

Project

SATYA

INVESTIGATION
INTERIM REPORT #3

MEMORANDUM

to: Project SATYA Admins
(Angela Gollat, Antonia Abu Matar, Jens Augspurger)

from: Carol Merchasin; Dr. Josna Pankhania

subject: Interim Report on the investigation into the sexual abuse claims against Swami Vishnu-devananda and other leaders within ISYVC, and narratives of survivors on sexual, psychological, and other forms of abuse

date: November 2020

TRIGGER WARNING

This report discusses several forms of abuse, including sexual abuse in graphic language, emotional abuse and negligence.

**The appendix at the end of this document includes different resources and inspiration for self-care for survivors and supporters who might find reading this report distressing.*

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History of Project SATYA, the EBM's investigations and mediation attempts

by Carol Merchasin, Esq.

As we are coming to the close of the investigation, I thought it would be helpful to go back to December 2019 and recap the formation of the Project Satya group and provide some background for where we are now in relationship to the EBM, as of October 2020.¹

Background of Project Satya

On December 10, 2019, Julie Salter, who had been a close disciple of Swami Vishnudevananda, (Kuttan Nair) the leader of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres ("ISYVC") from 1982 until his death in 1993, published a Facebook post with an account of the sexual misconduct of Swami Vishnudevananda. Salter was known as Swami Kartikeyananda from 1979-1999 while she was a member of the ISYVC.

In her Facebook post, Ms. Salter also described her subsequent efforts to bring this information to the Executive Board Membership ("EBM") beginning in 2003.

A community group called 'Project SATYA' (formerly: Sivananda Yoga Community) was immediately created, led by Antonia Abu Matar, Angela Gollat and Jens Augspurger ("the Project Satya Admins") to shed light on this and other claims of sexual and psychological harm in the ISYVC. The Project Satya Admins set up a Facebook group ("Project Satya Facebook Community") and additional women immediately began writing Facebook posts about sexual misconduct involving Swami Vishnudevananda, Prahlada, Swami Mahadevananda and others. Allegations of other forms of abuse (emotional, financial, callous indifference, and indentured servitude) also began to come forward.

The History of the EBM's Investigation into Julie Salter's Allegations

On December 13, 2019, the EBM issued its first statement through its Public Relations firm, Communications Avenue. They announced that a confidential email inbox had been set up by the PR firm and that women who had allegations could reach out to this email address confidentially. The PR firm's website indicates absolutely no experience with confidential, trauma complaints. It was later announced on February 8, 2020, via a subsequent EBM statement that some of the emails sent to this address would be handled by Lanny Alexander, a lawyer who was seen as being close to the EBM and who had handled previous complaints on behalf of the EBM.

¹ This memo has been published in the Project SATYA Facebook group in October 2020.

The EBM attempted to reassure sceptical women to come forward by asserting that no one who told their story would be sued. The Project Satya Facebook Community viewed this statement as an admission of the silencing of women in the past. Ms. Salter had been threatened with legal action in 2007 after a lengthy and unfruitful attempted negotiation with the EBM. Other women also allege that they had been intimidated in their efforts to disclose or report abuse.

In a further erosion of trust, the EBM first appeared to express surprise at Ms. Salter's claims in December 2019, but a statement made a week later (on December 16, 2019) admitted that they were aware of Ms. Salter's claims many years before and that they had failed to investigate.

Given the inadequate and contradictory responses from the organization, Project SATYA decided that an independent community-led investigation would better serve bringing truth forward and letting survivors' voices be heard. Project SATYA set up a GoFundMe account and raised money to retain Carol Merchasin, a retired lawyer with experience in conducting investigations and Dr. Josna Pankhania, a narrative therapist with experience in advocating for women in abusive situations.

In January 2020, the EBM announced that they had hired Marianne Plamondon, a Québec lawyer with experience as an independent investigator. Her investigation was initially limited to allegations against Swami Vishnudevananda. Subsequently, the EBM expanded the mandate of Mme. Plamondon's investigation to include allegations of sexual misconduct against Prahlada (aka Thamatham Reddy).

Lack of trust and transparency on the part of the organization, initially discouraged Julie, and others from participating in the Plamondon investigation. However, at the end of March 2020, only hours before Julie Salter (and eventually others with allegations of abuse by Swami Vishnudevananda) were scheduled to be interviewed by Mme. Plamondon, the EBM suspended its investigation into all abuses by Vishnudevananda, citing COVID-19 as the cause.

The Plamondon Investigation into Prahlada

The investigation into allegations of abuse against Prahlada continued but initially not all of the women who came forward to Mme. Plamondon were included in her investigation. Instead, on April 10, 2020 Mme Plamondon stated that the EBM had limited her investigation to only four women. This seems to contradict the EBM's commitment in early 2020 that "Ms. Plamondon will have the independence to meet with anyone she believes would help in her findings, and we will not interfere in any way during her investigation."

Eventually another two women were permitted to give their allegations to Mme Plamondon. We understand that the investigation into Prahlada is on-going.

Attempts to Engage the EBM in a Process of Reconciliation

After the EBM cancelled the investigation into the allegations of abuse against Swami Vishnudevananda, they communicated individually with Julie Salter, Lucille Campbell and Pamela Kyssa, offering them a choice: either a mediation process as an alternative to an investigation, or an investigation at an unknown future moment.

Over a period of several weeks, the three women communicated with the EBM to inquire regarding the process the EBM had in mind, as an investigation and a mediation are two inherently different processes.

1. Investigations are a way to collect information and come to a conclusion about what happened;
2. Mediations are used to negotiate a voluntary settlement of differences with the help of a third party. They are typically useful for disputes of property or money. They are not useful, in fact they are harmful, in situations where there is a power imbalance among the parties, where there is fear, coercion or where there are criminal allegations.

In order to determine the best process to engage in, the women asked the EBM a series of questions:

Do you believe what the three of us have said regarding the sexual misconduct of Swami Vishnudevananda? If you already believe us, then waiting for an investigation is not necessary.

If you do not believe us, then we must consider whether the mediation you have proposed is the right process for us to be involved in.

The EBM responded to the question of whether they believed the women's allegations by saying that *'each one of us have our own experience, and each of the current EBM members have their own personal truth in their relationship with Swami Vishnudevananda, as well as different understandings of what constitutes sadhana and service.'*

Working with the Mindells

The EBM then appointed Arnold and Amy Mindell as mediators. The Mindells are experts in working with large and small groups in conflict. The EBM suggested the women meet with the Mindells in order to start the mediation process.

However, once again, there was no communication as to what the topic of the mediation might be. Usually, a mediation begins with a conflict to be solved: how to divide the assets in a divorce, or how to sever a business relationship. The conflict in a sexual assault is not one that can be mediated. As the women pointed out, you either believe us (no investigation necessary) or you don't (an investigation is necessary).

Julie, Lucille, and Pamela asked me to speak to the Mindells on their behalf to find out what the EBM meant by "mediation." I informed the Mindells of the interim results of

my investigation, specifically the many allegations of sexual abuse. Upon learning this, the Mindells said they felt that a mediation process would not be the best process. Instead, the women asked for the EBM to engage the Mindells to lead a community wide process of truth and reconciliation.

The EBM responded:

We do not wish to mediate with the Project Satya group.

*Should the 3 women want to engage in **a direct mediation process** with the EBM, they can let the EBM know.*

As we come to the close of the investigation into the allegations against Swami Vishnudevananda, it appears that the EBM is committed only to the process of mediation, which the women correctly have identified as harmful. Further, it appears that the EBM has no intention of resuming the Plamondon investigation into the credible allegations of abuse by Swami Vishnudevananda.

The EBM also responded:

We remain open to listen to the 3 women. This was offered several times already and was declined.

I want to be clear that the women did not ever *decline being listened to*. They asked reasonable questions to try to determine what process the EBM had in mind and “mediation,” a process totally unsuitable for sexual abuse, was the only option offered.

