Mindedness</p> <p>Seeking, Interesting</p> <p>Knowledge</p> <p>Alluring</p> <p>Broaden Horizons</p> <p>New Experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open your mind, and let it happen! • I want to experience life • I should be on a mountain, somewhere, with a guru • My own mystical revelation. • So many questions not answered • What it did was, it got me to go deeper into my own study. • Break the rules, because you've gotta know what the other side is! • I didn't even know what it was • I wanted to go deeper • I thought it was really weird the first time.

Discussion of the Third Theme: Positive Social Interaction

The way in which the group interacted with each other was a focal point between and among participants, as all 4 of the participants had something to say about how the group socialized. They spoke of feeling connected, of belonging, feeling accepted and supported. They spoke of tolerance and non-judgment, laughter, sharing meals, and feeling familial. The fact that there was no mention of dissention among group members was interesting, given that before the teacher training program we were all unknown to each other. The group spent a significant amount of time together in close quarters, particularly at the yoga retreat, where there was little privacy. This group of 13 students were a diverse cultural mix, different from each other not only in ethnicity but also economically, academically, and in sexual orientation.

It struck me as very unusual for so many people from such diverse backgrounds to get along so well, the only common denominator was everyone's interest in Kundalini yoga. There seemed to be an unspoken idea that we were a culture of our own within a culture, and that all differences of our respective lives were automatically left behind once we entered the yoga studio.

Yogic teachings primarily originate from the philosophies of the Hindu faith (Feuerstein, 1998); although, Rama (1979) suggested that yoga can be found in the scriptures of most religions. Yoga encourages the total equality of humans, by teaching how to be rather than how to do. It seems that all who came into the space of that yogic studio understood this. All participants alluded to this idea in some form or another: "other people around me who were like minded, was the absolute highlight"; "a group of people very peaceful, happy, polite, kind, clean heart"; "It was funny to see how the mix of people were all together, how everybody interacted" (See Table 3).

Table 3

Positive Social Interaction

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIO N	Connection Belonging Feeling Supported Acceptance Tolerance Non-Judgmental Sharing/Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loved spending time with people • In a group of people, very peaceful, happy, polite, kind, clean heart • I didn't have anyone wanting me to be a different way • I was able to go on my own personal journey, in a very supported environment. • Even though your path is personal, it's amazing to see other people go through it too. • It was funny to see how the mix of people were all together, how everybody interacted. • To have the other people for support, other people around me who are like minded, was the absolute highlight

Discussion of the Minor Themes From Descriptive Coding: Apprehension

Apprehension, although not prevalent, was significant enough to be documented. All participants, including me, expressed some apprehension attached to the training. Participants related fears regarding their ability to keep up, particularly with the physical aspects of the training. There was also some fear expressed related to running out of time to achieve goals set, aging, being judged by others, and feeling less than, questioning the authenticity of the curriculum, and being in close quarters to others physically for a prolonged amount of time. Most of these fears seemed to dissipate early in the training program, due mostly to the positive social interaction and support radiated by the group.

Apprehension is rooted in fear, and fear brings pain and ultimately suffering in our culture. Recognizing limitations (Table 4) seemed to be about a fear of being less than, not being able to keep up, or compete with more accomplished students, and having a sense of not deserving to be in the program. “At first I was scared,” stated one of the participants; it seemed that she echoed my own initial feelings regarding the expectations of not only the instructors, but also my peers. I did not want to be seen as being weak, or, worse, a burden to others because I was much more mature than many of the students.

The goal of yoga, as mentioned previously, is the end of suffering. As humans, pain is inevitable, whether it is physical, mental, or emotional. At some point in our lives, we will all know what pain is. The majority of us in Western culture have learned well how to mask pain, by covering it, rather than seeking the source. Allopathic medicine is a good example of this. Doctors do not look for the source of disturbance in the body, but rather treat the symptoms. If we get a headache, there any number of over the counter medications we can take to alleviate it.

Yes, for most of us the pain will disappear, and we will continue on until the next time, and again we will reach for a pill, and so, we continue to suffer.

In contrast, the yogic perspective sees opportunity for growth in pain. It is seen as a way to correct imbalances within one's self; it teaches one to acknowledge the presence of a deeper reality and to move toward addressing the source by changing one's perspective (Ajaya, 1983). Frankl, (1959) changed his way of being while incarcerated in the Nazi death camp. When viewing his situation from a Western mindset, clearly, he was suffering, but from an Eastern perspective because he made a conscious choice regarding how he was going to greet each day, he had created a positive attitude from which came growth.

This seemed to happen during the teacher training program in the choices made by the participants when faced with challenges that brought fear and apprehension. "At first, I was scared" (Table 4) implies that this participant pushed through the fear. It was a similar experience for the participant who talked about how difficult something was. This apprehension seemed to be replaced with more positive attitudes, particularly when each participant spoke of what they had gained from the program.

Table 4

Apprehension

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
APPREHENSION	Emotional upset Recognizing Limitations Urgency Reservations Hesitation Uncomfortable Overwhelming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was resistant, it was different • At first, I was scared • Everything didn't match up • I'm not very good at it • It was very difficult for me • I'm more of a private person • Honestly, it took me another year to go through it. Kind of overwhelming.

Discussion of the Minor Themes From Descriptive Coding: Unusual Experience

Each of the participants, including me, shared details of unique experiences that occurred as a result of certain yogic exercises, such as meditation or chanting, which had impacted them in some way. Each participant shared his or her experience during the interviews to either illustrate a point or to share how the experience had influenced participation in the teacher training program. The experiences they spoke of were related to Kundalini yoga, even though they may or may not have occurred during the teacher training program. The experiences ranged from having a sense of emotional relief, a sudden innate understanding of an esoteric concept, to auditory and physical phenomenon. The reasoning behind labeling these experiences as unusual

is based on the perception of each individual and how they related their stories. This was not limited to content, but also to body language, and facial expressions. When connecting mannerisms and physical expression with verbal content, the importance of these experiences to each of the participants was relayed to the listener.

Table 5

Unusual Experience

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE	Pretty Trippy Surreal Experience Another Dimension Celestial Communication Weird Projection Mysterious Remarkable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • beyond comprehension, unimaginable • A turning point, and amazing point. • I felt very small • I had an experience, I thought might be a kundalini awakening. • It was the first time I ever felt the power of breath • The day after White Tantric, all those thoughts were gone. I woke up and those thoughts weren't there, and it was just a normal day, and I went on, and those thoughts have never come back

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
		<p>I felt the hand push my chest to make me sit up.</p> <p>Heard a voice chanting over the group.</p>

Distinguishing Between Major and Minor Themes

The reasoning behind making a distinction between the major and minor themes is attributed to how often reference was made to them. As previously noted, apprehension occurred minimally for each participant in a variety of ways. It was deemed to be significant when recognizing that feelings of apprehension can invoke a range of emotions anywhere between paralysis and motivation, as Wellwood (2000) noted when he talked about *frozen fear leading to depression* and *fluid fear moving one forward*. It was interesting to me that, although the participants experienced these feelings and shared them with me, indicating that they had been significant enough for them to mention, it appeared that they were in line with Wellwood's description of fluid fear. "Yet, where there is fluid fear, there is also openness and responsiveness to life" (p. 177). This apprehension seemed to be a motivating factor in their overall journey towards growth.

Unusual experiences are subjective and open to interpretation. They were included because they appeared to be meaningful for each participant. However, they were not included as major themes since they were not all direct results of the teacher training, but in some instances were associated with the participant's overall experience of Kundalini yoga. These experiences

were also subjective and, as such, might not be considered as unusual for some people; however, when noting facial expressions and body language as the participants relayed their stories to me, it was my own interpretation that these experiences were unusual for them, and therefore, I marked them as significant.

The Participants' Stories

Each theme is explored in the stories of the participants, including my own. The rationale for each theme was defined by separating the participants' experiences and using their own words.

Participant: Joe (Appendix D)

Joe presented as being more than willing to share his story. His demeanor was warm, engaging with sustained eye contact, and he held a relaxed body posture during the entire interview. Joe sat confidently with his hands on his thighs. He was convivial and animated, gesticulating with his hands when he wanted to emphasize a point. Joe spoke with a sense of excitement when he explained how the style of Kundalini yoga resonated with him. His eyes seemed to light up as he spoke; he leaned forward as if to impress upon this researcher how important this was for him:

So, I think with Kundalini yoga, once it's in your heart, the meditation, relaxation, it calls you and I'm like...I had to do something, you know, I gotta go back, so I start...I went back, about 6 months prior to signing up for our teacher training, then decided to go for it.

Joe, again, sat tall in his seat and, as he shared his experience of the 10-hour meditation workshop, *White Tantric Yoga*, his body language seemed to radiate the same sense of empowerment as when he spoke of making the decision to participate in the yoga teacher training program. His enthusiasm was apparent. I was partnered with Joe for this meditation event, and while I struggled through this day of meditation and felt out of my comfort zone, Joe

was relaxed and excited about how the day was going to unfold. He was patient and gentle and was largely responsible for my being able to participate in a meaningful way.

It was interesting that Joe talked about being in a bubble; I think this is about being able to leave everyday issues behind and to reach a different level of consciousness that allowed him to be able to see things from different perspectives. When he talked about “checking out,” it was as if he gave himself permission to step out of his everyday reality to experience almost a form of cleansing, which in itself appeared to push him forward, to empower him to step into the unknown. There was also a sense of empowerment, as he talked about his future goals and what he wanted to do with the knowledge he had gained throughout the program. “I teach... I see myself doing this ..., I would like to keep teaching, to help people find some relief in this tough life. “

Joe made several references to his teaching and how he intended to present other styles of yoga and meditation techniques to his students. It seemed apparent that along with his desire for self-improvement, Joe also wanted to share what he had learned with others because he believed in the benefits of yoga. Joe was often the first person to help any of his peers he saw struggling and always had words of encouragement and comfort. Joe, like our instructors appeared to have the ability of knowing how to encourage rather than enable. I was often the recipient of Joe’s support, which had the effect of inspiring feelings of confidence and renewed effort when things became difficult, rather than validating my excuses to give up.

The feelings of connection, acceptance, and belonging, which also appeared to contribute to Joe’s sense of empowerment, were reflected in the way he spoke of his interactions with the other participants in the group. His voice lowered, became warm, and deep. There was almost a

reverent cadence as he spoke of how he felt about the group with whom he had shared the experience:

I had an amazing experience, it was beautiful in a group of people, same minded people, very peaceful, happy, polite, kind, clean heart, and all these things, and my experience was just amazing...I loved spending time with the people, you, and everybody else. Having our own time that was really good especially eating the breakfast and the lunch and the dinner, the food was great. Having it in a different place completely helped us do more yoga things, you know, practicing, and all that stuff.

Joe was adept at helping everyone to feel comfortable; he was always careful to draw everyone into any discussion, but he also seemed very perceptive and appeared to understand another person's needs for separateness and privacy.

Joe presented as curious, open-minded, and appeared to see new experiences as an opportunity for growth even when he expressed his apprehension. He talked about how he first became interested in Kundalini yoga. He seemed boyish in his explanation of how he would see his first teacher coming to the gym with her students carrying blankets and pillows, and he grinned a lot when he spoke of his first impressions:

I would see her with a weird group of people, I would see her with pillows and yoga mats and they would go in there and turn the lights off and I would hear some music they would do some exercise, I had no idea what it was. And the first time I was kinda scared and I talked to my wife about it, and the next time I saw them, I approached her, and she replied she was the leader of the group, and I said "so what are you...what's going on here what are you guys doing?"

We did some breath work with the music and some chanting, I was very resistant at the beginning, with the chanting part of it because that's when I was a little bit more in my concept of this chanting was a little bit different, and em...I really liked it, I told my wife. I started going to the classes.

Joe's curiosity was not just limited to experiences, but also to the acquiring of knowledge, particularly when it came to ideas that were different, ideas that were contained in yogic teachings that were often difficult to grasp. In the references Joe made to being open-

mindful and his apparent eagerness to learn, he presented as being uninhibited when it came to exploring new ideas and experiences:

I really enjoyed the different people coming in, doing different things, so the subject they introduced was valuable and I think the other thing, like em, this guy, the musician...I like the challenge and I like to be able to learn what happens when I go through physical and emotional pain and what I do to push through, and in the happiness when it's done that you feel.

When discussing the first question on the questionnaire, which asked how he came to be interested in Kundalini yoga, he spoke of his fear for the future and of his perceived unhealthy lifestyle. He seemed to have come to a point in his life where he was seeking direction. He was unhappy with his life; he mentioned his relationship with food, exercise, and the things he had been doing that he knew were detrimental to his health:

I had some anxiety problems and I decided that I wasn't really active, I was like, office, home, office, home, a lot of Mountain Dew, and bad diet and it's not gonna go to the right direction, it's not gonna go right, so I decided to stop doing what I was doing, including my job and I turned in my resignation.

Joe seemed to have a fear of running out of time, although he did not appear to be fearful of aging or death. He seemed to be more conscious of not having enough time to experience and learn about the things in which he was interested. When Joe talked about why he had decided to participate in the yoga teacher training program, he emphasized how important it was for him to do the training when he did.

His apprehension about learning the concepts of Kundalini yoga seemed to be rooted in his lack of knowledge regarding what he perceived to be differences from the Bikram style of yoga with which he was familiar. Joe talked about his discomfort and resistance when he was first introduced to chanting. What appeared to stand out for him was that his curiosity overrode his apprehension. The all-day meditation workshop presented as another opportunity for some apprehension and anxiety for Joe, although as his partner, this was not apparent to me at the time.

Joe shared during the interview that even though this was his second time participating in this event, and even though he did not show it, he had been nervous.

Although Joe did not describe any experiences that he thought were mystical like other participants, when asked the question of whether there were any defining moments for him, he talked about an exercise we had all engaged in where the concepts presented as quite perplexing. As a group we had made our feelings known to each other at the conclusion of the exercise during the afternoon break. However, it appeared that on some level Joe seemed to have found something meaningful for him in that exercise. He attempted to communicate how important this exercise had been for him during the interview. Joe moved his hands around as he spoke, and his eyes took on a luminous quality as he expressed his sense of wonder while he was recounting what he had experienced. He spoke softly and slowly and almost reverently as he recalled this particular exercise. We had been given a poem to read, and there was also a recording of it which we were asked to record for ourselves. We were then asked to meditate on what we had heard:

Well you know what, I think it was that little poem, that thing that we read you know that one about creation that we recorded, and as I am reading this, it goes from simple things, and gets more serious from I created this plant, to I created the universe, so as I'm reading I could feel myself laughing, and at one point my recorder actually...there is a part that I am laughing, laughing at what I am reading...it's so beyond comprehension, unimaginable things that I'm reading to myself and I'm claiming that something is...I cannot imagine right...so that contrast made me think, Wow! maybe I'm a small part of it, so I think that point was for me a very interesting point, I could call it a turning point, or an amazing point for me, that was like an eye opener point for me, it was also his tone, and voice.. and I said to myself, Oh My God, what am I saying, shut up, you didn't create the world.