I do not know what the EBM has in mind when they say they are open to “listening,” however, I note that “listening” could be accomplished by reading the investigative reports, the survivor statements that Dr. Pankhania has compiled and then making a full, sincere apology for the harm done.²

² The essay “Nature of Apology” by Dr Josna Pankhania can be found at the end of this report.

PART I:

**Report on the Investigation into the Sexual Abuse Claims
against Swami Vishnu-devananda and other Teachers**

by Carol Merchasin, Esq.

Overview

In this report, I take up the allegations against Swami Vishnudevananda (“SVD” aka Kuttan Nair), who was the founder of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres (“Sivananda Yoga”).

Sexual misconduct at the top of an organization often encourages a culture of sexual misconduct at all levels of the organization. When reports of abuse threaten an organization, such reports may lead to the ignoring and silencing of sexual and other harms. Therefore, in addition to the complaints of sexual abuse involving SVD, this report includes allegations of sexual abuse against other swamis/senior teachers and reports of the organization’s failure to (properly) respond.

Summary of the Investigation into Allegations of SVD’s Sexual Misconduct

In December 2019, Julie Salter posted on her Facebook page that Swami Vishnudevananda, a man who taught celibacy, had in fact sexually abused her for years. This serious claim was followed by the claims of two additional women who posted their sexual assault allegations against SVD along with Julie, under her post and on the Project Satya Facebook page. A fourth woman who read their disclosures decided that it was time for her to tell her story, and she reached out to the Project Satya confidential inbox.

I had several interviews with these four survivors, and I also interviewed a number of corroborating witnesses who were told of the assaults by the four survivors. In all cases, they were able to corroborate that they had been told of the claims by the individual women.

I also reached out to a number of people who were said to have information about these alleged assaults in order to hear their versions of events. However, many of the people who had information are dead, others could not be located and others did not respond to my request to conduct interviews. Nonetheless, I did manage to speak to a number of people with either firsthand knowledge or corroborating information.

I also note that originally the EBM themselves agreed to conduct an investigation into the allegations made by Julie Salter, Pamela Kyssa and Lucille Campbell, but they halted that investigation just two hours before Julie Salter’s interview.³ Therefore, this investigation, limited as it may be, is the only opportunity to shed light on these claims.

³ I documented the EBM’s subsequent communications with Julie Salter, Lucille Campbell and Pamela Kyssa and the women’s efforts to engage the EBM in a community healing process. That document has been delivered to the Project Satya Admins and it has been posted on their Facebook page. It has been copied here for reference and is preceding Part I of this report (p. 6ff.).

I emphasize that these are allegations and unlike Swami Mahadevananda and Prahlada who are alive and able to speak, SVD is dead. In addition, memories of events in the 70s and 80s have often faded. It is not possible for me to do any more than evaluate the credibility of the women and the available corroboration, identify any patterns of misconduct that emerged, and present the additional evidence that arose out of my investigation.

I feel now that it is the EBM's responsibility to shoulder the remainder of the work that needs to be done. All that I can do here is to show the Satya community and the ISYVC that there are serious issues that remain to be addressed. One is the issue of the actual celibacy of Swami Vishnudevananda and other swamis who claim to be celibate, not only because it allegedly is a lie, but also because celibacy creates an illusion of a space that is safe when it is not. Another issue is how the centers and ashrams have dealt with women and men who have come forward to report sexual misconduct. It is not enough to have a policy; leaders and staff must be trained, there must be a safe, independent process in place to take in complaints, investigate them and resolve them in a way that protects everyone.

The Allegations

I investigated the following allegations against SVD:

1. When he was their guru, he initiated sex multiple times with three women. No consent was obtained but since he was guru at the time consent would not matter.
2. That he presented himself as celibate, taught renunciation and celibacy while allegedly he was secretly having sex with at least three women from the early 70s through the 80s; and
3. That he made overtly sexual advances toward a fourth woman.

In addition, I investigated allegations of sexual misconduct against other Sivananda teachers in a variety of different centers and ashrams. Regarding these allegations of sexual misconduct against other teachers, I have reported not just the sexual advances and misconduct themselves but also the total lack of attention these assaults received from leaders of ashrams when they were reported.

I investigated allegations at the following Sivananda Yoga centers and ashrams:

- Grass Valley Ashram, California, US (Yoga Farm)
- Orleans Ashram, France (Yoga Chateau)
- Val Morin Ashram, Québec, Canada (Yoga Camp)
- Bahamas Ashram, Paradise Island, Bahamas (Yoga Retreat)
- Neyyar Dam Ashram, Kerala, India (Dhanwantari Ashram)
- Los Angeles Center, California, US
- San Francisco Center, California, US
- New York Ashram, Woodburne, US (Yoga Ranch)
- New York City Center/Bahamas Ashram

Definitions

It is helpful to understand some legal concepts raised by these allegations. The definition of the words “sexual assault” varies among countries and within states and provinces. I have used the following common definition of the phrase “sexual assault”.

*Any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the **explicit consent** of the recipient.*

This definition includes sexual contact from touching, all the way to rape.⁴ Within that broad definition, there are a variety of issues that relate to the concept of consent.

Definition and Misunderstandings about Rape

Whether an action is “rape” is a question that is generally defined by the law of the jurisdiction at the time of the assault. The most common definitions require some level of force and an absence of consent. However, a growing number of jurisdictions are moving to “consent-based” rape laws that have dropped the requirement that there be force and are focusing solely on whether there is clear and unequivocal consent.

In this case, the allegations against SVD occurred in many jurisdictions and in a period of time when, although this behavior was unacceptable, there was little or no support for women to come forward to report. In any case, as in many jurisdictions, the words “sexual assault” are used here as term for the broad category of behavior that includes sexual conduct without consent.

Issues of Consent within the Definition of Sexual Assault

“Consent” in the context of sexual contact requires a careful look at the roles and circumstances involved. If adults engage in a sexual relationship willingly and with explicit consent, the term “sexual assault” does not apply. However, there are limitations to this issue of “willingness” depending on the law of the jurisdiction:

1. Consent must be established and reestablished. It cannot be “implied.” Silence, passivity, and ambiguous conduct do not establish consent.
2. A person must be capable of consent. They cannot be asleep or incapacitated.
3. Consent often requires “voluntary agreement” which cannot be obtained if the accused induced the other party “to engage in the activity by abusing a position of trust, power or authority.”⁵

⁴ This is a definition widely used, including by the US Department of Justice.

⁵ **Canada Criminal Code, R.S.C., 1985, c. C-46, § 265(3)(d)** indicates that no consent is obtained where the complainant submits or does not resist by reason of **(d)** the exercise of authority.

A growing number of jurisdictions (in the US, there are 14) also recognize that consent cannot be given at all when one party is in a *position of authority, power or trust*, as is a teacher or a spiritual advisor, regardless of the age of the other person.

These laws recognize a reality – that even without physical force or threats, when one of the parties is in a relationship of trust with the victim (such as manager [in the workplace for example] teacher or spiritual advisor), there is a power imbalance, and consent cannot be freely given.

The Expectation of Celibacy

SVD publicly espoused celibacy and it could be argued that the organization is branded around this celibacy. At the same time, if true, these allegations indicate that he was not celibate. This is a problem not only because it is potentially hypocritical and a lie, it is a problem because that claim of celibacy lured women into believing that they were safe from sexual harm, when their allegations show they were not.

Four women were willing to come forward to describe a pattern of behavior which began as far back as the early 1970s and continued until 1986. In addition to the four women, a number of additional men and women came forward to speak about what they knew about SVD's conduct and to give me direction about others who might have relevant information.

Investigation Standards

In conducting an investigation, I consider:

Credibility: When assessing credibility, I am alert to evasiveness, inconsistency, any evident bias, any motive to lie, the inherent plausibility of the allegation and the level of detail.

Corroboration: It is common in allegations of sexual misconduct that there are no witnesses. However, often the person alleging abuse has made a contemporaneous (or later) account to a family member, friend or colleague. When there was someone or something that could corroborate an allegation, I tried to contact that person or obtain the necessary information to help evaluate the claim.