It appeared that at some point during this exercise, the concepts Joe was trying to grasp became clear to him more on a visceral level than a rational one. He seemed to struggle to convey in words what he had understood. There seemed to be some fear that he would be misunderstood or perceived as being incoherent. Conversely, he was also refuting what he had

understood; there appeared to be a part of him that needed to rationalize for himself as he shared his story.

This exercise was introduced toward the end of the training program, so, it is possible that it could have been an accumulation of experiences that had led Joe to this point of what he seemed to believe was a sort of awakening. To the extent that there was change for Joe, it would be misleading to conclude that the change came solely because of the yoga. It is also possible that change for Joe came from his feelings of being empowered by positive interaction with the instructors and the other students.

Participant: Sue (Appendix E)

Sue spoke softly and slowly throughout the interview; she presented as giving great thought to answering the questions. At times, she smiled wistfully as she recalled some aspect of the training, and at others her expression and body language changed and became quite introspective. On the surface, Sue presented as a woman of compassion and empathy, but one got the impression that there was an underlying vigilance around other people. On this occasion, however, she was warm and engaging, and presented as more than willing to share openly. Sue admitted that she had not intended to enroll in the Kundalini teacher training program and that she had done so only at the urgings of a long-term friend. Sue emphasized the fact that this was a friend that she had a “huge amount of respect for” and who assured her that she would benefit from it, that she would be “helped.” Sue shared how she had not known what Kundalini yoga was until she had gone to visit a numerologist because she was interested in learning numerology. As it turned out, the numerologist she saw was also one of the instructors in the Kundalini teacher training program.

The interview with Sue was a little shorter than the others; however, she presented with so much depth to her answers. She shared how she had always felt different from others growing up and, in fact, had been treated differently, although she did not specify anyone in particular who had treated her differently. She spoke of not really feeling comfortable in groups of people and shared that there were several aspects of the training that had not resonated with her. She spoke melancholically about feelings of emptiness and depression and how for some time she had wanted her life to end.

Sue sat with relaxed body posture, with ankles crossed and hands in her lap, which appeared to show her as being somewhat shy, unassuming, and thoughtful, but there also seemed to be an element of strength about her as she spoke. She expressed several emotions throughout the interview: sadness, joy, empowerment, curiosity, apprehension, and her desire to help others. What she seemed to emphasize the most was being around the other students and how that had impacted her, also she seemed intrigued by the idea of having a new experience.

Sue was often quite self-deprecating, recounting with sadness and laughter her feelings about herself before she went through the program. Sue's curiosity seemed to dispel her initial apprehension regarding the program, but what seemed to have left a lasting impression on her was the sense of empowerment she seemed to feel particularly from the shared experience of being with the other students:

I think the most important thing for me is that I learned there are other people out there with me who have high moral fiber, that we need to be doing what we think is right That I had always been an outcast my entire life because I kind of lived on a different plane from everybody else, and to find out that, that's perfectly ok to be like that and to have other people for support and other people around me who are like minded was the absolute highlight and I think the mental discipline and knowing there were others out there like me is what I really learned about it that was very supportive.

Sue shared a period of her life when she was in a difficult relationship, although she did not go into detail regarding what those difficulties were. She did share that along with her apparent negative self-worth, this relationship produced thoughts of suicide. Although Sue did not speak of a specific plan she had at that time to hurt herself, she alluded to the fact that those thoughts have continued to plague her for most of her life—until she experienced the day of meditation, *White Tantric Yoga*.

Sue found the 10- hour meditation workshop to be challenging. She talked about her partner tentatively, giving much thought to her words. She appeared reluctant to say anything negative but seemed to want to express how this person had affected her experience. She spoke of her partner's lack of focus, laughing as she explained that she was more into putting on her makeup. Sue seemed to have a preconceived idea of what it meant to have a yoga mindset, and she shared that she felt her partner's behavior did not align with that perception. However, Sue was quick to point out that she and her partner-for-the-day were still friends.

When it comes to unusual experiences, Sue stated that she did not have an epiphany or any type of out-of-the-ordinary physical experience, she stated that what came to mind for her was what had happened to her after the meditation workshop.

I didn't have an epiphany or anything. The morning after White Tantric, is what sticks out...my spirit and my mental attitude changed, that was a point where I really saw that it worked and was effective, which I didn't really expect to have any...any, change from White Tantric.

Sue was referring to the emotional struggle she had been dealing with for some time. Sue recounted how the difficult relationship had been so traumatizing to her that she had prayed not to wake up in the mornings. There was an impression that Sue believed that somehow, she had contributed to her own distress because of things she had done in her life. Even though she had determined she was not going to act on her suicidal thoughts, as stated above, the thoughts had

remained with her for most of her life. Sue was smiling when she shared that the morning after the White Tantric meditation day, she woke up and for the first time the thoughts were gone, and that they had not returned since:

...but the day after White Tantric, all those thoughts were gone, and I woke up and the thoughts weren't there, and it was just like a normal day and I went on and those thoughts have never come back.

Sue appeared to have somehow managed to overcome her misgivings about the meditation exercises and open her mind to a new experience, which ultimately changed her outlook on life. When Sue disclosed how she had felt about the 3-day yoga retreat, she expressed that it was also difficult for her because she was not used to sharing her space with others, and so she, once again, found herself out of her comfort zone. However, she appeared to draw some comfort from the fact that she knew the person with whom she was sharing a room.

Sue's reluctance to be involved in outward displays of conflict or disharmony appeared to have resulted in her own internalization of negative emotions, which seem to have caused her significant discomfort. Sue also seemed to be quite concerned about how others perceived her, particularly when it came to the physical exercises.

As previously noted, I observed the class from where I had placed my yoga mat at the back of the studio. For the first few days of the yoga teacher training, I had noticed that like me, Sue seemed to be pushing herself to keep up with the other students, even though many of them were either more familiar with a particular pose or were younger and more flexible than either she or I were. I remember thinking that here was a kindred spirit. It seemed that neither of us wanted to be perceived as lacking when performing the yoga exercises. Indeed, she was more valiant than I, even though she was clearly having difficulties, as evidenced by her facial expressions, flushed skin, and erratic breathing. At times, she continued to push herself until she

saw that there were a few of us who were content to rest when exercises became challenging and were beyond our physical capacity, it was only then that she appeared to give herself permission to relax.

What Sue appeared to enjoy most about the training was the interaction between herself and the other students once she began to feel comfortable with them. She appeared to feel accepted. She talked about being an outcast her ‘whole life’ because she “lived on a different plane” from everyone else and had different ideas, but being in the teacher training she appeared to feel validated, which seemed to increase her sense of empowerment.

Sue shared that although she does not want to necessarily teach yoga, she does want to share the knowledge and wants to help others to heal. She talked about the mental discipline of the program and decided that she wanted to continue to search for like-minded people. Sue indicated that the entire experience left her feeling empowered to be able to do that. Sue’s curiosity seemed to be fueled partly by her respect and trust, both in and for her friend who encouraged her to participate in the yoga teacher training, also by the feelings of acceptance she had found with the other students. Although she mentioned several times how challenging she found some of the concepts and exercises, she did not indicate at any time that she had any thoughts of giving up on the program. Sue indicated that, although she probably would not cultivate a daily practice of the yoga asanas, she was interested in other aspects of the yogic lifestyle.

Participant: Liz (Appendix F)

Liz presented as vivacious and articulate, and seemed eager to talk about her experience. Her body language was expressive; she spoke prolifically with her hands, and her eyes flashed when she became excited about certain topics. She smiled and laughed often, and her apparent

joie de vivre was infectious. Her enthusiasm and curiosity showed in her willingness to push boundaries; she spoke briefly of her interest in occultism and stated that she had fallen in love with Kundalini Yoga. It occurred to me as Liz was talking she appeared to view this Kundalini yoga as being somewhat dark and mysterious; this was possibly why it appealed to her. She was intrigued by the mysticism surrounding the meditations and chanting and seemed to be fascinated by the concept of energy and speculated on how it could be manipulated throughout the body. "I'm constantly practicing yoga, you know I practice the exercises because I find that playing around with them and practicing them and doing little things helps me learn more about this energy"

Liz seemed to be skeptical regarding the authenticity of some of the philosophical underpinnings and theoretical background of Kundalini yoga and yoga in general, particularly where it concerned Yogi Bhanjan (2003). She mostly avoided commenting on him; but if his name came up, she would look pointedly at me, smile, raise one perfectly shaped eyebrow and give a derisive snort, before smiling charmingly again. However, she insisted that, although she questioned some of the sources of information, this had fueled her curiosity and sent her off on her own journey of discovery:

Everything didn't match up, somethings didn't mesh with me...I always felt like I needed to be on the mountain somewhere with you know...pause...with a guru, you know for real, where I actually somehow witnessed this person channel the information and now they're telling me directly. That wasn't the experience, for that, it was all right, but what it did do was put me in the right position, I would say to try to gather my own information. I wanted to learn more about something, so, what I've done with the knowledge is essentially work to gain more knowledge in ways that are more free and independent.

When Liz did eventually mention Yogi Bhanjan (2003), it was to share how she typically went about searching for knowledge. There was an element of the rebel in her as she talked about the contrast between light and dark. It was interesting to me that Liz did not appear to

differentiate between the two, she seems to see them from the perspective of being the same thing:

... and then remember there were all these rules, you know yogi Bhajan says don't do this (cynical voice) don't do that, and you know those are all the things, I'm gonna do, all the things you are not supposed to do, because you've gotta know what the other side is, so I find that very interesting... It's not so much that I am trying to go against it, it's just that you know, what I'll say is that from darkness comes light and if you think about it as a metaphor the kundalini groove is all about lightness, it's all about white light, it's about wearing the color white, it's all about this light stuff, you mention darkness for a second and it has all these horrible connotations and the whole time I was in class, somehow darkness became more alluring to me than it ever has.

Liz's exuberance subsided a little as she became more reflective when expressing her admiration for the other students in the group and how they had contributed positively to her overall experience. She spoke of the acceptance and support she had felt and acknowledged the idea that everyone in the group gave the impression of being on their own personal journeys of discovery. Her eyes again took on that luminous quality as she declared how amazing it had been for her to witness how others in the group explored their own paths. "It was part of my growth, it was a big part mainly because of sharing space with people who were all on a path of some sort, ... even though your path is personal, it's amazing to see other people go through it too."

When relating her experience of the yoga retreat, Liz wistfully spoke of her feelings about the land and related a story about a dream that she remembered that had occurred several years prior to the yoga teacher training and recollected the profound effect it evoked, particularly when she found herself *living* part of that dream. She recounted how she recognized the land on which the yoga retreat was held and how she felt as though she had been given a mystical revelation:

When it was time to get up and go to that house where the food was, I was awakened because I knew I was a part of something, I was witnessing something that I had seen before and so I loved it, I loved that part of it. I loved going out at night, I loved looking at all the stars, the stars were amazing, the sky like, just opened up, I loved the sound of

nature, I loved being...remember at one point that we were walking like in the dark, and it was amazing being able to trust the ground knowing that I wasn't going to step on a creature or a life so there was a great moment of trust, trusting nature, trusting the environment, umm...so I had a great time at the yoga retreat.

Liz marveled at how, during the retreat, she felt supported by the rest of the group when she was in *deep rest*, as she called it, and that she was allowed to be in her own space, with no interference or expectations:

...the way that people were or the mood or the energy that was created during the yoga retreat that other people were participating in facilitated the experience that I had, because I didn't have anyone interfering with what I was doing I didn't have anyone wanting me to be a different way, I didn't have anyone pulling on me to do this or do that.

White Tantric Yoga was challenging for Liz, as it appeared to be for the majority of the group, Liz confessed that she did not particularly enjoy the meditation workshop, but she admitted that she had been intrigued by it solely because of the woman with whom she was partnered. Although she spoke of her general impatience regarding the event, she related that there had been some interesting personal revelations while engaging in several of the exercises with her partner. When Liz described her partner as a lesbian, it was with no reservations or judgment; on the contrary, she shared that she was fascinated by the feminine energy that was shared between them. She also conceded that she experienced herself in a new way:

My favorite part about it was working with my partner and us being in tune with each other and supporting each other... There was a balance there, she was more in tune with masculine energy, I was still in a place to be in the feminine, I didn't feel like I needed to dominate... It was like a dance... I experienced myself in a new way, not that that was true, and when I was... I remember driving my car and feeling a sense of oneness with my drive, which is good.

When asked what she felt she had gained from the overall experience, Liz laughed, and her eyes lit up and she raised her arms in the air and said, "I got a teaching certificate!" She became more serious and shared that when it was her turn to actually teach the class, which had

been a part of the requirements for graduation, she recalled how it had felt for her. She smiled as she asserted that being able to teach was *very empowering* for her. Liz used the word, *confidence*, several times, which suggested to the researcher, that she felt empowered when she felt confident, and it seemed important to her that she had earned the *authority*, by virtue of the acknowledgement of her peers that she was able to teach others. Liz also gave the impression that she derived much pleasure from helping others.

I got a teaching certificate...(laughs) I can teach yoga, that was very important to me. Umm, for me... for me going into that position, being able to go in front of a class and teach something that I want to teach is empowering, you know, I have taught a lot of other things, and this was empowering for me... When you are in a position to help others to help themselves, it feels good, I don't see myself facilitating someone else's healing process, I'm not doing it, I'm just making it easier, that feels great.

Liz also acknowledged that she felt more able to deal with things in her own life, because of the tools she had gained during the program. One of the things she emphasized that seemed to have left a powerful impression upon her was how the breathing techniques had affected her:

I never felt such a difference until we were just breathing the whole time that was amazing, absolutely amazing, so I did feel a shift there, in consciousness in who I was, in my body, in my mind, so even now when I teach, I emphasize breathing so much, the way I move, the way I exercise, everything, I'm always thinking about and incorporating healthy breath which might seem small, but it does something big, you know that kind of intangible thing.

Liz related one other experience that appeared to be unusual for her and that she associated with Kundalini yoga. Although this event did not occur during this teacher training experience, Liz appeared to believe that the following experience was relevant to the question that had been asked regarding relating to defining moments:

I know everyone around me was crying, and I'm just standing there looking at them and thinking "alright, I hope this works out" but with her I felt this empathy, which was (laughs) it might seem weird but it was a really cool moment for me to feel this empathy for her and where I started to understand the power of any process in which you're growing and she could have that release, so yeah, it wasn't my moment, but it.. it did define some things for me (chuckles).

Liz's vibrant personality and interesting perceptions earned her popularity among her peers during the yoga teacher training program. She presented as curious, confident, and genuine. She appeared to be comfortable speaking her truth regarding how she felt about the training program. It became apparent that she was on her own journey of self-discovery, although hers had a different motivation from some of the other participants.

The essence of what she appeared to get out of the program was support, empowerment, and knowledge that she can pass on to others. Liz had alluded to her own practice of helping people in ways that had to do with using energy to heal, and she wanted to take what she learned and integrate it into what she was already doing. She emphasized several times about her ability to teach, but not in a superior way, rather a humbling sense of wonder, that she was able to give back.

Participant: Ann. (Appendix G)

My overall impression of Ann was of an introspective, somewhat shy individual. Throughout the yoga teacher training, she could usually be found conversing quietly with any combination of one or two people at any given time; she did not appear to gravitate towards anyone in particular. She was friendly to all, with a quiet, approachable demeanor. Ann's attitude towards the interview was one of professionalism; her facial expressions were solemn, her eye contact, steady. She smiled rarely during the interview; however, her bearing did not suggest that she was at all unapproachable. Ann began to visibly relax as we chatted about the confidentiality requirements and informed consent.

As Ann began to share her recollections of the training, it became apparent that she had begun her journey long before she had enrolled in the Kundalini Teacher training program. She spoke about exploring Kundalini yoga by attending different classes after being introduced to

this style of yoga some years before. She spoke about how much it resonated with her even though she initially found it to be weird:

My sister-in-law invited me over to do yoga, and I thought we were just doing slow yoga, and that was the first time I was introduced to Kundalini yoga, which I thought... like the first time I did it, it was like really weird, but I really liked it, even though it was completely different from the yoga I had been doing before.

Ann shared that she had continued with her own exploration with videos and classes and then disclosed that there had been what she identified as some “changes” in her life, although she did not go into detail as to what those changes were, instead shared that they had caused her to want to go deeper into the practice of Kundalini yoga to embrace the spiritual aspects. Ann began taking classes at the studio where the teacher training was offered, and a year later, she enrolled in the teacher training program. Ann indicated that she had found that her practice had helped her to feel more grounded during some challenging times in her life:

I honestly feel like I felt more grounded and centered I definitely was working through a lot of my own stuff during that time, I really processed through a lot of my mental emotional stuff... umm... it helped me kind of hold my center when things were not always very balanced.

Ann reiterated that she had wanted to explore the spiritual aspects of yoga to move past just focusing on the asanas, which is typical of most yoga classes offered in the West. She presented as curious as to what more this style of yoga had to offer and seemed to have concluded, if she embraced it and committed herself to a regular practice, she might find what she was looking for. She commented on how she wanted to do it wholeheartedly, to get serious about it. At the same time as exploring the spiritual aspects of this yoga, she appeared to be intrigued by the ritualistic/mystical aspects of what she was learning. Although Ann agreed that she had enjoyed the learning experience, she indicated that she found the curriculum to be somewhat demanding and the instructors overly rigid. “I thought that... that there was a lot of

information in the curriculum, and honestly it took me another year to go through it after the fact”

Ann indicated that she believed she had experienced some form of spiritual awakening that developed during the training. She spoke of feeling centered and connected to what she called, “source,” which was one of the terms used during the training to describe one’s higher power or God. As Ann spoke, her voice became a little louder with a more confident tone to it; she seemed to have a deeper sense of her own judgment. These feelings seemed to represent empowerment for her, as she acknowledged that this power came from within her. “I used to speak outside of myself, especially the spiritual pieces, calling on the ascended masters, archangels, but now I feel the connection from within...”

Ann explained that White Tantric Yoga was overwhelming for her, at least it was at the beginning of the day. She alluded to some physical issues she was having but again did not go into detail. However, she admitted that once she “settled in” she began to understand the purpose of what she was doing and how it was affecting her, or how she perceived it to be affecting her. Like Liz, Ann seemed to be captivated by the idea of energy and how she believed it was working for her:

I realized for me, like some of those hand positions we would hold them for about thirty minutes sometimes or twenty minutes or longer. For me I realized what it was, that you were working energetically through the... almost like karma... when whatever that is focused upon sometimes, I don’t even know if we know (chuckle) but its... it felt like it worked through energy blocks in our systems, but it is also working through your karma too, like releasing all that karma.

Ann indicated that this was not the first time she had participated in White Tantric Yoga. She shared that she had attended a Summer Solstice event one year where a less intensive version of White Tantric was offered. Ann’s eyes became more expressive when she began to relate, at length, a spiritual experience she believed she had during one of the prolonged

meditations. As Ann set the scene, she became quite animated, and seemed eager to tell the story, possibly to evaluate the researcher's reaction in order to satisfy herself that she was credible. The words she used to describe her experience were, "Pretty trippy."

Ann shared that she could not remember what the *mantra* was that was being chanted, but she remembered feeling proud of herself because she had not fallen asleep. She shared that about one-half to three-quarters of the way through the meditation she felt a hand push her chest to make her sit up straight. She said she opened her eyes thinking that perhaps it was one of the event monitors who had seen her slouching, but when she opened her eyes, there was no one there:

I was like Wow! So we continued on, and we were doing this chant, and moving our hands in a certain way, and all of a sudden everything started sounding like everyone was like off key and off the beat and I was like what the heck.....why is everybody so, so off and umm as we were doing it all of a sudden it was almost like time slowing down, and it was like a jumble with time slowing down, I heard Yogi Bhanjan's voice and he was doing the chant over all the jumbling of all these people who were chanting together and, all of a sudden, I was like what the heck is going on as we were doing this, and then all of a sudden it was like when you are watching a movie and they show like time speed coming back to our normal 'now' time or something, but it literally was like (funny sound) and then all of a sudden everyone was all on key, nobody was off, it was like I had flipped into some other dimension or something.

Ann continued telling her story, relating how she had told her partner for the practice what had happened and how her partner revealed that she had also had the same experience.

They had both described to each other what they had heard and felt.

I tried to describe this to her and she... her jaw dropped, and she was like no way... She was like, I had the same experience. The two of us had the same... so it wasn't just me, it was her, she had the same thing where everything slowed down, and she was like everybody was off beat or off key or whatever.

When talking about the yoga retreat, Ann seemed to find the interaction with the other participants to be positive and spoke about how much she had enjoyed sharing the activities with them and totally immersing herself in everything that was offered. She acknowledged that

practicing the yoga helped her to feel different in a positive way, which in turn influenced the way she interacted with others, particularly when things were negative. She spoke of experiencing some surprises that she had not expected and how she had begun to feel more energetic and focused. Empowerment for Ann appeared to be linked to how she felt physically energized. “I just can go out in the day with a different energy and feel almost more energetic and more alive I guess...”

Ann seemed to have some apprehension regarding her approach to her practice, which appeared to be influenced by her expectations of herself. While she maintained that she was seeking a spiritual approach to her practice, she admitted that she did not always follow through on her commitment:

I can't say I'm perfect, practicing every single day, and I should be because I'm supposed to be doing a 90-day meditation right now, I fell off, and I've got to start again, but I umm, I have done 40 and 90- day but if I'm not into it, it's harder for me to do it, so ...

Ann admitted that her life had changed because of Kundalini yoga, but she could not articulate why or how. Ann expressed that she was interested in sharing the knowledge she gained with others, while continuing to explore her own personal practice and what it will yield.

Analysis of the Researcher's Experience

The list of words and phrases in my journal and field notes emerged as being valuable data recorded about my own experience, not least because they were written expressions of events as they happened, and therefore, more reliable than my own memory might have been at the conclusion of the training program. Secondly when I began to compare this data to the major themes analyzed from the data collected from the participants, it was interesting to note that, although, each of us had come to the training for a variety of reasons, the perceptions regarding our overall experience appeared to be similar.

One of the things that revealed itself to me from my own data was the disparity between positive and negative words and phrases, there were considerably more positive words than negative. The second revelation was that the majority of positive words and phrases reflected aspects of all three major themes drawn from the data obtained from the participants interviews. I noticed that I had recorded negative words and phrases in my journal and field notes less frequently after White Tantric Yoga. The majority of the negative words had to do with my initial resistance.

Discussion of Researcher's Experience

Apprehension. In answering the same questions, I had created for the participants, I relied most frequently on memory and the impressions I was left with regarding certain activities. I wrote about my feelings regarding some of the exercises that I found to be somewhat outlandish. I questioned whether or not we were being tested, and it was interesting that even though I had doubts and felt uncomfortable, I did the exercise because I did not want to be the odd one out, I wanted to fit in, this became somewhat empowering for me because I learned a lot about my peers, myself, and my own limitations and strengths. (Table 6)

The apprehension I felt appeared to have revealed itself in the initial irritation, frustration, and criticism I levied towards myself for my inability to keep up physically with my peers during the first 2 weekends of training. I was also irritated with the instructors as I was convinced that their expectations were unreasonable. In truth, they had no expectations, and I realized eventually that they also knew the difference between encouragement and enablement when I voiced on more than one occasion in those early classes that I was considering withdrawing from the program. Impatience with myself manifested in complaining, resistance,

and anxiety, all of which was met by validation of my feelings, non-judgment, and support on behalf of both the instructors and my peers.

White Tantric Yoga. White Tantric Yoga seemed to be where my attitude began to change. As intrigued as I was to be experiencing something new, once again my ego seemed to have *sprouted wings!* This was going to be a great conversation piece! I recall that there were times throughout the day where I found it difficult to suppress my amusement. The huge room was filled with at least a hundred people all dressed in white! I looked around at everyone and thought, “What the heck am I doing?” There was wall-to-wall yoga mats on the floor, each being only several inches apart. The initial feelings of excitement at a new experience began to vanish, I remember thinking, “Oh my God, I’ve joined a cult.” (Table 6) I actually jotted this thought down in my journal.

Our instructors had arrived early and reserved space on the floor for our group. I was paired with one of the men in the group. I sat down on my mat and felt the heat of bodies all around me; I began to panic but was reassured by one of the instructors that she would help me “hold my space.” The energy in the room was palpable, and one could not help but be affected by it; the quiet rumblings of conversation surprisingly began to soothe me, and for a while, I settled down.

Then came the first exercise; I was fidgety, unfocused, and worrying about what others would think of me. I tried to be positive and began thinking about how amazed I was that so many people were interested in doing this; however, after the first 5 minutes, I found myself judging them for being crazy! Of course, this was my ego speaking again, telling me, I could be hiking and half way up a mountain in the clean, crisp air of the morning, but instead here I was, sitting on the floor in a room full of strangers, staring into the eyes of a man I barely knew!

I was too embarrassed to leave, I would have to maneuver myself through the non-existent walkways to get to the exit, and I just knew every eye would be on me as I went. I held my space, and eventually, I settled down; I realized that I was not the only person in the room who appeared to be struggling. As I looked around, I observed that there were others who seemed to be having as much difficulty as I was having. By the end of the last meditation, which was a chant that lasted 2.5 hours, something had shifted in me. The words that I had jotted down quickly at the end of the day, before I left the venue began with the *agitation* and *resistance*, I had felt at the start of the day, and ended with feelings of being *liberated*, *inspired*, and *energized*. (See Table 6)

I remember that evening vividly. It took almost 3 hours to drive home due to an event that was happening in the city center. Many of the streets had been blocked off, and traffic was virtually at a standstill and was consequently backed up in some areas for as far as a mile, a fact I later learned from the news. I remember marveling at how calm I felt and how accepting I was of the situation; the cacophony of car horns and people seemed to have faded into the distance, as I patiently sat in my car waiting to move the next few feet. It is difficult to describe what I felt. It was like nothing could touch me; I felt as though there was some sort of protective barrier around me, and that I was glowing from the inside out!

When I answered the question about White Tantric, I recounted what had happened to me during the 2.5-hour meditation, since this was what I wrote in my journal:

I found it hard to concentrate or sit still. I did not want to do it, there was a lot of resistance, but I decided I needed to challenge myself. Sometimes, I would see the colors of the chakras, mostly purple, blue, green, then they came in the shape of a uterus and ovaries. Then I saw clouds and the sun shining through, it was beautiful. I don't think I will ever do the 2.5 hours of meditation all in one go again, unless I have to. I don't think there is much point if you can't sit still. I think 31 minutes is quite enough! It has been a long day, I'm ready to go home now.

That experience stayed with me for quite some time, and I persisted in looking for meaning and an understanding of the significance of what had come to me during that meditation. Though I was conflicted and had vacillated between doing it and not doing it, somewhere, in that 2.5 hours, I experienced change. The sound vibration of so many people chanting and the subtle energies that I felt still intrigue me. I remember thinking that I wanted to experience that feeling again, and again, and the thought crossed my mind that this was probably how a drug addict felt when chasing a *high*. I struggled to make sense of the images that had come to me, and it was not until the cancer diagnosis, that I began to attach meaning to what I had experienced.

I thought of the Chakra system, which are the seven centers of consciousness, and, interestingly, correspond with the Endocrine system. They are situated along the spine in what is known as the subtle body. Each of these chakras are represented by a color and have a certain energy principle for the area of the body. (Rama, 1979) The chakras are significant in Kundalini yoga because the kundalini, which is the coiled serpent is said to reside in the root chakra that is located at the base of the spine. The color for this chakra is red, above the root chakra is the sacral chakra, which is located in the area of the reproductive organs and is represented by orange. The navel point is where the third chakra is located, and this is represented by the color yellow. The fourth chakra is in the area of the heart and is represented by green; it was interesting to me that the cancer was on my left side just above my heart. The throat chakra is blue. The color purple or Indigo represents the third eye chakra the area of intuition and knowing, and the crown chakra is the seventh chakra and is sometimes depicted as being white. (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012)

The shapes that I saw, the uterus and ovaries, to me, represented life, and the clouds and sunshine seemed to signify that all was well. During the time after the diagnosis, I never saw myself as ill. It was a challenge, one that I realized was the result of my lifestyle and though I knew there would be some unpleasant experiences, somehow, I also knew that all would be well. I had learned to trust! I had also learned, at least during that time, that although there was pain, I truly did not suffer, I was not attached to outcomes.

After White Tantric Yoga, I settled down into the program. Of course, I still struggled with the physical aspects, but it did not matter. No one was judging me; if anything, I felt completely supported, like Liz, when I would do my own thing. This was where I began to feel empowered; I stopped worrying about what others would think of me if I decided not to participate in an activity, or I did an exercise I was comfortable with rather than forcing my body to do what I felt was not possible for me. It was interesting that when I let go of those expectations of myself, I found myself going to places physically that I had never previously been able to go.

Yoga Retreat

The three-day yoga retreat was a new learning experience for me. Like Sue, I was not used to being with so many people for extended lengths of time. When we first arrived at the house where we were to stay, I was a little apprehensive. However, my fears were quickly dispelled when I realized that there was the same respect here for personal space as there was at the studio, even when there was little space between our mats. I wrote in my journal, “It was like a big sleepover with a bunch people I really liked” (See Table 6). I found a new respect for nature, I felt relaxed, contented, and almost childlike, allowing myself to experience running

barefoot in the grass, and playing on a tree swing. I gave myself permission to participate in what resonated with me, and to excuse myself when it did not.