Patterns of behavior: When the stories told by unrelated accusers establish a pattern of misconduct, it is a strong indication that the allegations are credible. For example, it is unlikely that women in different places at different times, who have little or no connection, have 'concocted' the same or similar stories or have conspired together to lie. In many cases of sexual misconduct, the pattern of behavior is the most persuasive evidence that sexual assault has occurred.

The Survivor's Allegations

I number the survivors here in chronological order. They are named with their permission.

Vishnudevananda Survivor #1 (Paddy Erwin)

Paddy Erwin was a karma yogi at Val Morin in 1969, where she had a number of duties, one of which was to occasionally work at SVD's house.

She noticed that he would approach her any time she was alone in the house with him. This began with him touching her arm, patting her shoulder, calling her a "good girl" and pulling her in for a hug. Sometimes when she would be alone working in another room at the house, he would call her into the living room to watch television with him, scoffing at any excuse offered and calling her into the room over and over, patting the sofa next to him. He insisted that she sit down very close to him and he would put his arm around her. When the television show was over and Paddy would try to leave, she reported that he would cajole her to stay. Although she was uncomfortable, at first she tried to rationalize his behavior as an innocent, childlike enjoyment of things.

However, she recalls that his efforts escalated and he started calling her into his bedroom when she was there in the house. The first time she responded and entered the bedroom, she was shocked because the lights were low and he was lying on the bed with his legs wide apart wearing nothing but jockey shorts. He began to ask Paddy to get something that he himself could easily reach – a glass on the bedside table, for example, attempting to get her to reach over his body. She remembers squeezing all around the bed once in order to avoid doing that. As soon as she would leave the room, he would call her again, saying, "Padma, would you move this for me?" "Would you get me a glass of water?" After four or five attempts to get her to stay in the bedroom, she told him she was sorry, but she had to go. And she would leave, very confused and a little shaken.

On the last time that this "game" occurred, she said that she told SVD she had to leave to finish something before getting ready for evening satsang. He came out of the bedroom immediately wearing a dhoti. He sat down in a kitchen chair and watched as she tidied up. He started praising her again, insisting she come over to him and he patted his leg, inviting her to sit on his lap. At first, she shook her head 'no' but after his repeated insistence, eventually she went and sat stiffly along the outside of his right leg. He bounced her awkwardly on his lap; then she alleges he progressed to tickling the front of her torso and finally to kissing her neck. When she tried to pull away, he pulled her in tighter and tried to kiss her on her mouth.

Horrified, she pulled away and ran out of the house. She took steps to ensure she was never alone with him in the house or elsewhere after that encounter.

Vishnudevananda Survivor #2 (Lucille Campbell)

Lucille Campbell came to the Sivananda community when she was quite young. She had lost her father and left home. She was devoted to SVD and saw him as her “spiritual father.” However, in approximately 1974 at a retreat at the Vancouver Centre, she opened the door to his cabin and alleges she found the director of the Centre on top of him having sex. She closed the door and “froze.” She didn’t want to think about it.

In 1975 or 1976, at Val Morin, Swami Vishnu asked Lucille to give him a massage; when it was over, she alleges he asked her to perform oral sex. She had no interest in a sexual relationship with him, but she did what he asked. She thought at the time that it was a tantric yoga practice. She was 21 years old and he was 51.

The second sexual encounter came in 1976 or 1977 at Val Morin. Again she said it began with a massage and ended in a sexual encounter. She remembers that there was no intercourse; she performed oral sex.

In 1979, Lucille was flying with SVD to Munich, Germany. She had become clear that what was happening was wrong, and she was sad at the loss of the ideal that he had come to represent to her. She said that during the plane ride she saw that he had “no respect”; he was throwing his food down his clothes and on her. She suddenly saw him as “disgusting.”

When he asked her to come to his hotel room, she performed either manual or oral sex, but that was the last time. He gave her money, and she left his hotel room.

Lucille then left Sivananda in 1981. She said she saw that “the orange robe is nothing but a lie.”

Vishnudevananda Survivor #3 (Pamela Kyssa)

Pamela first met SVD at the Sivananda London center in 1978 or 1979. Her next encounter with him was on a group retreat at Windsor Castle in either 1979 or 1980. After the group portion of the retreat, she was asked to go to Swami Vishnudevananda’s private room and give him a massage. She had worked in massage therapy in the past.

After she finished giving SVD a long massage and when he appeared to be asleep, she sat down silent and cross-legged on the floor. After a time, Swami Vishnu got up off of the massage table and sat down on the floor also. He made a gesture which she interpreted as “Do asanas.”

She did the Sivananda postures known as the Sun Salutation. Swami Vishnu attempted a modified shoulder stand assisted by a chair. She remembers being somewhat shocked at how physically compromised he was and his inability to manage even this posture. She finished the Sun Salutation sequence and while she was on her back with her eyes closed in relaxation pose and in “her own world,” she realized that SVD had climbed on top of her. She alleges that she held his right hand from

pulling down her pants and she said, “Swamiji, I don’t want to get pregnant.” She said that as a way to discourage him and resist his advances. She recalls that he responded, “You will not get pregnant.” She alleges that he continued forcefully pulling down her pants and he penetrated her. She also remembers being repulsed by his body odor.

She told no one at that time.

In 1981, she was at the Yoga Ranch when SVD was also there. She was assigned to bathe him. She was told he was ill and needed help. After she bathed him and was drying his feet, she reported that he tried to pull her head down on his penis. She resisted and walked out.

She saw him again in 1982/1983 in the Bahamas Ashram, but she had no sexual encounter with him there. In fact, she was called out to meet with him in the middle of the night; she informed him that she was getting married and leaving the community. He gave her money – approximately \$200.

Ten years later, in 1992, the year before Vishnudevananda died, Pamela went to Val Morin to speak to him. She wanted to tell him that what he had done had harmed her. She was able to get a private audience with him. When she began to tell him that what he had done was not okay, she remembers him repeating, “I don’t remember, I don’t remember.” His words were slurred due to his stroke but she understood him.

Vishnudevananda Survivor #3 (Julie Salter)

Julie Salter reported on December 10, 2019, in a Facebook post that SVD had sexually abused her for at least three years between approximately 1982 and 1986 while she was his secretary/personal assistant. She did not speak about this abuse while it was happening for a variety of common reasons: she feared breaking with her guru, she knew she would be sent away and she had no money or place to go. She had been completely uprooted from her family. From her perspective, the abuse was a deep secret. In fact, many people had “heard” about the situation with Julie or suspected it because there had long been rumors about SVD’s sexual relationships with prior secretaries.

However, after SVD’s death and after she left staff at Val Morin, she began to speak about what had happened to her. I interviewed a man who heard a rumor about SVD having sex with Julie; he asked her directly and he confirmed that she told him her story.

The First Communication of these Claims to the EBM

In 2003, Julie wrote a letter to the EBM, requesting a meeting with whichever of them were available at the Yoga Camp that summer. She received a reply with a date and

time to meet with Swami Swaroopananda and Swami Mahadevananda. The meeting happened with Swami Mahadevananda only.⁶

In the meeting, she said she told Mahadevananda that she thought it important that senior staff and other students discuss, at least amongst themselves, the “secret” sexual life of SVD for the sake of healing of all, and whatever changes would be needed for the health of the organization. She told him how damaging it was for her to hold this secret.

The EBM has repeatedly stated that they did not know about these allegations until 2007. But I interviewed a woman who told me that she spoke with Julie before she was going into the 2003 meeting with Swami Mahadevananda. Julie told her that she was going to speak about the sexual abuse that had occurred during her time with Swami Vishnudevananda. After the meeting was over, this woman reported that Julie told her she had accomplished her goal, she had told Mahadevananda and the next step was for him to inform the EBM and for them to then take further action.

I reached out to Swami Mahadevananda to ask him about the topic of the meeting with Julie in 2003 since he was the only other person present. He first responded that he did remember the meeting but he did not remember well what was spoken of. He said, “We had a short informal conversation. She sounded a bit frustrated about the Organization and Swamij (sic) and after shortly she left (sic).”

I then asked him this: “I wonder if when Julie met with you in 2003 at the camp, she made any mention of the sexual encounters with Swami Vishnudevananda that she spoke of later. Or if you had heard of this even before that?”

He replied:

After that meeting in 2003 (sic) of course it became an opened (sic) knowledge but, as a continuous surprise for everyone due to the continuous exemplary behaviour between Swamij (sic) and Swami Kartikeyananda.... Yes, she did mention during the meeting always in general terms what did happen to her during that period with Swamij (sic).

The Continuing Conversations 2005-2007

In 2005, Julie was persuaded by a friend to write again to the EBM and request a pension to help her with her poor financial situation. She had been SVD’s personal assistant, nurse, and caretaker for many years; she had been a member of the EBM and the head of the Yoga Camp at Val Morin. Her health was poor and, having been denied a leave of absence, she had had no choice but to leave the organization

⁶ Julie reported that a karma yogi told her that Swami Swaroopananda did not appear because he was having a massage.

completely. What she felt she had been promised was that she “would be taken care of.” She was at a point where she felt she needed that “care.”

The EBM requested another meeting, this time with a facilitator, John Beaulieu. Mr. Beaulieu’s wife was present, but Julie says she was not permitted to bring anyone with her. Mr. Beaulieu was allegedly a neutral facilitator, but I note that he currently does programs for Sivananda yoga.⁷

In that meeting, Julie alleged that she talked about the need to confront the truth of the sexual abuse she had experienced. I have reviewed another letter that indicates that the EBM asked her to make up a “wish list” of what she would want – i.e. a house, a car, a pension. I have heard a number of rumors that Julie “demanded” a house, a car, a personal assistant, but these items appear to have arisen out of the process that was begun at the 2006 facilitated meeting with the EBM’s own facilitator.⁸ The EBM eventually responded with an offer of \$300 a month.

Danny Kastner, a Toronto lawyer representing Julie in 2007, asked for a lump sum payment of \$600,000. Julie was almost 50 years old, she had worked in high level positions within Sivananda yoga for more than 20 years, earned no salary, had no pension and no housing. Because no contribution had been made to any government retirement fund, she was not entitled to any retirement money from the Canadian retirement system – only a tiny amount from Old Age Security. Her health was extremely poor. The \$600,000 represented the opportunity to buy a modest house and have a retirement income.⁹ I do not know if other members of the EBM who served many years and left the ISYVC have retired with a pension, although there are many rumors that Swami Mahadevananda continues to receive a pension after having been removed for misconduct.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Kastner received a letter from the law firm of Stikeman and Elliott ordering Julie to “cease and desist” making statements about any sexual relationship with SVD and withdrawing the \$300 monthly offer.

Corroboration of the Allegations against SVD

It is difficult to corroborate the types of sexual assaults that are reported here. The alleged perpetrator has long been dead. The passage of time and dimming of memory

⁷ See for instance here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3j06yuVzkY8>

⁸ I have also heard rumors about vast amounts of money that Julie had received. Julie reports that she received the following from the EBM: \$1000 on a month to month basis for approximately two to three years after she left Val Morin ashram, a onetime payment of \$2500 for “immediate needs” and an economy plane ticket in 2006. She says she neither received nor was offered any more money, a car, or a house. The only thing she really wanted was a pension to be able to survive.

⁹ For context, I note that if Julie bought a \$200,000 house and had \$400,000 to live on until age 85 (the average lifespan of a woman her age in Canada) beginning in 2003, she would have had approximately \$1000 a month, not factoring in any variables like earned interest.

are additional factors. Some of the people who are said to have had firsthand knowledge are no longer living. More than a few of the people who might have had relevant information would not speak to me because they were afraid they would be recognized in this report, perhaps because they are still active in the organization, or because they were just afraid. I am aware of a number of people who cannot speak because they have devoted their lives to the ISYVC and at this point it is their livelihood and their home. For them, staying silent may feel like a necessity. In addition, I was told that even to speak about an allegation against a man like SVD who was revered felt impossible for many.

Nonetheless, with the help of many in the community, I was able to interview a number of people with relevant information. I did contact the EBM but they did not respond to my request for an interview.

Paddy Erwin told no one about her “grooming” encounters with SVD. She felt that she had misinterpreted what was going on until she read Julie’s statement in 2019. Lucille Campbell told one person but that person declined to speak with me.

Julie told a number of people but only after leaving in staff in 1999. I spoke to two people who corroborated that she spoke to them about the sexual encounters with SVD. In addition, Julie consulted with a lawyer, Danny Kastner, to whom she also told the story in 2006, which he also confirmed.

Several people told me that they “heard” that SVD was not celibate and was having sex with his secretaries. One man told me that after he heard the rumors, he asked Julie about it directly and she told him that it was true. He believes this was in 1999.

Pamela Kyssa gave me the names of a number of people that she spoke to about her allegations against Vishnudevananda. Several of those people spoke with me.

At the Bahamas Ashram in 1981-82, she confided in a man who spoke with me and was able to corroborate that the story he remembers Pamela telling him was essentially the same as the account she told me.

In 1986 Pamela confided in a friend who was visiting her that Vishnudevananda had assaulted her.

A therapist recalled that Pamela had discussed the trauma of “guru abuse” in the mid-90s, although not the specific name of the guru.

I also reviewed emails between Pamela and another person in the early 2000s where Pamela wrote about her sense of betrayal by a trusted spiritual teacher.

Additional Corroboration

I reviewed a Maclean’s article from 1974 written by Marci McDonald, an award winning Canadian journalist, entitled, “Swami Vishnu-Devananda is not like you and me.” In that article, in addition to the spiritual hypocrisy she observed, Ms. McDonald reported that on her last evening in Val Morin, at midnight, the woman who was SVD’s secretary

came up behind Ms. MacDonald crying out in anguish, “Oh Swamiji, how could you?” and “spitting violently along the path as if to spew out some ineradicable bad taste....” The woman did not reveal to Ms. McDonald the source of her grief but the implication is unmistakable.

I spoke with a man who reported that four different women told him directly they had sexual encounters with Vishnudevananda in the early 70s. He said that two of the women were 16 or 17 years old and when they returned from a Sivananda event in Canada they spoke to him about their experience. They told this man that Vishnudevananda had behaved in a very sexual way with them, asking them to disrobe and bathe in his living quarters. This man reported that the women told him they did not comply. Instead they left, eventually leaving the community altogether. The two other women who told him directly they had sex with SVD were adults. It was not possible to identify and locate the women.

I spoke with Eric Terwilliger, (named with his consent) who was a student of SVD from approximately 1976 until 1983. Eric told me that in the summer of 1983, he was living at the Munich Center and working to organize a yoga festival. SVD had come to participate in the festival and a student from the Center who was a massage therapist was called upon to give him a massage. After she had been in the room with Swami Vishnudevananda for a while, she ran out into the room where Eric and Swami Durgananda were. Eric saw that she was quite upset and red-faced. She said Swami Vishnudevananda had grabbed her head and tried to pull it down on his penis to perform oral sex.

Eric remembers Swami Durgananda said something like, “This is not the first time; he has tried that before.” In fact, Eric said that Swami Durgananda told him that Swami Vishnu had tried the same thing with her once, but that she had rebuffed him by saying that she was only interested in learning yoga.

Eric left the organization in the fall of 1983 because he could not bear the hypocrisy of the teaching of celibacy masking sexual misconduct. He called Swami Vishnudevananda the “Bill Clinton of yoga” because it was “quite well known” that he was not celibate and that he used women for oral sex.

However, Eric felt then and to this day, that the yoga practice that SVD brought to the West was “a truly synchronized version of yoga -- bringing together all four paths.” What he learned had a tremendously positive effect on him throughout his life. He continued to recommend it to his music students and others, always warning them that SVD was not a holy man but that they could learn from his teachings to create their own path.