Back at the studio, sitting at the back of the room accomplished two things: the first that I was not able to be seen by the others unless they turned around, and the other that I was able to observe the group and their interactions. I observed my peers more than I probably would have had I not been using the experience as an intellectual platform. It appears that in addition to having a personal agenda for the experience, my curiosity was influenced by the collection of data for this endeavor. However, I needed to acknowledge that there were times when I was not as open-minded as many of my peers, particularly when it came to several of the activities during the training, and that it was my perceived fear of non-acceptance that spurred me on. There were several activities that I had difficulty understanding, and which seemed silly to me; however, I finally realized that my feelings were rooted in my fear of the potential for embarrassment and, therefore, being judged by others. I recalled what Liz had said about being allowed to go on her own journey, and I realized that this had also become true for me, as well.

There was not one of the students with whom I did not have a good relationship. It was such a diverse interesting group, and there was much to learn from each of them. I was curious about everyone, in fact we all seemed to be interested in each other and shared much of our personal histories during break times and when sharing meals. The social interaction was positive throughout the teacher training program. As the group evolved, there was a familial feel to it. Everyone was concerned for each other's welfare; there was genuine help available to anyone who appeared to be struggling, or who presented as being in distress. There was encouragement, support, and unconditional acceptance by both the students and the instructors.

Empowerment showed up for me after I had completed the yoga teacher training when several months after the conclusion of the class I was diagnosed with breast cancer and chose to have a double mastectomy. I never saw myself as being sick, this was empowering for me. I recognized that my body had been trying to communicate with me and had been for some time; I had not listened. I did not blame myself for having breast cancer, but somehow, I instinctively knew it was the result of my lifestyle. Even though I experienced some residual fears of doctors, hospitals and medical procedures from my childhood, I was not afraid of the outcomes, even knowing that the possibility of the disease ending my life was very real. I managed to stay present and in the moment. I used the knowledge I had gained from the yoga teacher training and other than feeling inconvenienced from the many appointments, I carried on with my life as normal. I believe I was changed, not so much from the diagnosis, but more so from my approach to it. I saw myself as much more resilient, accepting, and noticeably less fear based. I had continued my yoga practice, and physically, I knew I was stronger.

During the teacher training I experienced phenomena which were tactile, visual, and auditory for which I have no explanation. The first time was during the White Tantric Yoga meditation day. The last meditation was 2.5-hours long and, at first, was very challenging for me to remain still and focused. However, eventually, I settled down and after a while the sound of the others chanting seemed to fade into the distance, and I could only hear my own voice. As I previously shared in chapter one, colors began to float before my eyes, which were closed. I saw the colors of the seven chakras, but the dominant ones were green, purple, and blue, which, as mentioned above, are the colors associated with the heart, throat, and third-eye chakras. The colors began to form a shape which looked to me like a uterus and ovaries, then as they receded into the background, clouds and sunshine took their place. I remember feeling this warm ticklish

feeling, in my stomach. When the meditation was over, I was somewhat disoriented for a while, but then there was a sense of peace, it was as if nothing could harm me.

The two subsequent experiences that I had were during meditations at the studio, the first time I heard laughter, it was a man's voice, deep and resonant. When I talked about what I had heard after the meditation was over, it became apparent that no one had heard the sound of laughter but me. The third experience I had was during a gong meditation, when I felt someone touching me, pressing lightly on my stomach; I was very disturbed by this and opened my eyes to see who it was. Everyone in the room was on their own mat, and the instructor was in her place at the front of the room. There was no way she could have picked her way from the back of the room to the front in the time for me to feel the touch and open my eyes. I still have no rational explanation for what I experienced, although I believe that somewhere in my subconscious the answers likely could be found.

The major and minor themes that I had extracted from the data for the participants, also applied to me, for reasons that were similar but different. I started to understand that I had begun this journey reluctantly, and I became a part of it from an ego-based perspective. I had not been honest with myself. I wanted to do it, but I did not want to do the work it required. I was essentially lazy. I wanted change in my life, and I knew I had to make changes in the way I thought about myself before those changes would take place, but I struggled with the path I had set for myself, for the most part because I was living a fear-based life, fear of embarrassing myself, fear of not being accepted, fear of not fitting in, fear of being too old, and fear that everyone would see what a fake I was, even while I was trying to tell myself I was different.

I began to feel empowered that first time I accomplished an asana, which I had previously not been able to manage, but it was because of the help and encouragement I received from my

peers and that powerful little woman who was our instructor. I hear her even today when I struggle in my daily practice saying, “Keep up.” Somehow through all my complaining and irritation, I did keep up. I now recognize that this was the negative energy from which I needed to be cleansed, once it was gone, this experience took on a different meaning for me.

Table 7:

Major and Minor Themes for Researcher Experience

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
EMPOWERMENT CURIOSITY POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTION	Confidence/Trusting Energy Acceptance of Self Knowledge Connection Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I learned a lot about my own limitations and strengths, • I believe I was changed, not so much from the diagnosis, but more so from my approach to it. I saw myself as much more resilient, accepting, and a lot less fear based • Pushing my body to places I never thought it would go. • I had not been honest with myself • As intrigued as I was to be learning something new

THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
	Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was interested in how the teachings would work for addiction • I wanted to understand how and why this yoga worked • I wrote in my journal that “it was like a big sleepover with a bunch people I really liked • feelings of being <i>liberated</i>, <i>inspired</i> and <i>energized</i>
APPREHENSION UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE	Reservations Hesitation Surreal Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even though I had doubts and felt uncomfortable • Oh my God, I’ve Joined a cult! • I felt as though there was some sort of protective barrier around me, and that I was glowing from the inside out! • the subtle energies that I felt

Researcher Discussion on Themes: Analysis of Empowerment & Curiosity.

Empowerment, In looking through my notes regarding my experience, I found the following comments that explained my sense of empowerment:

“I learned a lot about my own limitations and strengths” (Table 7)

I believe that empowerment for me came with recognizing that I had more ability and endurance than I had previously supposed when I settled down and began to really focus on the possibilities were there. There was also evidence in the way I reacted to the cancer diagnosis;

“I believe I was changed, not so much from the diagnosis, but more so from my approach to it. I saw myself as much more resilient, accepting, and a lot less fear based.”

On a personal level, this, alone, suggests evidence of transformation, a transformation that began that very first day with my complaining and general dissatisfaction. The energetic shift was subtle, but I believe it started the day I stepped over the threshold of that yoga studio.

Curiosity. I was curious about how this time would change me, and my peers. Change is inevitable, even the shortest of conversations or interactions with another can bring about profound change in one’s life. I wondered how this change was going to manifest for all of us. Most of my curiosity was geared toward the curriculum I wanted to learn, I think more than I wanted to do yoga. I wondered how my experience would have been different if I had just sat back and watched everything, without participating; would the knowledge I gained have brought about the same realizations?

“I wanted to understand how and why this yoga worked” (Table 7). The Idea of yoga being a scientific technology was reiterated throughout the literature, (Broad, 2012; Feuerstein, 1998; Rama, Ballentine, & Ajaya, 2014). We were instructed that each *Kriya* we practiced, worked to correct physical, mental, and/or emotional conditions. A *kriya* is like a recipe to

promote improvement in overall health in those areas, as previously noted, a *kriya* is a set of exercises or a combination of exercises (*asana*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), chanting (*mantra*) and hand movements (*mudra*). (Lindsey-Wehner, 2012). I can personally attest to many of those changes taking place in my own body, with repetition of a particular *kriya*, and I know that there are scientific explanations for why these *kriyas* work; however, I have continued to learn how this is so as I record my personal experience of this work, and I suspect, beyond, as well.

Analysis of Positive Social Interaction for Researcher

I wrote in my journal that interacting with the other students was, “like a big sleepover with people I really liked” (Table 7) at the time I was describing my feelings about the yoga retreat; however, this feeling for me pervaded every time we were all together. There was never a time that any of the students made me feel that I did not fit in even when I was constantly grumbling and complaining. There was always gentle encouragement and acceptance of who I was, even though looking back, I must have been really irritating. Feeling accepted was huge for me. Knowing that I could charter my own path and participate from my own comfort level without fear of judgment also contributed to feelings of empowerment.

Analysis of Apprehension and Unusual Experience for the Researcher

The apprehension I felt in the beginning of the program, as explained previously, seemed to be connected to ego but also it seemed related to a negative sense of self. I had put myself in a position of having to share myself with others and to participate meaningfully in a program that I was not sure I would be able to manage. I felt as if I were a fraud. I was afraid. I wanted to run away and tried to make excuses that would sound plausible to myself. Again, in retrospect, I see now that this was the negative energy I had been carrying with me, and the manifestation of this,

I am convinced, was related to the diagnosis of breast cancer. One of the things that crossed my mind was my likening this group of people as a cult. “Oh my God! I’ve joined a cult!” In a sense I had done just that. We were a group of people who were sharing a common experience and belief system.

The unusual experiences were a little unsettling, at first. I remember thinking at one point that I was hallucinating and that, somehow, I had been brainwashed, perhaps, by the chanting; however, I recognized that even if that had happened, there was movement in what we were doing, something was manifesting. It was not until others shared their experiences, some that were similar to mine, that I recognized that I had accessed my own creative consciousness. I will always remember the feeling I had at the end of the day of White Tantric. “I felt as though there was some sort of protective barrier around me, and that I was glowing from the inside out!”

(Table 7)

Conclusions

In summarizing, what I believe was gained from this experience by all participants was a sense of belonging that, in turn, fueled their feelings of acceptance and empowerment. It was interesting to me that such a diverse group of people came together in such an unreserved way and embraced the cultural values of yogic philosophy, as a group. Through the experience of the teacher training program, we became a family. Yogi Bhanjan (2003) stated, “Yoga explores your dimensions, depth, nature and potential as a human being in simple terms, that is all that yoga means” (p. 14). I believe that, during the time the group spent together, each of us had an opportunity to explore our own human potential.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Yoga is like music. The rhythm of the body, the melody of the mind and the harmony of the soul creates the symphony of life. – B.K.S. Iyengar

Introduction

This investigation queried how participation in a Kundalini yoga teacher training program could facilitate personal transformation that was not precipitated by either trauma or epiphany but rather a conscious choice to follow a given course of action toward that goal. While conceding that there are several limitations to this study, which will be discussed later in this chapter, if one considers the program in its entirety there is compelling evidence to suggest that yoga philosophy and the practice of Kundalini yoga can lead to personal transformation. Having said that, it should be acknowledged that other possibilities exist to explain any transformational changes that took place for each participant. Each of the major themes that emerged from the data could be viewed as aspects of the lived experience of the program and also suggestive of personal transformation, in their own right, without yoga and yogic philosophy being the impetus for change.

When looking collectively at the major themes of *empowerment*, *curiosity*, and *positive social interaction*, Lee, Ybarra, Gonzalez, & Ellsworth, (2018) identified these qualities that as associated with personal growth. After carefully exploring the data and the themes that emerged, to say definitively that personal transformation resulted from the experience of the yoga teacher training program would be misleading. But, the participants, including myself, as the researcher-participant did seem to experience personal growth as reflected by the three major themes present in their interviews,

I will first examine the kundalini yoga teacher training program on its own merit and discuss the reasoning behind my conclusions. I will then move on to examine all of the themes

that have emerged from the data. To a lesser degree, two minor themes of apprehension and instances of unusual experiences that were reported by all participants and were related to the training or kundalini yoga will also be discussed. This chapter will also examine limitations and delimitations, along with recommendations for future research, as well as the implications of the study.

Discussion of the Findings

Of the 13 persons who participated in the workshop whose experiences could have been explored, only five were chosen, including the experiences provided by four participants and my own personal journey, which represented a little over a third of the group. It should be mentioned here that not having previously experienced a program like this, it is unreasonable for me to speculate on whether or not this training program and the experience was typical of other yoga teacher training programs. What I can speculate on is the content of the curriculum, which after researching for a program in which to participate, appears to be similar to many others, when it comes to the teaching of the yogic philosophy. However, this was a kundalini yoga teacher training, and as such there were several differences in the way material was presented. The most interesting fact that I reflect upon is that Yogi Bajan (2003), who, as noted earlier, was of the Sikh faith, was considered to be largely responsible for making kundalini yoga accessible to Western students.

Reflections on the Program Content

I have to admit, the idea of a Sikh teaching yogic philosophy was somewhat confusing for several students, including myself. We were aware that yoga was rooted in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and that it had been passed down through Hindu scriptures of the *Rig Veda*, *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* and Patanjali's *yoga sutra* and was not considered a part of the Sikh

faith, in fact, many Sikhs heavily rejected it (Ajaya, 1983; Feuerstein, 1998; Khalsa, 2001; Rama, 1979.) This fact may have been where some of my own resistance came from, as I began to convince myself that I was being subtly indoctrinated into the Sikh faith, particularly when we attended the required *Sadhanas* at the *Gurdwara*. It was one thing for me to make a conscious decision to attend, but initially I balked at the idea that I had to attend the *Sadhanas* in order to complete the program.

The realization that this was not what was happening came with the fact that we were all encouraged to participate from our own comfort level. I came to understand that the purpose of attending *Sadhana*, was not for the religious aspects, but rather the emphasis on the equality of all people, and the shared connection of all things according to yogic philosophy (Ajaya, 1983; Feuerstein, 1998; Khalsa, 2001; Rama, 1979)

The teaching style of the curriculum was paced so that students had the opportunity to conceptualize and reflect on what was being taught by asking questions and engaging in animated discussions. The instructors shared from their own experiences with the yogic lifestyle to help illustrate difficult philosophical and psychological concepts and invited students to begin to integrate these concepts into their own lives; peer support and relationship building were also continually encouraged.

One of the most profound aspects of yogic philosophy are the *yoga sutras* of Patanjali, particularly, the first two: the *yamas* and the *niyamas*. These two sutras combined consist of 10 ethical principles that lay down suggestions for how one should conduct oneself in the world and how one should pay attention to the self (Ajaya, 1983; Bhajan, 2003; Chidananda, 1997; Khalsa, 1996; Krishna, 1972; Morgan, 2001; Pond, 2003; Rao, 2002). The virtues of these aphorisms were extolled throughout the training program and are at the core of yogic philosophy. It is my

belief that if one cultivates and integrates these principles wholeheartedly into one's life, transformation is inevitable. However, they require intention, diligence, and commitment.

The five *yamas* are precepts for living with others. *Ahimsa* is the first and advocates for non-violence towards, and compassion, for all living things. *Satya* is about honesty with the self and others. *Asteya* emphasizes refraining from taking from others anything that is not freely given; this may include possessions, ideas, and even time. *Bramacarya* is about conserving one's energy, and *Aparigraha* talks about allowing and non-attachment, whether to people, places, or things. The five *niyamas* are guidelines for taking care of oneself and consist of *sauca*, which is about cleanliness, and this applies to both the body and mind. *Santosa* advocates for gratitude and contentment; *tapas* is about change, not being stagnant in either our actions or thoughts. *Svadhyaya* encourages self-study, and *Isvrapranidhana* is about humility and faith.

It is interesting to note that, although these precepts form the foundation of yogic thought, they are not typically taught in yoga classes in the West. As noted elsewhere in this work, the Western view of yoga mostly focuses on the *asanas*, the postures. I had previously encountered the concepts of the eight limbs of yoga: however, I was not as intimately acquainted with the *yamas* and *niyamas* until participation in this yoga teacher training program. These concepts may have been familiar to other students before they enrolled in the program.

Shared Positive Experiences

As each of us worked on adjusting our worldview to reflect the yogic ideas, we created an ambiance that was conducive to sharing with each other. We seemed to become acutely aware of our surroundings and each other, so that there was no need to ask for help. There was an implicit understanding that each of us would look out for the person on the mat next to us.

There was a sense of timelessness when we gathered at the yoga studio for each day of classes. Everyone was encouraged to work at his or her own pace and to rest if needed, while gentle support was always available from the instructors. As a group, we decided that we were each going to pick one of the yogic principles on which to focus. I had chosen *aparigraha*—that is, learning to detach from things, feelings, and, in particular, some of my past decisions that I believed were holding me emotionally captive. I recognized that I had been resolutely attached to outcomes, and that I struggled immensely with just allowing myself to be in the moment.

The practice of *Pratyahara* (meditation) is about withdrawal of the senses and learning to concentrate (Bhajan, 2003; Broad, 2012; Frawley, 1999; Feuerstein, 1998; Kaur-Khalsa, 1996; Khalsa, 2001; Khalsa & O’Keefe, 2002; Krishna, 1972). It was a focal point of the training and was often accomplished with chanting (*mantra*). As we learned to withdraw our senses and focus, particularly while chanting, a palatable energy vibration was created in the room. These meditative times and the energetic vibration they seemed to produce, appeared to contribute to the sense of peace and well-being everyone gave the impression of sharing, which in turn was possibly the reason for the gentle way in which we treated each other.

Other aspects of the training were White Tantric Yoga, and this seemed to be a turning point in one way or another for all the students who were enrolled in the training program. The meditations were challenging, and I found myself to be extremely resistant at the start of the day. The last meditation of the day was 2,5 hours long and required one to chant a Sanskrit phrase continually. The *asanas*, the yogic postures, were another source of discovery for me. I gained a new respect for my body and how well it served me as I negotiated exercises I had not believed myself capable of performing.

By the time the training program was over, and we had shared many conversations, struggles, challenges, and much laughter, we had essentially become a family. There was a familiarity amongst the group, something many of the students remarked on when we shared our last thoughts on the final day of training. Lives had changed, perhaps not to the extent that the changes fit the definition of *transformation* as delineated for this work, but I propose that the possibility of personal transformation as a result of participation in the Kundalini yoga teacher training program existed. Having said that, the possibility also exists that each of the major themes identified in the data could also have led a person to personal transformation.

How Empowerment, Curiosity, and Positive Social Interaction Could Contribute to Personal Transformation

A contrasting perspective on how personal transformation could have transpired is related to the themes that emerged from the research data and might not be related to yoga. Alternatively, one could reason that transformation occurred because of the feelings of empowerment, the satisfaction of one's curiosity, or because the experience was shared through positive social interaction. Below are considerations for each of these characteristics.

The Possibility of Transformation Through Empowerment

The participants indicated either directly or indirectly that the experience of the training program had empowered them. Empowerment can have positive and negative connotations. Cross, Woodall, and Warwick-Booth (2017) noted the ambiguity of the meaning of *empowerment* when they point out that there is no firm definition of what empowerment means, concluding that it depends on the context in which the word was used. Chaudhuri (2016) explained that every relationship contains some aspect or element of power. It is this idea that I

explored when I examined my own feelings regarding how I had felt empowered, and the context appeared to be similar for the participants.

Liz was definitive in her expression of the feelings of empowerment when she spoke of the confidence she had gained in her ability to teach what she had learned. Joe's sense of empowerment seemed to manifest in both the teaching techniques and an experience he related from one of the exercises. Sue's empowerment came from her feelings of acceptance and her own sense of value after she believed she had experienced healing during a meditation session. Ann's sense of empowerment was related to the physical aspects of the training, particularly when it came to engaging in energy work to address some of her own emotional issues. My own feelings of empowerment also appeared to stem from the physical aspects of the training program. I found that I could accomplish more physically than I had previously believed. It is possible that when a person feels empowered, there is motivation to take the action needed for positive change to occur, and it is also possible that the change could be profound enough to fit the definition of *transformation*.

The Possibility of Transformation Through Curiosity

Curiosity, according to Schattner (2015), exists for almost every human being. Curiosity is the power behind discovery and learning. Schattner also expressed how curiosity can help with bonding between people. It is interesting that Phillips, Evans, and Muirhead (2015) linked curiosity to well-being, because this appeared to be in evidence throughout the teacher training program amongst all students. Curiosity seemed to be present for every student who participated; there were those who seemed to want to explore their own personal boundaries by coming out of comfort zones and exploring the unknown.

Curiosity for Liz appeared to be similar to my own; we both seemed to be interested in the philosophy of yoga and were curious about the effects of certain exercises. I wanted to learn the intricacies of how and why they worked. Sue's curiosity regarding the program had initially brought her to the group, and although she had expressed some discomfort with some aspects of the program, she was also open and ready to learn from everyone with whom she shared time. Joe was often the person who would engage in some of the deepest searching; his curiosity often appeared to fuel the rest of the group. He seemed to ask questions that others were reticent to ask. Ann was more curious about how a certain exercise, mantra, or meditation would affect her and seemed to want to explore her feelings surrounding this. As each person in the group explored their own curiosity, boundaries were tested, and minds began to stretch.

I was curious about every one of the other 13 students who participated in the training program. I found I wanted to get to know them all on a personal level. I remember thinking how empowering it was for me to be around such positive, non-judgmental, intelligent people who all seemed to care that I was there. There was such a cultural mix of people: they were doctors, engineers, bankers, nurses, mental health professionals, real estate brokers, tour guides, gay, heterosexual, Catholic, Mormon, American, African American, Indian, Turkish, Israeli, and Hispanic. Each of the participants signed up for the teacher training program for a variety of reasons. Some were already yoga instructors and wanted to improve on or refresh their teaching skills, others came out of curiosity, and then there were those who appeared to be in search of spiritual and personal growth.

The Possibility of Transformation through Positive Social Interaction

Positive social interaction presented as one of the strongest themes and possibly a significant indicator of personal transformation. It seemed unusual to be a part of a group of

people where there was no dissension. Positive regard was present throughout the training program, from both the students and the instructors. The shared experience of the teacher training program appeared to give credence to the suggestion by Lambert et al., (2012) when they found a correlation between the sharing of positive experiences, happiness, and life satisfaction.

Boothby, Clark, and Bargh, (2014) used the sharing of chocolate to suggest that shared experiences whether pleasant or unpleasant were amplified. They reported that when two people tasted chocolate together, the experience was deemed to be more enjoyable, than when only one person tasted the chocolate, and the other person did not.

Before embarking on this journey, I had considered following a solitary path, gaining knowledge from books, videos, and personal practice. I recognized early in the teacher training program that the experience would not have been as satisfying had I not shared it with others. Everyone expressed on some level how valued, accepted, encouraged, and cared about they felt as a member of the group. Sue was particularly fervent in her praise for how she felt because of the people who had shared the experience with her; she stated that it was the highlight of the training for her, that she had found people who were like her, or at least that she considered to be like her. Joe was enthusiastic about how much he loved spending time with everyone, which included sharing meals and ideas. Liz seemed to be in awe of how she was able to go her own way and never felt judged. She expressed that she loved the way everyone was supported. Ann enjoyed the way that everyone interacted and seemed to have appreciated the diversity of the group and expressed that she felt grounded and centered.

The Possibility of Transformation Through Apprehension and Unusual Experiences

The possibility of personal transformation through feelings of apprehension and from experiencing events that were unexplainable and/or that revealed an insight that changed a personal perception to such a degree that it completely changes the person's viewpoint is not an unreasonable concept. This idea aligns with the recognition of personal transformation being brought about by trauma or transcendence as previously discussed. It is possible that a single event or experience could initiate a considerable change in the persons way of being. Although these experiences came about because of the yoga teacher training, they could also have been the catalyst for profound change to have transpired in their own right.

Initially, there seemed to be general apprehension among all of us; however, it became clear from the data that the participants who were interviewed experienced apprehension for a variety of reasons. Joe and Sue appeared to have some fear of time passing them by and not completing things in their lives that they wanted to accomplish. For Joe, it seemed to be about the safe, predictable life he had been living, and for Sue, it appeared to be about healing from years of anxiety and not feeling accepted. Although Joe indicated that he was interested in enhancing his teaching style, he also appeared to be hoping to grow from the experience. Sue voiced her desire to help others. She saw herself as a healer, rather than a teacher; however, she appeared to have experienced healing for herself that she related happened during the White Tantric Yoga event, which she admitted she had not expected. Sue seemed to be on a quest to help heal some issues from her past, and even though she had no aspirations towards becoming a teacher, she was nonetheless interested in acquiring knowledge.

Liz presented as having apprehension regarding authenticity, although she did not express that in a way that was negative. Both she and Ann were interested in the spiritual aspects

of the training, but for distinct reasons. Liz seemed captivated by the mysterious and esoteric teachings, whereas Ann seemed to approach them from a more pragmatic perspective; she seemed to look at each exercise and the acquisition of knowledge practically and applied what resonated with her in her life. She indicated that she found the physical aspects, such as breathing, meditation and the asanas to be beneficial to her and that she incorporated them into her practice, using them for specific purposes.

On a personal level, I recognized that my initial apprehension stemmed from my fear of embarrassing myself and of not being able to keep up physically, which I knew I had internalized as being weak. Sue seemed to share my feelings in the beginning. Although she participated wholeheartedly even when she was struggling to keep up with the others, she seemed to relax more when she realized that it was her prerogative to move or not, that we could go at our own pace, and there would be no judgment.

Each of the participants, including myself, reported at least one unusual experience related to the nature of yoga. Ann had experienced tactile and auditory sensations during a lengthy meditation when she had attended a previous White Tantric Yoga event. She also shared that she had used specific mantras and mudras that she had learned during the teacher training that had worked for her to achieve a desired result. Sue shared her experience of White Tantric Yoga and talked about how she no longer had the suicidal thoughts that had plagued her for most of her life after she had attended the White Tantric meditation day. Joe became excited when relating how one of the experiential exercises involving music and a poem had affected him, and Liz recounted her experience at White Tantric and how she had experienced herself in a new way with her partner and how it had affected her on her drive home after the event.

As previously described in the introductory chapter to this work, I experienced two instances of phenomena for which I have no factual explanation. Although I was intrigued by these experiences, I remember feeling somewhat disquieted by them. The first was during the White Tantric Yoga meditations; there were visual phenomena even though my eyes were closed. I *saw* colors and shapes, which were recognizable to me, and to which I ascribed meaning; however, I was intrigued by how and why these images had manifested. The second event was during an afternoon gong meditation. This experience was both tactile and auditory.

Transformation, Transcendence/Epiphany, and Humanistic/Transpersonal Psychology

At the beginning of this endeavor, I believe I approached the nature of transformation and transcendence/epiphany from an entirely Western perspective of personal growth. Indeed, as I interviewed the participants for this work, I believe my thinking was as Welwood (2000) suggested regarding human potential, which was too often limited and narrow. Even though I agree to a large extent with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, there is much that it does not account for as I illustrated in my accounting of Frankl's (1959) journey. I was viewing my interpretation of the stories of my participants and my own through the eyes of a Western psychology paradigm that has since radically changed. Walsh (1993) pointed to the introduction of transpersonal/humanistic psychology as a way to explore possibilities that other schools of thought in psychology could not, possibilities such as mystical and peak experiences, a part of Maslow's hierarchy, that have had meaning to people across time and cultures, possibilities that had occurred during this yoga teacher training program.

As I have unlocked my own potential for experiencing, it has become clear to me that all who participated in the yoga teacher training were already in tune with these possibilities and that, whereas having out of the ordinary experiences was greeted with surprise, there was also

acceptance. I had only explained the changes that might have been taking place for each of us from an emotional point of view. For example, when I spoke of myself as feeling irritated and agitated, and perceiving this as fear-based emotion, from a transpersonal standpoint, I was experiencing growth, even then.

The point is that transformation and epiphanies could happen during the course of a day, a year, or a lifetime. I had not recognized my own transformation, because I could not move past my emotion and limited thinking. Ruzek (2007) stated that Maslow (1943) had predicted the emergence of a fourth force in American psychology, which was about the development of a school of thought that could explain and study consciousness, in particular states that were not considered pathological. She discussed the inadequacy of traditional theories of psychology of the time and explained what was going on with people who were meditating, practicing yoga, and taking psychedelic drugs such as LSD to change their consciousness and ultimately their experiences, the impetus being the social and political changes in the 1960s. The civil rights, women's rights, and counter culture movements brought attention to the political and social discontent of that time.

Due to this discontent, according to Ruzek (2007), people were looking for ways to change their inner worlds. One of the avenues they began to explore was Eastern philosophy, looking for alternatives to the organized religions of Judeo-Christian origins. Ruzek explained how transpersonal psychology has become concerned with concepts such as self-actualization, mystical experiences, cosmic awareness, and transcendental phenomena. It was during this time the charismatic spiritual leader Yogi Bhajan (2003) arrived in New York and began educating his followers regarding Kundalini yoga. It would appear that those who participated in this particular program, were among those of whom Ruzek spoke.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. First, the small sample size for the comparison of the lived experience was limited to 4 participants and cannot be considered as representative of all yoga students. Secondly, this study was limited to one yoga teacher training program, in one location, and a style of yoga that is not as popular as *Hatha* yoga, with which most people in the Western world are familiar.

Thirdly, the fact that because of this immersive experience, all participants became well known to me and indeed each other could have presented issues of bias; however, steps were taken during the interviews, as explained in Chapter 3, to help eliminate this possibility when gathering and analyzing data. At the time of the interviews, the participants were not aware of each other participating in the study; however, it is possible that they might have discussed their participation among themselves at a social gathering.

Another limitation that may have affected the data was that all except one student had at least a rudimentary understanding of the concepts of yoga and were familiar with the style of Kundalini yoga. The student who stated she had no prior knowledge was also a participant in this study. It is possible that this fact could have influenced the findings.