I reached out to Swami Durgananda for an interview about this incident and other rumors that I wanted to verify, but she did not respond to my request.

Pattern of Misconduct

Here, as in the earlier reports, we have unrelated women from different time periods coming forward with similar allegations of sexual misconduct. Many of the incidents are similar in nature, involving massage and oral sex, the payment of money, a grooming process that has several similarities. While this is not definitive proof that the conduct occurred, it does add considerably to the credibility of all of the stories.

Analysis

I found all four of the women who came forward to be credible. There is no motive for any of them to lie about their experiences. There is no lawsuit, no money to be had, no vendetta against the organization. Lucille, Paddy and Pamela left a long time ago and have little or no contact with the ISYVC. Pamela spoke with many people about what happened to her beginning in the early 80s and this was confirmed by the people that I spoke to. Lucille and Paddy simply left and moved on. But when Julie posted, they all felt they wanted to say what had happened to them. I find their motives credible.

Julie told no one even after SVD died. She continued in the organization that she had served for so many years. But times changed, society's views on sexual assault and authority changed. In 1999, Julie told me that the EBM was grappling with an alleged sexual impropriety of Swami Mahadevananda (that he was having an Indian woman staff member bath him nude in public) and she realized that in order to deal with that, everyone needed to deal with the "deep dark secret" – that their leader was not celibate and that he had sexually abused her for years. It was then that she began to tell her story. In my experience and in the research that we have on trauma, we know that it can take decades and sometimes a change of circumstances before someone is willing to come forward.

I find Julie's testimony credible and in keeping with what is known about survivors of trauma inflicted by spiritual teachers.

Other than the women themselves, there were two corroborating witnesses with firsthand knowledge. Eric Terwilliger reported that he saw a woman run out of SVD's room in a state of agitation and he heard her say that SVD had tried to push her head down to his penis. I credit Eric's testimony because he had no agenda against Sivananda, even going so far as to continue to send people to study yoga there -- with the warning about what he knew. Another former Sivananda leader from the 70s also related several experiences in which four different women came to him and spoke of their sexual encounters with SVD. He was clear in his memory; another witnesses corroborated that he, like Eric, left the organization partly because of this knowledge of SVD's sexual misconduct.

I interviewed many people who "knew" that SVD was not celibate; who "knew" or suspected that he was having sex with Julie. I have done more than one investigation where something that everyone "knew" turned out to be untrue. Such "common knowledge" can be wrong. However, here, where there are four credible women

describing a similar pattern of misconduct, and several firsthand witnesses of other women telling them the same thing, I find this “common knowledge” carries weight.

Although I did not interview anyone from the EBM, in 2007, their lawyers wrote to Danny Kastner, Julie’s lawyer:

It is with surprise and disappointment that we received your letter dated July 23, 2007, particularly because it contains defamatory allegations that Ms. Salter would have been sexually abused by Swami Vishnudevananda. It is bizarre and suspicious that Ms. Salter is choosing to raise this matter fourteen years after the death of Swami Vishnudevananda.

First, Eric Terwilliger stated that Swami Durgananda, a member of the EBM, was present in 1983 when a woman giving SVD a massage said that he sexually assaulted her. If that is true, then Julie’s allegations should hardly have been a surprise to the EBM in 2007, since Swami Mahadevananda also knew, according to his own statement, in 2003.

Second, it is neither “bizarre” nor “suspicious” that it took Julie a decade after Vishnu’s death to talk about these issues. Statutes of limitations governing child sexual assaults were lengthened many years ago to address exactly this issue: that it can take many years before children who have been abused are able to come forward. Julie Salter was not a child, but part of the power dynamics that make it necessary for children to have time to process and disclose assaults, also apply in cases of sexual abuse involving adults. When the abuse is perpetrated by a person who has the trust of and power over the other person, it can take years to process the sense of disloyalty and conflict. This is why the Canadian statutes of limitations on adult sexual abuse have been eliminated.

I note that threatening Ms. Salter with a “cease and desist”, the EBM took the place of actually conducting an investigation and learning the truth about what she was saying in 2007. I also note that the EBM cancelled their own investigation in March 2020. They could have settled this question on their own terms but instead they cancelled their investigation within hours of Julie Salter’s interview by their own independent investigator.

Nothing about these actions signals to me that the EBM is interested in learning what the truth actually is. Since the EBM governs an organization whose very foundation (and income) is based on a particular public image of Swami Vishnudevananda, including his celibacy, they have more of a motive to lie than do the women who came forward.

Other Instances of Assault by Leaders and Teachers within the ISYVC

It is the case that when sexual misconduct is tolerated at the top of an organization, it often (consciously or unconsciously) creates a sense of “permission” for sexual misconduct throughout all levels of the organization. If a leader is behaving in a sexually inappropriate way, it becomes impossible to question and discipline other lower level leaders who are behaving in the same way.

In the course of the investigation a number of women reported being assaulted by lower level teachers, priests and leaders at a variety of ashrams and centers. Some of these I am unable to corroborate. Others, such as Grass Valley, California, and Orleans, France are well corroborated.

Corroborated or not, these allegations paint a picture of an organization that appears not to be in compliance with a number of US, Canadian and EU laws.

Grass Valley, California

There were four women who made allegations not only of sexual assault, but also the complete failure of the leadership of the Yoga Farm to provide a safe environment for women -- even once the leadership was aware of the problem.

Survivor #1 reported that a priest named Guruprasad touched her in a way that made her uncomfortable, that seemed sexual. She was able to avoid his offer for him to give her a massage. This occurred in 2008.

Survivor #2 filed a police report on December 19, 2008. The police report states that she was assaulted by “Swami Guru Prasad,” that a massage became an opportunity for him to try to have sex with her, but she was able to resist his assault. She told a male karma yogi at the ashram what happened immediately after the assault. According to the police report:

...he [the karma yogi] attempted to contact the leader of the organization via email. He identified this person as Swami Sita. [He] did not receive a reply from Swami Sita regarding this matter. [He] slept on the issue Friday night. He still did not received (sic) a reply from Swami Sita, so he contacted two other people not currently at the facility. He identified these as Swami Vidia and Swami Panava. Swami Vidia encourage him to follow what he felt was the right thing to do. [The karma yogi] ended our conversation [with the police officer] by saying that he felt it was an “abusive environment” at the yoga farm. He felt this matter was being swept under the rug and believed similar circumstances/accusation had happened before.

These women’s accounts of assaults were further corroborated by another women, Survivor #3 who came forward alleging issues of unwanted sexual texts by the same priest in 2009 or 2010.

Survivor #4 was a karma yogi assigned to assist Guruprasad. He assaulted her numerous times from February-May 2011. The woman was confused and unwilling to have a sexual relationship, but she did not know of anyone that she could turn to. Eventually, the woman told Swami Sita what was happening. She alleges that Swami Sita blamed her for the assaults, berating her for “harming the priest’s karma,” and sent her away to another ashram. There she witnessed another troubling situation involving a Brahmachari (celibate initiate) and a student, engaging in cybersex via Skype. Again, she had no one to turn to because she had learned that coming forward did not lead to anything but retaliation for the victim, so she left the organization.

This police report indicates that leaders of the Yoga Farm, including Swami Sita were aware of this incident in late 2008. And yet, in 2011 Guruprasad was still at the Yoga Farm where Survivor #3 was assaulted and then retaliated against for having raised the issue. I reached out to Swami Sita for an interview, but she did not respond.

I found all of these claims credible, given that they were corroborated by a police report and a total of four unrelated women’s testimonies.

I also found credible that the director of the Ashram dismissed not only the claims, but the woman who brought them forward to her. This response, that it is the woman’s “fault,” or “you are harming this man’s karma,” or that there is “nothing that can be done” is one that Dr. Pankhania and I heard repeatedly over the course of this investigation. Victim blaming, victim shaming and resolving the problem by sending *the victim* away was a pattern repeated over and over again in the course of this investigation.