The delimitations of this study concern the fact that because this particular yoga teacher training class had only 13 students including the researcher, and four of those students were included in the study, demographic variables could not be used as possible explanations for behavior patterns. Certain demographic information could have made it possible for the identity of the participating students to be discovered, therefore, breaching confidentiality. It is possible that had demographic information been available, it might have shed additional light on the data and influenced the findings.

Another restriction could be the fact that students for the teacher training program were not randomly chosen in the traditional sense. It was interesting that there were no pre-screening assessments for suitability for the program, although the main instructor met with each person who had signed up for the program individually before the first day of classes. However, it is possible that the instructor made personal evaluations regarding each participant that were known only to her; therefore, the selection of students for the training was not random, but rather selective and based on the instructor's perception of who she felt was appropriate for the training. It is not known at this time how many students applied for this particular program; however, the instructor had stated that everyone who *signed up* for the class was accepted. It is also not known under what circumstances a student would have been refused admission to the class.

Future Directions for the Study of Yoga

In recent years, the growing interest in the efficacy of yoga as a healing modality has inspired a prolific amount of research to be published on this subject. A considerable amount of research has been published on the benefits of yoga in all areas of physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Barrows & Fleury 2016; Broad, 2012; Hopkins et al., 2016; Kaufman, 2016; Macy, Jones, Graham & Roach, 2015; McCall, 2007; Mehta & Sharma, 2010; Pascoe & Bauer. 2015; Riley & Park, 2015; Ross et al., 2014; Shannahoff-Khalsa, 2005; Sharma, 2014; Sharma & Knowlden, 2012,) The majority of studies suggest that yoga can be efficacious as part of integrated health care programs and treatments for a myriad of conditions; the studies mentioned in this work are only a small fraction of the volume of literature that is available.

Many people may not have the physical capacity to participate in the yogic *asanas*, (postures). However, they may still benefit from the concepts of yogic philosophy and practices.

The yogic diet that is based on Ayurvedic healing practices, chanting, and certain breath techniques are all areas of yoga that when practiced individually may make a difference to one's quality of life. These are all areas where further research may confirm and validate previous findings from research on yoga. Following a yogic path encompasses all the concepts listed above; however, much of the current research seems to focus primarily on the meditative and physical aspects of yoga.

What was reiterated throughout the literature is the need for larger sample sizes and more rigorous and ambitious studies to evaluate the efficacy of yoga. The evaluation of teacher training programs from a broader spectrum of locations and styles to identify which aspects of the training are most conducive to a person's growth and change would also be beneficial. As hospitals and clinics are becoming open to integrated healthcare practices, there could be a place for the type of experience a yoga teacher training program provides.

Implications of the Study

These findings may have implications for a broad spectrum of integrative health treatment programs. By incorporating an immersive yogic experience into an allopathic-based treatment plan for a variety of mental and physical health concerns, individuals could become more involved and begin to take personal responsibility for their own healing process. Although acknowledging that yoga is not for everyone, a yogic training program could offer those who are interested an opportunity to explore yoga and the philosophy that supports it in its entirety. Through curriculum-based programming designed specifically to focus on healing, yoga might help individuals to become more self-aware, thereby leading to more success in treatment from a variety of health issues. A structured yogic training program could even be useful if incorporated

into a residential treatment program for people who are struggling with substance use disorders, which, if successful, could implicitly become life transforming.

Conclusions

Indeed, when one takes note of the maladies that plague our daily lives, it is easy to understand why yoga and yogic philosophy has gained recognition in the West. There seems to be an emergence of dissatisfaction in ways of living and being. We flock to churches, synagogues, mosques, ashrams, and temples, looking for peace and guidance, while building more and more weapons of destruction. Religious dogma seems to be serving as a way to control the masses and an excuse to wage war and dissent amongst each other. We ignore the poor, homeless, the sick, and the weak in favor of amassing wealth, often at their expense. The cost of healthcare continues to rise as, essentially, a price is put on human life in the form of lifesaving medical procedures and medicine. We have managed to put a man on the moon, yet we have failed to solve the problems of mass incarceration, homelessness, addiction to mind altering substances, obesity, and poverty.

In short, the impression of Western culture is one that subsists largely by external and instant gratification as we continue to amass more *stuff* to feed our need and drive for what we perceive as success and happiness. It is no wonder that people have begun to look elsewhere for salvation, even though, according to the teachings of yogic philosophy, the answers have been with us throughout the ages. However, there seems to be a new consciousness that is penetrating the veil of overindulgence and obsession with material things. In recent years, popular media has been promoting the idea of the evolved human, with books and movies depicting super heroes with super powers. Many modern spiritual gurus seem to be appearing with messages of hope and wisdom, and science appears to be echoing many of the of the principles being expounded,

particularly in reference to the ancient wisdom of yoga. It is interesting that with all our inventions, brilliance, and affluence, many of us are now looking to the East to supply us with the knowledge we need to heal ourselves. We seem to have become hungry for change as we search for meaning to our lives that goes beyond the next fast car or labor-saving device.

Kundalini Yoga and the principles behind it appear to have been a well-kept secret, until Yogi Bhanjan (2003) began teaching in the West. Having seen the positive changes Kundalini Yoga has made for me, I have begun to explore the possibilities of using this ancient philosophy in my work as a substance abuse counselor to those who are incarcerated. It does not require any equipment, just a willingness to go beyond what one thinks is possible for him or herself. It does not infringe upon religious beliefs. I believe that this could be a positive path to implementing a cohesive program along with evidenced-based practice modalities to treat addiction, and also to help individuals to find some meaning in their lives.

I have found yoga to be a spiritual journey that has helped me to view my life in terms of mind, body, and spirit from a deeper, more nurturing perspective. I have found stillness and wholeness, perhaps not perpetually, but I believe I have found a renewed sense of emotional stability that helps me to navigate the less than joyous times. I have become more accepting, knowing that eventually the storm will pass. In hindsight, this experience has helped me to approach my life from a perspective of self-exploration, adventure, and love. I choose now to focus on what is possible, rather than what I cannot do. I am still on a spiritual journey that allows me to connect deeply with myself from a place of awareness and understanding. I have noticed more synchronicity in my life, particularly when reflecting on the *yamas* and *niyams* of the *yoga sutra*. The lessons continue to impact my life, and I realize I have changed. When I practice kundalini yoga, I feel radiant and alive.

As of this writing, it has been almost 3 years since I completed the yoga teacher training program. I have come to the realization that, along with lifelong friendships that were forged, the knowledge gained continues to impact my life in subtle ways. I have come a long way to finding the peace I was searching for, and I am gradually coming to a place of letting go and letting be.

Levine (1989) encapsulated perfectly the ultimate gift I believe I received from this experience.

So, we see that in the spaciousness of letting go there arises a natural balance. By our letting go of confusion, knowing arises. By our letting go of anger, love arises. We do not have to import love, we need only to let go of that which blocks it. By our letting go of fear, calm arises. Love and Peacefulness, care and generosity are natural qualities of being that are evident when not blocked by mental traits acquired to preserve and express the imagined self. (p. 40)

This thesis has attempted to provide a deeper insight into the nature of yoga, particularly Kundalini yoga to help contribute to the encouraging results regarding how yoga can help change the lives of individuals by working towards healing emotional wounds, strengthening and toning the physical body, and helping to forge positive healthy relationships. This study has also sought to contribute to existing knowledge of the possibilities of personal growth and transformation. The insights that could be gained from this study might be of assistance to those who are interested in embracing a yogic lifestyle with the intention of sharing, growing, and expanding personal awareness. Although this study did not shed light on any hitherto unknown phenomena, it raises questions for further study regarding the influence of positive shared experiences, certain yogic philosophical tenets, and physical and meditative practices and their role in living a meaningful life.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Hello Everyone

As you all know I have been working on my doctoral dissertation. My study is about how it was to go through the Kundalini Teacher training program. Many of you had said you might be interested in helping me with my research by talking with me about how the training was for you. If any of you would still like to help me with my study, please let me know by sending me a private message, that tells me how I can best reach you to set up a time and date for an interview. The interview would take no more than an hour of your time.

Thank you, I hope to hear from you soon.

Appendix B: Letter of Participation and Informed Consent

Introduction

My name is ----- . I am a doctoral student at Saybrook University in Oakland, California. I am doing a research study on what it was like to take part in a Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training program. I am doing this research as part of my doctoral degree, and I am asking if you would like to take part in my research.

Activities:

If you take part in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Meet me at a time and place of your choosing so that I can talk to you about what it was like for you when you went through the Kundalini Yoga teacher training program.
2. I will ask you to answer nine (9) questions.
3. Give about an hour of your time for the interview.

Audiotaping:

I would like to use a voice recorder to record your answers to the questions. You can still participate if you do not wish to be recorded.

Please sign here if I can record you: _____

Eligibility:

To participate in this research, you must:

1. Have been a student in the January 2015 Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Program, at [REDACTED]
2. Have completed the training

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Dropped out of the training before it ended
2. Completed Kundalini Teacher Training at another time and place

I hope to include (4-6) participants in this research.

Risks:

There is very little risk in this study. One possible risk is that another student who was in the same training class might be able to identify you because of descriptions of some of the activities in which we all participated. It is also possible that you could become distressed upon thinking back over some aspect of the training, or of your life.

If you are worried that you might be identified as taking part in this study, you can stop taking part at any time, and you do not have to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

Benefits:

There are no benefits to taking part in this study, except perhaps you might enjoy sharing your own story of how the teacher training was for you.

The potential benefits to others include a possibility may have a better idea of what it would be like to become a Kundalini yoga teacher, or they might become interested in Kundalini Yoga, or in the philosophy of yoga in general.

Confidentiality:

Any information you give to me will be kept private as it is required to be according to the law. I will keep your identity confidential by giving you a fake name or using a number instead of your name.

I will be the only person who will be able to see any of your information.

I will keep your information and your recorded interview transcript in a file on my computer, which will have a password.

I will keep your information for 7 years. Then, I will delete electronic information and destroy paper information.

Contact Information:

If you have questions for me, you can contact me at: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

If you have questions about your rights in the research, or if a problem has occurred, or if you are injured during your participation, please contact the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. (Participants were provided information when they were selected.

Voluntary Participation:

Taking part in this study is your free will. If you decide not to take part, or if you want to stop after you start, you may do so at any time and there will be no questions asked.

Termination of Participation:

If you decide to stop taking part, you may do so by: calling or e-mailing me to let me know you no longer wish to take part in my research. If so, I will not use any of the information I gathered from you.

Signature:

A signature indicates your understanding of this consent form. You will be given a copy of the form for your information.

Participant Signature

Printed Name

Date

Researcher Signature

Printed Name

Date

Appendix C: Interview Protocol
A Yogic Path to Personal Transformation

Name:

Location:

1. How did you come to learn about Kundalini Yoga?
2. Why did you decide to participate in the Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Program?
3. What are your thoughts and feeling about the curriculum that was taught?
4. What was your experience of White Tantric Yoga?
5. What was your experience of the Yoga Retreat?
6. What do you think you gained from the overall experience?
7. Do you think this experience has changed you in any way, if so how?
8. Were there any 'defining moments' for you during the course of this program?
9. What do you plan to do with this knowledge now that the program is over?

Appendix D: Interview Transcript: Participant Joe

1. How did you come to learn about Kundalini Yoga?

This was about 2007, so about 8 years ago, err, I developed some stress related issues, and, and it became physical issues too, my knee started hurting, I had some anxiety problems and I decided that I wasn't really active, I was like, office, home, office, home, a lot of Mountain Dew, and bad diet and it's not gonna go to the right direction, it's not gonna go right, so I decided to stop doing what I was doing, including my job and I turned in my resignation, and it took about 6 months to completely detach from my work, I started helping them in different forms, and stuff like that.

Finally it was December of 2007, I was out completely, and I started doing some gardening and other stuff that I had neglected for a long time, and I looked into going to community college, I lived near Estrella Mountain community college at that time so I grabbed a school catalog, so I'm looking at some things and I decided to join their fitness club, so in the community college I didn't know you could sign up for a semester for 90 bucks, it's really inexpensive for whatever, the 6 months semester, it's really inexpensive if you're gonna go to a fitness center community college, so I started going there and they check your blood pressure and stuff, they give you an initial assessment, and I lifted weights and worked on the treadmill a little bit and did some really great recoupment, and they have a little.... Like a basketball court, but it's not a full-sized basketball court, like little, maybe little physical things exercise area with a wooden floor. Every Thursday night, and whenever I'm there Thursday nights, I saw my first actually, she happened to be my first Kundalini yoga teacher, I would see her with a weird group of people, I would see her with pillows and yoga mats and they would go in there and turn the lights off and I would hear some music they would do some exercise, I had no idea what it was.

And the first time I was kinda scared, and I talked to my wife about it, and the next time I saw them, I approached her and she replied she was the leader of the group, so... and I said, “So what are you...what’s going on here what are you guys doing?” and she said, “Well, my name is Sylvia, and I’m a Kundalini Yoga teacher, you’re welcome to come take a class. I said, “I would love to” so, she invited me, and I sat through the first class with jeans and everything, she still makes fun of me, (laughs). Joe came to my first class with the jeans, anyway, I can’t even sit down and cross to that position, like you know how it is, and that was my first Kundalini Yoga class.

We did some breath work with the music and some chanting, I was very resistant at the beginning, with the chanting part of it because that’s when I was a little bit more in my concept of this chanting was a little bit different, and em....I really liked it, I told my wife. I started going to the classes without signing up for the class, the next semester, I signed up and I started from the beginning. And she then took me to.... To Ashram and a couple of times we did Sevaks class and some other classes, and we did White Tantric, and it was 2008 January, February, we did together, and so this was my introduction to Kundalini Yoga. She also introduced me to Bikram yoga, that’s why we are doing this (he’s referring to his business) but then after I opened this place, and I’m not....so I think with the Kundalini Yoga, once it’s in your heart, the meditation, relaxation, it calls you, and I’m like.... I had to do something, you know, I gotta go back, so I start... I went back, about 6 months prior to signing up for our teacher training, then I decided to go for it.

2. Why did you decide to participate in the Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Program?

Ok so there were a couple of things. I first realized I had waited too long, and I’m getting older, I can’t wait anymore; time is valuable, precious. Right now, I’m in a taking action mode

right now, if I have to do something, I do, it, I don't wait. And so little things, like yard landscaping things, I kind of procrastinate on those too, but the major things I don't wait anymore I do it, right away. So, this I said, you know what, I'm not going to wait anymore I gotta get it done and do it, bring some stuff here and the second part is more like a business, I wanted to be more diversified, not single dimensional with hot yoga, I just wanted to provide some meditation, so a couple of reasons for that.