A Note on Sexual Harassment Law in the US and the Allegations from the Yoga Farm

Employers in the US have a legal duty to protect employees, (and volunteers in some situations) from sexual harassment.¹⁰ In addition to a policy, the law requires there be a process in place to receive complaints, investigate and resolve them so that the harassment does not occur again. Retaliation against a person who reports an issue is illegal.

What has been alleged and credibly corroborated is not only that women were sexually assaulted by a priest at Grass Valley, but that the leadership of the Ashram knew about it, ignored it, and thus allowed several other women to be assaulted. When Survivor #4 reported it in 2011, she was belittled, demeaned, and sent away.

¹⁰ The issue of whether the karma yogis are unpaid volunteers or employees is beyond the scope of this report. Generally speaking, “volunteers” are not covered by all laws protecting employees. However, it is possible that all of the karma yogis in the US are not “volunteers” and are covered by anti-harassment and anti-discrimination laws. For more information on US law, see <https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/small-business/who-employee-under-federal-employment-discrimination-laws>

Not only does this allegation describe unconscionable behavior, such a failure to act can lead to legal liability.

Orleans, France

Another woman alleged that she was subjected to an unwanted sexual advance by a senior swami at the Orleans Ashram in France in 2011. She reported that she was walking with him in the woods when he grabbed her and tried to kiss her. I note that outside of any legal issues, the aggressor once again was a senior swami who had taken a vow of celibacy. However, what happened when this incident was reported is worth understanding.

This survivor initially was not going to say anything about what happened but then she learned that other young women had been subjected to various sexual advances from this swami. The survivor then went to Swami Kailas and told her about what she knew. Swami Kailas acted surprised and she told the survivor that she (the victim) would have to come to the office with the swami and confront him herself.¹¹ The survivor did that and the senior swami denied it had happened.

Another woman who was present in Orleans during this time came forward to the investigation and corroborated this account. She herself also went to Swami Kailas to report yet another incident on behalf of a woman who was afraid to do so. Swami Kailas became angry that the woman mentioned anything about it. Later the survivor learned from a meeting at the Paris Center in 2020 that the swami had admitted it but he taught for *seven more years* until he was removed from teaching.

Val Morin, Canada

One survivor told us of a series of encounters with a senior swami in Canada a few years ago. She reported that this swami often looked for opportunities to drive a wedge between her and her boyfriend and then she alleges that one night he invited her to have sex with him, despite the fact that he was a swami and supposedly celibate. Later, he began to retaliate against her, humiliating her in front of others during staff meeting and making unpleasant remarks.

Another woman came forward to mention a disturbing incident with the same swami. She said he was very insistent about learning details about her boyfriend and that he was sometimes very seductive towards her, although he was also psychologically and verbally abusive. When saying goodbye to him, he touched her shoulder or her back and when she turned to leave, he began to touch her with very slow caresses. She mentioned that before that happened she had felt “invaded” by his gaze and that she

¹¹ It is never appropriate for a victim to have to confront their aggressor. It is the responsibility of the organization to resolve these situations.

noticed that he kept watching her and looking at her in a way that made her very uncomfortable.”

I have not printed the name of this senior swami because I am not able to corroborate these two accounts, although the pattern is suspiciously similar. However, I invite a representative of the EBM to contact me and I will give them the relevant information so they can conduct a neutral, independent investigation, as is their duty under Canadian law.

Bahamas Ashram

A woman reported that she was very badly hurt, possibly in a rape attempt, at the Bahamas Ashram in 1990 and that the response of the ashram was incredibly callous. At this point in time, 30 years after the fact, I am not able to corroborate her story or to determine who may have committed this shocking alleged assault on her. Although the focus of my investigations has been on sexual assaults, I am including this one because the allegations speak to how issues of harm have been dealt with within the ashrams.

She told us that the attacker punched her very hard and then tried to kill her by covering her face with a pillow. She lost consciousness and as she woke up found the strength to fight the man off. Either because he got scared or for other reasons unknown, he ran off, leaving her alive and bleeding. Although she was in an isolated hut and it was the middle of the night, she was able to contact a guest within the Ashram who came to her assistance, followed by some staff.

She recalled that she felt the leaders of the Ashram were more interested in protecting the reputation of the Ashram than protecting her. They told her that they would take her to a private hospital, they would pay and that she should not say what happened. She said she was told to tell the doctors and anyone who asked that “It was a personal matter” and not “any of their business.” An administrator accompanied her who did indeed pay cash, but the survivor felt that the woman was there to make sure she did not tell the truth about what happened. She also said that when she decided that she wanted to make a report to the police, they discouraged her from doing so, saying that it would ruin the Ashram and implying that they could sue her.

The woman was seriously injured – she told us that her jaw had been broken and she was not able to eat solid food. Through the kindness of strangers, she managed to fly back to Canada by herself. In the 30 years since, she told us that she has never heard another word from the Bahamas Ashram where this occurred.

Not only did she suffer considerable physical injuries, but she began to suffer PTSD from the event, eventually making it impossible for her to work in her profession and causing her to spend many of the next 30 years of her life in difficult financial circumstances.

Although I was not able to corroborate this report, this woman made contemporaneous notes of this incident and the aftermath which I reviewed. Contemporaneous notes are considered reliable sources of information.

This is not the only account I received of the Bahamas Ashram operating in a questionable way to protect their reputation. I also received reports from several former staff members who alleged that they were told to counter negative reviews on Trip Advisor with false glowing reviews. One of that reported that she was instructed to create a “how to” on creating a fake email address and flood the Trip Adviser site with positive reviews. This was said to be okay because the “worldly laws” did not apply to SVD’s mission. I have turned that information over to Trip Advisor as it violates their terms of service.

We also received several allegations that the Bahamas ashram was negligent in the disappearance of Wesley Bell, a karma yogi who went missing in January 2013 and was never found. It was alleged that the leadership of the ashram made no effort to contact the police immediately on the discovery of his disappearance.

Neyyar Dam

I received a report from a man “Jon,” (a pseudonym) who had been staying in the Neyyar Dam Ashram. Jon reported that he met a young woman there who told him that she was sexually assaulted by a member of the staff. She told him that while practicing extra pranayama with this man at 4am, the staff member had been encouraging inappropriate hugs and kisses. She had been trying to manage his unwanted advances by herself. He had then forced himself on her, groped her genitals, and tried to have sex. She managed to get away and promptly left the ashram. Jon reported this troubling incident to the director of the ashram who stated very clearly he would deal with it. This happened in 2014.

Later, Jon returned to the ashram and was shocked to find the staff member who had been accused of sexual assault still there. And while Jon was there, yet another woman came and told him that a similar incident had happened to her.

Jon had a second meeting with the ashram director who stated that the staff member had been instructed not to touch any guests during asana adjustment, and never to be alone with female guests. Jon considered this to be an inadequate response to what was alleged to be an attempted rape.

Los Angeles Center

A woman who had been staff in the LA Center many years ago described a situation where the director of the Center solicited her for a sexual relationship. He was not bound by vows of celibacy but he was married. The first time she declined but eventually she gave in to his requests. As the senior teacher at the Los Angeles Center, he was in a sense her boss and her landlord, and she also says that as a child abuse survivor, her ability to say ‘no’ was taken away from her as a child. Even as an adult, at that time, she did not know how to say ‘no’ to a person in a position of

authority. She was younger than he by a decade and she was living in a strange city with no family. She was yearning for a “big brother” to talk to, to get advice from, and to care about her as a person. She was not interested in him sexually but he pressured her for sex. He repeatedly and specifically told her not to tell anyone.

There was no one that she could go to with this situation because he was the person in charge.

San Francisco Center

A woman came forward to say that the man in charge at the San Francisco Center in the early 2000s had inappropriately touched her on two separate occasions. The first time, she was confused and didn't know how to react. The second time, he went further and she stopped him. Later she felt that he and Swami Sita found a reason to give her an ultimatum to leave which she did, when the real reason is that she refused to have sex with him.