3. What are your thoughts and feeling about the curriculum that was taught?

So, you know the good thing about my experience with the curriculum, I was exposed to another teacher training for 9 weeks. Every day, 24/7 we were in a hotel, for 9 weeks, and eat breakfast up and down there's no outside connection, of course your phones and Internet and all that stuff, so I can kind of compare them but I really thought it was very em deep. The text book materials, really great, I loved because we didn't have any materials in the Bikram teacher training, I'm not trying to bad mouth his teacher training; whatever he did, he does, he does it the way he is doing it, but I really enjoyed the text books, I really enjoyed different speakers coming doing different parts of the teacher training, em like they brought, couple of people one with em , she was a runner, a doctor something, you remember she was talking about different things, anatomy, and there was this other lady, a doctor who came up, and so I really enjoyed the different people coming in, doing different things, so the subject they introduced was valuable and I think the other thing, like em, this guy, the musician, something Guru Singh, Mahair, Mahair, Guru Singh something, so it's really good experience, and I think also added was the combined experience between Jaap Kaur, Sangeet, and all the other people's combined experience it was really, really valuable, so overall my experience is good, I thought it was really good, beneficial

4. What was your experience of White Tantric Yoga?

My first experience, initially, I was very skeptical, and scared the first one I did, 8 hours of yoga, the first one we did, and I talked to some of the people and it could change, White Tantric, they changed, the first one it was one hour, it was the same posture for 62 minutes, they are simple, we were sitting down, but you know we were partners, yeah we were partners, so em, however, I really liked the idea, as long as we are open minded, you know you don't go into it blind minded, so I just want to experience the life, so if you tell me I developed a machine I will put you through and fax you to (), this is from Wayne Dyer, Wayne Dyer started one of his speeches, one time, open your mind, if I tell you I developed a machine and I'm gonna put you through and fax you to (), trust me, so please let it happen, so I decided to be that way, so open minded, experiencing things whatever it is, and my experience afterwards I had an amazing experience, it was beautiful in a group of people, being simple, same minded people, very peaceful, happy, polite, kind, clean heart, and all these things, and my experience was just amazing, and I went there again the second time, then about 6 years of gap in the middle, and then together we went, (referring to he and I being partners for the one we went to for our class) and em, I like the challenge and I like to be able to learn what happens when I go through physical and emotional pain and what I do to push through, and in the happiness when it's done that you feel, I like all that stuff, and you kinda go away one day outside the bubble, outside the routine things that you are doing going inside a different bubble, so it's now all of a sudden you check out one day, no news no nothing, and boom, you are in there and then when you leave, it's a different perspective, so I enjoyed it, I am looking forward to going again this year.

5. What was your experience of the yoga retreat?

Emm, the one that we did? It was... it was good overall experience, and I liked that we were kind of away for a while... outside the city, completely, we slept not in our beds, I loved spending time with the people, you, and everybody else. Having our own time that was really good especially eating the breakfast and the lunch and the dinner. The food was fantastic, you know...Having in a different place completely helped us do more yoga things, you know practicing and all that stuff. I think my overall experience was good, I wish... I don't, know, I wish we had more time out there, a couple more weekends or something, maybe the entire teacher training was out there. I think

6. What do you think you gained from the overall experience?

Answered both of these questions in question 7

7. Do you think this experience has changed you in any way, if so how?

Let me think about this a little bit. So I could say, in my teachings especially the Bikram, I'm a little bit more relaxed, not so much uptight anymore...I think I get this from Jaap Kaur, just come, and do what you can do, so I when I teach, I try to focus on Bikram, and then Kundalini; so, I'm not mixing up the two different styles, but you still teach the words, so I think my classes have become a little bit more positive, uplifting, because of that.

8. Were there any 'defining moments' for you during the course of this program?

Well you know what, I think it was that little poem, that thing that we read you know that one about creation that we recorded, and as I am reading this, it goes from simple things, and gets more serious from I created this plant, to I created the universe, so as I'm reading this it goes from simple things and it gets more serious, more serious, to I created the universe, I could feel myself laughing internally, and at one point my recorder actually...there is a part that I am

laughing, laughing at what I am reading...its so beyond... ah comprehension, unimaginable things that I'm reading to myself and I'm claiming that something is...I cannot imagine right...so that contrast I think made me think, wow... Why not, maybe I'm a small part of it, so I think that point was for me a very interesting point, I could call it a turning point, or an amazing point for me, that was like an eyeopener point for me, it was also his tone, and voice... and I said to myself, Oh My God, what am I saying, shut up, you didn't create the world.

9. What do you plan to do with this knowledge now that the program is over?

I would like to teach, and doing the gong meditation, I teach Sundays at 12:15, and I definitely see myself doing this, I think I'm kinda in-sync with my ...looking into life, understanding of my life, my life's philosophy, I think I am in-sync with it, I'd like to keep teaching, to help people find some relief in this tough life.

Appendix E: Interview Transcript: Participant Sue

1. How did you come to learn about Kundalini Yoga?

Actually, my husband found Sangeet Kaur-Khalsa the first time, and he went to her for numerology, and it led me to go to her to get my numerology done, and it was through Sangeet that I found out about Kundalini yoga. I didn't really do it except at times at her house when she had gatherings or when I took numerology classes from her and we would do a little bit of yoga in the beginning or during lunch or something, that was the only time I did it, and I'm still not very good at doing it.

2. Why did you decide to participate in the Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Program?

Because a girlfriend that I have a huge amount of respect for that I've known, I initially met at a numerology class about 10 years ago, she decided come hell or high water this was my year I was going. I didn't even know what it was, had no interest in going, I did not want to go, but she kept telling me I need to go this year; I need to call and find out, and finally one day on the day out her door, she said promise me you'll call Jaap Kaur and I said ok. So, I called Jaap Kaur and the conversation we had was that I promised Sadhana Kaur I would call you because she said you could help me; I don't even know what you are supposed to do, and that's how I got signed up for Kundalini teacher training.

3. What are your thoughts and feeling about the curriculum that was taught?

I thought the curriculum was good, I though the Yogi Bhajan videos were kind of hard to follow just because our text wasn't a direct translation of what he said, but somehow, I made it through the practicum and learned how to do it and became a teacher so I have to say the curriculum was good, it was intensive but I enjoyed it.

4. What was your experience of White Tantric Yoga?

I thought I was going to die! (laughs) it was very...it was difficult for me, and the partner I had, we're still friends, but she was very into fixing her makeup and very wriggly, which I found quite difficult through White Tantric and the yoga mentality, but she's a really sweetheart, emm ...but do you want to hear what it did to me? The White Tantric, I never even knew what White Tantric was other than I had to do it, but I thought it was very, very interesting because for many years, I woke up in the morning, there was a time in my life, when it was very difficult with one gentleman for a number of years, emm ...And, I would just pray that God would kill me before I went to bed, and I would wake up in the morning and cry because I wasn't dead, and that kind of persisted and there were times when I would wake up and for the first 20 minutes, I would lay in bed and think of everything wrong I had ever done in my entire life and hate myself, and think I should be dead, but I made my mind up in February 1976 that I wasn't going to kill myself, and it was difficult, but the day after White Tantric, all those thoughts were gone, and I woke up and the thoughts weren't there, and it was just like a normal day, and I went on and those thoughts have never come back

5. What was your experience of the Yoga Retreat?

It was just ok I guess, emm ...Most of us were sick when we went there, I didn't like the long walks going down to dinner because it was hard for me to walk that far. I don't like group living because I'm more of a private person, but at least I was in a room with people that I knew. The garlic toast for breakfast was a bit strange, but I love garlic so it was ok ...emm, it wasn't the highlight of my training but it was ok.

6. What do you think you gained from the overall experience?

I think the most important thing for me is that I learned there are other people out there with me who have high moral fiber, that we need to be doing what we think is right. That I had always been an outcast my entire life because I kind of lived on a different plan from everybody else, and to find out that, that's perfectly ok to be like that and to have other people for support and other people around me who are like minded was the absolute highlight. And, I think the mental discipline and knowing there were others out there like me is what I really learned about it that was very supportive.

7. Were there any 'defining moments' for you during this program?

I'm not sure about defining ...the morning after White Tantric, is what sticks out ...my spirit and my mental attitude changed; that was a point where I really saw that it worked and was effective, which I didn't really expect to have any...any, change from White Tantric, I just thought I'd do it, and thank God it was over and that was the end of it,

8. What do you plan to do with this knowledge now that the program is over?

Continue to find like-minded people. I went through my 6 months of teaching and realized that teaching is not one of my passions; at least, teaching yoga is not one of my passions. I'm not in the least bit sorry I spent all that money on myself and took that class because I think the mental discipline was worth it, and finding kindred souls was worth it, so I want to take this knowledge and continue to improve on my self-opinion and improve on how I can go out and help people with other ways, I'd like to help people healing. I'm a healer, and I'd like to do that instead of yoga.

Appendix F: Interview Transcript: Participant Liz

1. How did you come to learn about Kundalini Yoga?

I first started learning about Kundalini energy and serpentine energy by studying occultism, I found it interesting, I wanted to know how the energy flowed throughout the body and what it meant and what it did. I had an experience which I thought might be a Kundalini awakening and so from there I was researching, and researching and never really got the answers I was looking for exactly, but kundalini stayed on my mind. So, then I was working in a yoga studio doing Bikram yoga and err, someone was going to be teaching Kundalini yoga, so once again the word popped up and it was yoga, I loved yoga, so I thought well this might help me understand what this is, so I immediately tried it, and that's how I learned about Kundalini Yoga.

2. Why did you decide to participate in the Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Program?

Well, I wanted to be a yoga teacher, I really wanted to be a yoga teacher, just to study yoga; I really enjoyed being with students, and when you want to learn more about something, you become the teacher. So, I was looking for all kinds of teacher programs, and there were different kinds all over that covered different things, but it seemed like Kundalini yoga also covered all aspects other programs did as well. But, I had really grown to appreciate Kundalini yoga. So, I decided to go with it, but what really made me decide to go with it was them calling me and asking me to take the class because I had decided that I might do something different with my money at the time, so (pauses and laughs) I still don't have the computer that I wanted. Yeah so, it wasn't necessarily like I'm gonna be a Kundalini yoga teacher, I just wanted to take a teacher training, I just wanted to be a yoga teacher, that was my thing and em this one came in to...so, I decided to do it, it could have been anything, but this is what it was.

3. What are your thoughts and feeling about the curriculum that was taught?

It was alright...I mean, I was in a deep rest through a lot of the classes (Laughs), yes, I was in a deep rest but I really loved the reading, it was alright... I don't know if...(sighs) I don't know if you can ever teach as much as you can about a practice that no one... none of the teachers, and no one really em, were the originators of it, so everything was like fourth and fifth hand, I'm not even gonna say second hand, so all the information is passed down, and passed down, so there was always a feeling that I'm not getting what I feel I should be getting. I always felt like I needed to be on the mountain somewhere with you know...pause... with a guru, you know for real, where I actually somehow witnessed this person channel the information and now they're telling me directly. That wasn't the experience, for that, it was alright, but what it did do was put me in the right position, I would say to try to gather my own information.

I had done a lot of studying, prior to, about a lot of the concepts, and so not everything always matched up, not everything matched to science, as well. So some of the things didn't mesh with me at all, but it still put me in a position for me to claim my sense of educating myself so, I think that was really important for me, and I don't know if any teacher training would have made me feel differently, you know because of the nature of yoga, it's from a different country, and we don't even know if its India, it could be from a country prior to that, and there is so much that is missing in the dialogue so, for what it was, it was It was alright

4. What was your experience of White Tantric Yoga?

It was, it was interesting, because we were The idea is that you are supposed to be paired with a man, and I was actually paired with a woman and I was alright with that it might sound funny, but she happened to be a woman who loved women, she was a lesbian, so there was something about.... There was balance there, she was more in tune with her masculine

energy, so I was still in the place to maybe be in the feminine, I didn't feel like I needed to dominate in any way, shape or form, so we had a very good em... When we were working together when I moved one leg, she moved one leg, it was like a dance, we were never at odds with each other, we flowed through it very well, we were strangers prior to it... we were in the same class, but we didn't know each other, so this was our chance to know each other, and it was a very good experience. It changed my... it was a good experience for both of us to do something we didn't necessarily want to do but that we were supposed to do, and we dealt with it so well....

As I was saying...and then afterwards, I was very light headed, I can't say I liked it, I can't say I liked White Tantric, I don't know, I can't even say that it did anything for me, I remember that the idea was that it was supposed to clear everything out, clear out all your Karma's, but I don't really believe in Karma, so that doesn't really make sense to me. So, what it did do is physically and mentally exhaust me to the point that I experienced myself in a new way, not that, that was true, and when I was... I remember driving my car and feeling a sense of oneness with my drive, which is good because I was feeling dizzy from that.... You know that long day of meditation and chanting and physical activity... so it was... My favorite part about it was working with my partner and us being in tune with each other and supporting each other, and... em... and leaving it, those two things were great... alright...

5. What was your experience of the Yoga Retreat?

Laughter for about a minute... I was in a deep rest for most of that yoga retreat, (continued laughing) ... There were times when we were walking, and I was in a very deep rest so I was able to miss things that were controversial, I was able to miss things that I found other people were offended by emm... I was kind of able to go into my own little world and enjoy the

moment. What was unique about the yoga retreat which probably only relates to me, was that I had a dream a few years ago prior to that about land and about a house and the space, you know where I was meeting unknown family members and so on and so forth, and when we got to the land not the main place where we were sleeping, but when we got to the place where we were eating, that was the land that I saw in my dream, it was pretty much exact, so, for me there was an interesting connection there, which made me enjoy the experience, so I was having my own mystical revelation throughout the practice, which made me feel very comfortable going into a deep rest, so when everybody was in there doing yoga and listening and watching videos or whatever they were doing, I was asleep, I don't want to say asleep, I'll say deep rest, and then, when it was time to get up and go to that house where the food was, I was awaked because I knew I was a part of something, I was witnessing something that I had seen before, and so, I loved it, I loved that part of it. I loved going out at night, I loved looking at all the stars, the stars were amazing, the sky like, just opened up, I loved the sound of nature, I loved being..... remember at one point that we were walking like in the dark, and it was amazing being able to trust the ground knowing that I wasn't going to step on a creature or a life so there was a great moment of trust, trusting nature, trusting the environment, umm...so I had a great time at the yoga retreat, but clearly I have not mentioned anything that happened in the yoga part because I was in a deep rest, but that land and that experience was amazing to me, and maybe we can say that the way that people were or the mood or the energy that was created during the yoga retreat that other people were participating in facilitated the experience that I had, because I didn't have anyone interfering with what I was doing I didn't have anyone wanting me to be a different way, I didn't have anyone pulling on me to do this or do that, I was able to experience things as they were. Umm so maybe that was the special part of it.