She did not tell anyone at the Center because the man in question and Swami Sita worked together and the survivor had already been the target of what she felt was Swami Sita's verbal abuse.

The Yoga Ranch

One woman I interviewed described an incident at the Yoga Ranch in 2016 in which the resident priest touched her nipples. This happened when, at his invitation, she accompanied him on his daily rounds to the shrines. When they got to Siva temple, he instructed her to meditate. As she was seated with her eyes closed, he gently began touching her nipples over her clothes with his hands, saying that it would help the Kundalini to rise and for her not to be sad (he was aware that she was very vulnerable at that time).

New York City/Bahamas

A former ISYVC staff member wrote to us about a number of issues she encountered during her time at both the New York Center and the Bahamas Ashram. In the New York Center (late 1980s), another resident made repeated sexual advances to her, despite her repeated efforts to let him know that she was not interested in a sexual relationship.

These situations are not unusual; in fact, they happen in many workplaces, but the difference is there was no one that she could approach to report it because it was assumed that everyone was practicing celibacy. Similarly, in the Bahamas ashram, two men repeatedly made derogatory sexual remarks to her (and about other women who were guests) to the point where this staff member did not feel safe in the environment.

Conclusion

Although I was not able to corroborate each and every one of these complaints, there is sufficient corroboration for me to say that like Grass Valley, California, many of the Centers and Ashrams do not appear to be in compliance with laws outlawing harassment and protocols for handling reports of harassment.¹²

It is certainly the case that there are sexual harassment issues in workplaces everywhere, but what these allegations show is how poorly the allegations were dealt with, and what little regard was given to the safety of those reporting them.

The Allegations of the Disregard of Numerous Laws

In addition to violation of US, Canadian and EU laws on sexual assault and sexual harassment, we received other allegations of illegal activities.

1. Immigration fraud: We had a number of complaints of people being told to lie to immigration authorities while entering the Bahamas, the US and Canada. Generally, they alleged they were told to say that they were vacationing when they were actually karma yogis who were working.
2. Financial issues: Some people pointed out that it appears that after 2015, people coming to certain ashrams were asked to pay their fees (in some cases more than \$2000) in cash. While there is nothing illegal in requiring cash for payment, it does raise suspicions. Most legitimate businesses do not require payment in cash; many businesses who are avoiding paying taxes do.
3. Wage and Hour Laws: Every country has its own laws on how workers are treated and paid. In the US these are “wage and hour” laws. In addition, many states and provincial jurisdictions have laws which govern how many hours someone may work without a break (in the US, usually a 15 minute break for four-six consecutive hours) and when a worker must have a day off (again in most of the US, one day off each week). While this area of the law is quite complicated, especially because karma yogis are called “volunteers,” it is fair to say that one of the most frequent stories we heard were that karma yogis were required to work 12 hour days, 7 days a week for weeks, months or years on end with no, or few, days off.

¹² A few of these complaints occurred some time ago and there might not have been laws in place on harassment then. But by the late 90s Canada, the US and most European countries had very straightforward requirements outlawing harassment in the workplace and setting forth how claims of harassment should be dealt with. If the allegations above are true, these complaints were not dealt with in a way that is compliant with employment laws.

4. Multiple accounts of building and fire safety code violations at Grass Valley and the San Francisco Center: There are extremely disturbing accounts of ISYVC leaders lying to fire officials while endangering the well-being of the staff and karma yogis who were residing there. I cannot investigate these, but I will turn them over to the proper authorities for their investigation.

Overall Conclusion

During the last nine months, I have investigated over 30 women's allegations into sexual misconduct within the ISYVC. Primarily those allegations have been against Swami Mahadevananda, Prahlada and Swami Vishnudevananda. However, as in this report, there were many other allegations of sexual misconduct and refusal to address assault and harassment issues that arose from a number of the ashrams and centers around the world.

In attempting to corroborate these claims, I have spoken to more than 40 people. I have attempted to reach another 20 people who were either not able to be located or would not respond.

Here is what I know at the end of three long investigations:

1. The sheer numbers of credible, corroborated claims of sexual abuse make it clear to me that the ISYVC needs to make many changes in the way they are viewing and dealing with sexual misconduct.
2. The culture of hypocrisy around celibacy needs to be examined. If the vow of celibacy is taken, if it worth anything, its violations should not be ignored. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "What you do speaks so loud that I can't hear what you say."
3. It is not enough to have a sexual misconduct policy on file, or even posted on a bulletin board, the actual culture of the organization has to change. Every leader at every center and ashram need to understand how reports of sexual misconduct must be received and followed up on. This is not only the law in many of the locations where the ISYVC operates, it is also the moral and caring way to operate. But, in order to do that, the broader culture of wanton disregard for the spiritual seekers who are in their care must be addressed; there must also be a greater concern specifically for the safety of women.
4. At a minimum, the ISYVC should ensure that they are meeting the laws of the countries they are in. In the US for example, the allegations paint a picture of a wanton disregard for the law. I heard this enough to worry that compliance with local safety codes, immigration laws, labor laws is ignored; sexual harassment and sexual assaults, etc. are not of importance. What came through the allegations loud and clear is that the organization's priority is that its reputation is to be protected at all costs. Whether talking about the allegations of sexual misconduct or ignoring fire and building codes, the

“need” to protect the organization appears to have led to a consistent neglect of the people who serve it.

Many people with stories to tell are still within the organization. Because they have devoted years to karma yoga service, because they have seen others with no homes and no money sent away for speaking out, they do not have the freedom to speak out. If you are not in that position because you have left or because you are outside of the karma yogi system, then you are the ones whose voices must call out for change.

PART II:

**An examination of the practices of the International Sivananda
Yoga Vedanta Centres & survivors' personal narratives**

by Dr Josna Pankhania

Methodology & Framework

In February 2020, Carol Merchasin was appointed by Project SATYA to conduct an investigation into reports of sexual misconduct, and I was appointed to provide a psychosocial perspective on these reports as well as on reports of emotional, psychological, financial, and other abuses within the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Community (ISYVC). For this important project I have drawn on my experience as a narrative therapist⁷ and an ethnographic researcher⁸.

This report presents the personal narratives of the survivors who have allegations against Swami Vishnu-devananda and others in the organisation. These narratives describe sexual, psychological, social, spiritual, and financial abuse. They also describe the devastating sense of betrayal survivors experienced when attempting to seek help from the organisation. They were ignored (or removed), and the perpetrators of the abuse allowed to continue within the organisation. The narratives clearly express the trauma survivors have suffered, and continue to experience, to varying degrees.

I would like to give some background on how these narratives emerged and explain the methodology used in my work with the survivors. I will also provide a background on different types of abuse and abuse in yoga.

Purpose of the Personal Narratives

1. To give survivors a safe means through which to share their experiences of sexual abuse within ISYVC.
2. To make visible in a coherent and public way, those abuses that have been reported to Project SATYA, whether sexual, physical, financial or psychological.
3. To examine systemic issues in the organisation that may have enabled or promoted abusive behaviour within its leadership.

The process of interviewing and listening to survivor's stories, was carried out using a trauma informed approach, drawing on best practice from counselling and therapy spheres, with a firm understanding of the impact of trauma and its recovery. It was done through the lens of narrative therapy, which recognises the survivor as the expert in their own lives, and which also seeks to separate the problem from the survivor. This effectively helps to reduce the influence of problems in their lives (see section on narrative therapy below).

My response was that of a response-based therapist, the aim being to help the survivors to analyse social contexts and interactions, identify power dynamics and then deconstruct them. This material has then been presented using ethnography, which looks at cultural context and social practices.

Trauma informed approach

A trauma informed approach recognises the complexity of trauma and comprehends the dynamics of power within a hierarchical organisation, and the potential for abuse in guru/disciple, teacher/student relationships.