6. What do you think you gained from the overall experience?

Well.... I got a teaching certificate...(laughs) I can teach yoga, that was very important to me. Umm, for me... for me going into that position, being able to go in front of a class and teach something that I want to teach is empowering, you know, I have taught a lot of other things, and this was empowering for me, but I also gained a sense of umm... one thing about the training was that you really could be whoever you want. There was a sense of acceptance there, which is why I was able to be in deep rest, you know, most of the time, and that meant that I was able to go on my own personal journey there in a very supported environment. No one pretended to know who I was, no one pretended to have any ah ideas of what I should do or what I shouldn't do, and in the meantime, I'm learning about who I was. So, it was a very great time for me to build that confidence in who I was. And doing the Sadhana that we did, which is Nabi Kriya and working on your core, which is working on your confidence, I left more confident, and just following your path and doing what it is that I wanted to do. So, I think I left with a lot of confidence and being able to walk into any environment and be who I was. Then... now I have this added authority to be a teacher, which I already was before, so it wasn't like a grand epiphany but, it was more of a... I have the ability to teach the things that I want to teach. So, there is something very empowering about that.

7. Do you think this experience has changed you in any way, if so how?

Yeah.... I, I'm someone that has more tools, you know, you can't deny that kriyas and meditation are not useful, and when you add more tools it means that you are more equipped to deal with things in your life that maybe you weren't able to deal with before. Umm... when you are a position to help facilitate other people to help, to help themselves, it does feel good, you know when you're teaching... I don't.... I see myself as facilitating someone else's healing

process, I'm not doing it, I'm just making it easier, and that.... That feels great and it... I think I take that with me in other places in my life, I don't just take it and apply it to the class... umm, the rest I don't know I feel the same in many ways, but different at the same time, maybe that's just the majority... I don't know.... Did I have personal growth... I don't know, I hope so (laughs)... I hope so... I think I'm always growing, I really am I am always growing, I was in a position, where I mean, before that I was working on myself, I was working on myself before I went into teacher training, you know I had probably gone through years and years of consciously working on myself you know reading books, studying this, studying that, whereas prior to that it wasn't that much of an issue to me you know, I was who I was, and then I started to work on myself and I tried to change things about me that maybe I wanted to change or accept things I wanted to accept, whatever, and so it was a part of my growth, but it wasn't like the main thing, my main shebang, I had already been on that path, umm, you know, but it was a big part of it I think mainly because of sharing space with people who were all on a path of some sort, and umm, even though you're spiritual path is personal, it's amazing to see other people go through it too... so yeah...

8. Were there any 'defining moments' for you during this program?

Hmmm... well you know when we had that breathing class, when the lady was there who was a physical therapist, and I always forget her name, ahhh, when she came in and you know, a big portion of her class was just breathing, she really just went over breathing that changed... that was that was amazing, it was the first time I ever felt the power of breath, you know, I have... I would do all kinds of breathing exercises, you know, I used to always try to do breathing things and I never felt such a difference until we were just breathing the whole time that was amazing, absolutely amazing, so I did feel a shift there, in consciousness in who I was,

in my body, in my mind, so even now when I teach, I emphasize breathing so much, the way I move, the way I exercise, everything, I'm always thinking about and incorporating healthy breath which might seem small, but it does something big, you know that kind of intangible thing, and then I'll also say there was a moment where it wasn't necessarily my epiphany, but sitting next to her... what was her name... I forget her name... well anyway, one of our classmates, she was having one of those moments where she just cried... you know... It was during Sevak's class, you know he had this class and you know his portion and he... he was interesting, you know, I did not take a deep breath in his class... you know and which that should say something, I wasn't interested in how he was presenting things, and umm, we were talking about the stages of meditation and really might have been advertising for teacher training too, but whatever you know, there's always an advertisement, (laughs), but in that advertisement we were talking about the different phases that you go through and then the girl next to me burst out in tears, and he used that moment to say, look you know, you're going through this... this part, you know, anyway, it was pretty amazing to me because I'm sitting next to someone who is having a breakdown, I have never cried in yoga, not once, but I've been around people who have. One time I remember being in class and the next thing I know everyone around me was crying, and I'm just standing there looking at them and thinking "alright, I hope this works out" but, with her, I felt this empathy, which was (laughs) it might seem weird but it was a really cool moment for me to feel this empathy for her and where I started to understand the power of any process in which you're growing and she could have that release, so yeah, it wasn't my moment, but it.. it did define some things for me (chuckles) something about it... you know, I... I remember it in the breathing part.

9. What do you plan to do with this knowledge now that the program is over?

Well, you know I teach of course, so that's one thing that I have done with it, but for me so many questions about kundalini energy were not answered, so many things still don't make sense, and so I'm constantly practicing yoga, you know I practice the exercises because I find that playing around with them and practicing them and doing little things helps me learn more about this energy, you know so that was why I took it; I wanted to learn more about something, so what I've done with the knowledge is essentially work to gain more knowledge in ways that are more free and independent, not... one of the questions asked, I forget, but one of the questions... when I was in the class a lot of times, I heard things that I knew weren't correct, that weren't backed up, but I would just write it down, and I would come back to it... and what it did was it got me into deeper study in other things, umm, it got me into deeper analysis of other things so it helped me grow, so for me, the knowledge was one little page it can't even fill up the chapter, umm, its one page of a larger book to be read and scored and understood and then to incorporate... alright I'll give you four pages, one page seems small but you know what I mean, it was like a jumping board ... Because there's people who are practicing Kundalini yoga now who have grown from it, who have branched off, whether they admit it or not because they realize there is so much more to it to learn ...and then remember there were all these rules, you know yogi Bhajan says this, don't do this (cynical voice) don't do that, and you know those are all the things, I'm gonna do, all the things that you are not supposed to do, because you've gotta know what the other side is, so I find that very interesting... It's not so much that I am trying to go against it, it's just that you know. What I'll say is that from darkness comes light, and if you think about it as a metaphor the kundalini groove is all about lightness, it's all about white light, it's about wearing the color white, it's all about this light stuff, you mention darkness for a

second and it has all these horrible connotations, and the whole time I was in class, somehow darkness became more alluring to me than it ever has, and I had always been very comfortable with darkness, but just because of all the emphasis of why it became more alluring to me and that... well what is this, so kundalini yoga is often about projecting out, projections, you hear a lot about that, and that's a very masculine way of approaching things you know going out, pointing out, and the darkness isn't bad, is it bad, no ... so, the knowledge itself and allocating expression over certain aspects in the knowledge that was given made me open up to more implications and use it differently, so that's where I'm at.

Appendix G: Interview Transcript: Participant: Ann

1. How did you come to learn about Kundalini Yoga?

For me, I learned about it after I had been practicing just regular yoga for a while. I moved back here to Arizona, like about 10 years ago. My sister-in-law invited me over to do yoga, and I thought we were just doing slow yoga, and that was the first time I was introduced to Kundalini yoga, which I thought... like the first time I did it, it was like really weird, but I really liked it, even though it was completely different from the yoga I had been doing before. That was my first introduction to it was through a family member. I continued to practice off and on for several years, and then umm... I just continued... I did a lot of videos, and then after that, I think that you know, there were some changes in my life, and I really wanted to delve into something deeper, with more of a spiritual focus to it, so then I learned about yoga Phoenix and that was like probably within the year before we started the training for Kundalini yoga, so I started taking classes there, and I decided to make that my focus for that year because there was a lot of stuff going on, and I needed to put my energy somewhere else, so, that's how I started out with, with that.

2. Why did you decide to participate in the Kundalini Yoga Teacher Training Program?

I wanted to participate in the Kundalini yoga teacher training... again it was to put my energy somewhere else, but I wanted to have that spiritual side to the yoga, and I loved the whole idea of incorporating breath work in to these yoga poses that have to do with like mudra's with the hands and working with the chakras, how like holding your arms a certain way relates to the meridian lines in your body, like going at 60 degrees, and it has like ego eradicator and you have... you know, working with the arc lines, so it's not just the chakras, but it's your whole energy field, and so that... Having that experience with that, made me decide that that was really

a path that I wanted to follow, and not just like umm... it was a path that I wanted to incorporate into my life basically and not be like whatever about it.

3. What are your thoughts and feeling about the curriculum that was taught?

I think we... for the most part... She was very, very thorough, umm but it was her first time there teaching it, but I think that's... yeah on her own, on her own...she had taught it before, but she would be like with Sevak, and she would be like a secondary teacher. So, she taught it, but not like the whole thing by herself, that was the first time. Sometimes, I thought she was a little too umm, strict on some things very like, almost to the T on things, I don't know if that's the right word but somethings I can understand sticking to it but maybe not be so strict... super rigid about things but you can still be with the... whatever they have it.... Want it to be a specific way... otherwise I thought that, that there was a lot of information in the curriculum, and honestly it took me another year to go through it, after the fact, when I would go and teach a class, I would actually go back sometimes if I had the time, and read in that book that we had to get more in depth and then also some things would click after we took the teacher training, and I'd be like Oh looks like... now it makes sense to me.

4. What was your experience of White Tantric Yoga?

My first experience of White tantric yoga was kind of overwhelming to me because we had already had to do this, I won't say for hours, but were sitting on the floor and sometimes some of us... those hand things that we were doing seemed so uncomfortable, but then, after I had taken my tongue check a few more times, I realized for me, like some of those hand positions we would hold them for about 30 minutes sometimes or 20 minutes, or longer for me, I realized what it was that you were working energetically through the... almost like karma... when whatever that is focused upon sometimes, I don't even know if we know (chuckle) but

its... it felt like it worked through energy blocks in our systems, but it is also working through your karma too, Like releasing all that karma, so, as I've taken White Tantric Yoga, I can honestly say that when I did it at summer solstice, I actually had an experience, a spiritual experience with it, that was pretty trippy... So, I think it was the first day a White Tantric summer solstice, we do it for three days in a row.... Umm it was the first time I didn't actually get sleepy and want to fall asleep while I'm doing it, and I actually felt really good, and I did the whole thing without falling asleep, umm so I was doing... We were probably like half or three quarters of the way in and they were doing the chant... I can't remember the chant now... but there were hand movements, and I was doing this and, all of a sudden, I literally felt a hand push my chest like to sit up, then it went to the back and pushed me to like sit up straight, and I looked because I thought maybe it was a monitor came by and I was like... Whatever slouching too much or something, and no one was there, and I was like Wow! So we continued on, and we were doing this chant, and moving our hands in a certain way, and all of sudden everything started sounding like everyone was like off key and off the beat and I was like what the heck... Why is everybody so, so off and umm as we were doing it all of a sudden it was almost like time slowing down, and it was like a jumble with time slowing down; I heard yogi Bhajan's voice and he was doing the chant over all the jumbling of all these people who were chanting together and all of a sudden I was like what the heck is going on as we were doing this, and then all of a sudden it was like when you are watching a movie and they show like time speed coming back to our normal *now* time or something, but it literally was like (funny sound) and then all of a sudden everyone was all on key, nobody was off, it was like I had flipped into some other dimension or something, and so at the end of the day the girl that I was with, I said I had a... this experience when they were chanting, and I tried to describe this to her and she... her jaw

dropped and she was like no way.... She was like, I had the same experience. The two of us had the same... so it wasn't just me, it was her, she had the same thing where everything slowed down, and she was like everybody was off beat or off key or whatever, and then she said she heard his voice too and umm, the piece, anybody will attest to when you do White Tantric, it had been hot and dry, probably the monsoon season, but it didn't like storm, it was hotter than normal, it was dry but the thunder had built up and every night after we did tantric, we would get a thunderstorm it had built up while we were doing it, and it would rain, the wind would blow through and it was like thunder and lightning, it was the most craziest thing; it was like a thousand people doing this in like one space... Yeah it was kinda crazy!

5. What was your experience of the Yoga Retreat?

I enjoyed it except that like when that lady fell, I think they should have sent her to the hospital, honestly, instead of like blowing it off because it was kind of like she had fallen pretty hard... Umm, it's kind of funny to see how the mix of people and... were all together and how everybody kind of interacted and did with like getting up early and doing like Aquarian sadhana in the morning and going throughout that day, and then it was kind of hot then, and then, that one day when we were doing the celestial communication, remember when we were doing that, I think you ended up leaving actually, a couple of people did... I don't know that was... My experience of that, I really liked doing those actions and... and the different type of experiences for me, I always wanted to try that so I gathered the whole weekend I guess in a way.

6. What do you think you gained from the overall experience?

I honestly feel like I felt more grounded and centered I definitely was working through a lot of my own stuff during that time, I really processed through a lot of my mental emotional stuff... umm... it helped me kind of hold my center when things were not always very balanced

and so err, I found out that when I did practice regularly I felt very... I felt completely different from when I didn't practice... when I didn't practice for a while, then that's when I would be more affected by other people's emotions or maybe a remark someone would say but when I practiced more, umm my own sadhana or if it was just a meditation in the morning, I just can go out in the day with a different energy and feel almost more energetic and more alive I guess, so ... and I had seen... I do certain meditations like the one for abundance there's a couple of them I've used and I've had results from them, like something's happened that I didn't expect to happen and either helped me out financially or in other ways, so it's a power meditation and then the other one is the *gyan chakra kriya*, that was ... I love that one, that's one of my favorites

7. Do you think this experience has changed you in any way, if so how?

Oh definitely! it's changed me in a lot of ways ... the way I approach things, I come from more of a ... I think from a centered, grounded space than before I feel more connected to source, or whatever you want to call it. The one thing that changed with me is that umm I used to always speak outside of myself umm especially the spiritual pieces, like umm, and example would be like the script I used... I guess talking about how I use, but when something happens instead of like, oh let me call my umm ascended masters, my archangels, I'm not saying I don't believe in that but they put all their belief and power in that. Instead of perhaps help taking care of their self, but now I believe like that if you have that connection you don't have to believe that... you don't have reach out to that to protect you or to do whatever it is that you are calling them in for because if you have that connection within yourself, you don't need that, you are already connected to source, I can't say I'm perfect, practicing every single day, and I should be because I'm supposed to be doing a 90-day meditation right now, I fell off, and I've got to start

again but I umm, I have done 40 and 90=day but if I'm not into it, it's harder for me to do it, so ...

8. Were there any 'defining moments' for you during this program?

I don't know if I can pick one out, there's so many, and some of them aren't even while I was taking teacher training, but more after the fact... umm... I don't know I guess what stood out for me how much of when I practiced, how much it changed my life, but I can't think of one thing now that really stood out for me, I'm sure I could have maybe when I was closer to the end of the course....

9. What do you plan to do with this knowledge now that the program is over?

What I plan to do... what I've been doing since the program is over is just kind of actually teach... teach it and open it up to other people and sometimes what I find is that once they actually do it they love it, and then I just practice for myself, but I hope to offer a retreat, where I wouldn't just teach kundalini yoga, but I want that to be a part of that so that people actually get the experience of that, because I think it's important part of yoga, to have a kundalini part but maybe other yoga, it's not all kundalini yoga, honestly, some people kinda take the attitude of like it's the only one, but it's all the same, yeah, I've found without doing the other yoga... the other yoga grounds me and it helps me get that energy into my body, like incorporate it into my body, and if all I did was kundalini yoga then my back would probably be killing me right now, because a lot of the poses are sitting and doing stuff with your arms.