Trauma informed approach recognises:

- The prevalence of complex trauma and its impact on the emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of people in yoga communities.
- The dynamics of power and the impact of abuse within a hierarchical yoga organisation with charismatic leaders.
- The power of guru/disciple, yoga teacher/student relationships and the potential for abuse within these relationships.
- The systemic and cultural dynamics of power and abuse as it relates to yoga communities.
- The gendered dimensions of abuse.

Narrative therapy

Narrative therapy promotes the understanding that, *the person is not the problem, the problem is the problem*.¹³ Van Wyk (2008, p. 259) explains:

Persons who experience themselves as the problem feel helpless and experience a loss of personal agency about manoeuvring themselves away from the problem, unable to initiate self-change. When the problem is identified as the problem (the antagonist), the person is empowered, as protagonist, to take the lead in creatively taking control of the problem.¹⁴

Therefore, as a narrative therapist I work on the premise that the person, the client, is not the problem, the problem is the problem, that the client is the expert on their life and I am a witness who has the privilege of engaging with their world. A narrative therapist listens to the personal stories of the client's internal life and external world and supports the client to decipher for themselves those narratives which serve them well and those which oppress them. The postmodern, poststructuralist deconstruction of experiences and associated narratives is through the Foucauldian lens of social power, control, and oppression.

The survivors' personal narratives are presented in this report. In this way, their voices are respected and honoured since they are the experts on their lives.

¹³ White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton

¹⁴ Van Wyk, René (2008): A metaphor for Narrative Therapy. Conference Paper; p. 259. See also: Semmler & Williams (2000): Narrative Therapy: A Storied Context for Multicultural Counseling. *Journal of multicultural counselling and development* 28(1): pp. 51-62.

Response-based Therapy

The framework of Response-based Therapy is informed by Response-based Practice (RBP). It recognises the individual as an *active agent* who is situated within complex social contexts.

As with narrative therapy, this approach is informed by social justice, and human rights, and involves analysing social interaction, social context, and social responses, and how the individual makes sense of this complex and rich psycho-social situation. It seeks to take into account societal and interpersonal power dynamics, and then actively challenge those dynamics to ensure they are not reinforced. A component of Response-based Practice is Dignity Driven Practice, which upholds the dignity of each person, family, and community. Underpinning this practice is self-determination, which is the foundation of dignity.

The key tenets of Dignity Driven Practice are that:

- Self-determination is the foundation of dignity
- Language is central to the work of giving dignity
- The words you choose to say and write give meaning and power.
- Honouring the personal narratives of abuse survivors is one way of affirming their dignity

Dignity Driven Practice seeks to identify acts of resistance and for the individual to view themselves as being strong and adaptive in the face of suffering. Therefore, the courage and resilience of all survivors is recorded in their personal narrative.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a discovery of the cultural knowledge that people carry within themselves and express through various practices,¹⁵ and it refers to the genre of writing that presents qualitative descriptions of human social phenomena, providing deep and rich descriptions. The narratives of the survivors present powerful ethnographic descriptions of the culture of the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres.

Interview Process

I interviewed 80 people with complaints for the Project SATYA Investigation. Of the 80 people who contacted the SATYA Investigation, the vast majority was interviewed via Zoom on multiple occasions and for some, this process was carried out via email. Without exception these survivors expressed immense distress and a sense of

¹⁵ Massey, A. (1998, September 7–8). “*The way we do things around here*”: *The culture of ethnography*. Paper presented at the 1998 Ethnography and Education Conference, Oxford University Department of Educational Studies (OUDES). Retrieved from <http://www.voicewisdom.co.uk/htm/waywedo.htm>

profound betrayal. They had experienced verbal, psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, and financial abuse as well as institutional betrayal.

Those who had complaints of sexual misconduct were interviewed by both Carol Merchasin and myself, and these joint interviews numbered between one and 4 per person. After the joint interviews, Carol followed up on the legal issues and I explored the issues related to the impact of the abuse. My follow-up work in relation to impact was the same for all survivors; those who had experienced sexual abuse as well as those who had been subjected to verbal abuse, spiritual abuse, psychological abuse, institutional abuse, physical abuse, and neglect.

My follow-up work involved exploring with the survivor, the multi-faceted impact of abuse. These were of psychological, emotional, physical, psychic, spiritual, social, relational, cultural impact and so forth. Drawing on the best practice principles of narrative and response-based therapeutic approaches, the deconstruction process involved examining the multiple narratives that are interwoven within this matrix of the personal, familial, organisational, societal; all with their own gendered power and control dynamics. The aim was to support each individual to decipher which narratives were oppressive and which ones were liberating. Ultimately, they chose those narratives they wished to take with them and which ones they wished to let go of.

The personal narratives were thus explored. Most, though not all survivors, chose to share their narratives publicly. Those who did, chose to do so with the hope that such sharing will contribute towards truth, healing, and justice.

In order to achieve this, I drew on my counselling expertise to establish rapport, set out to listen actively and empathetically, and to offer unconditional positive regard. It was my aim to ensure that every interaction through the interview process was consistent with recovery and reduced the possibility of re-traumatization. I worked with the core principles of safety, trustworthiness, and choice. All those who approached the Project Satya Investigation with a complaint were empowered to choose the extent of collaboration, whether or not they participated in the investigation, or what they wished included in the report. My aim was to be non-directive (i.e. let the interviewee decide what they would like to talk about) and to ensure emotional and psychological safety, understanding the emotional, social, psychological and physiological impact of trauma, and at the same time, remaining responsive to the social and cultural contexts which shape survivors' needs and healing pathways. I made referrals where appropriate.

Most of the survivors chose to talk with me in person, therefore the interviews were conducted via Zoom. Some interviews were carried out via email. Given the traumatic nature of the subject matter, and the fact that some survivors were struggling with mental or other health challenges, I conducted de-briefing sessions until further support could be implemented.

This work involved survivors from across the world: North America (Canada and the US), India, Europe (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, Portugal), Australia, and countries in Africa and South America.

Meetings

I worked directly with survivors and met regularly with my colleague, Carol Merchasin over a period of 9 months. During this time, I also had regular progress update meetings with the members of the Admin team, Antonia Abu Matar, Jens Augspurger and Angela Gollat, who have dedicated themselves to creating a revolutionary space for the people affected by this historical and on-going abuse examined in this report.

External Consultations

I consulted with specialists, Dr David Johnson, Deputy Warden and Professorial Fellow in Contemporary Education, St Anthony's College, University of Oxford, UK; Dr Tony Sam George, Professor and Dean, Social Sciences, Director, Center for Research, CHRIST University, Bangalore, India; Dr Elizabeth Thomas, Associate Professor and Coordinator, Department of Psychology, CHRIST University, Bangalore, India; Dr Roy Moodley, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto, Canada; Dr Amrita, university lecturer and psychoanalyst, Krea University, Andhra Pradesh, India; Jacqueline Hargreaves, Independent Researcher, Founder of The Luminescent and Journal of Yoga Studies, London, UK; Dr William Hall, member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and the American Psychological Association, Washington, USA and Kay Powell, Australia, my editor. The support that they have provided has been immeasurable.

Overview of the Processes Involved in Abuse

This overview sets out to provide a brief description of the terms of abuse that figure in this report, and covers:

- Types of abuse common in society
- Sexual grooming process
- Impact of sexual violence
- Trauma of sexual assault
- Institutional betrayal
- Impact of institutional trauma,
- Charisma, Leadership, and the Social Psychology of Influence and Control
- Counter- Reactions of Abusers
- Abuse in Yoga

Different Types of Abuse

What follows is an overview of the types of abuse common in society. These illustrate the types of abuse reported by the survivors, who would have experienced one or more of these, but not necessarily all.

Behaviour that causes harm to an individual is considered abuse, and can be categorised into a number of different types:

- Sexual Abuse
- Psychological Abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Discriminatory abuse
- Organisational abuse
- Neglect
- Physical abuse

Sexual Abuse includes:

- Rape
- Indecent exposure
- Sexual harassment
- Inappropriate looking or touching
- Sexual teasing or innuendo
- Sexual photography
- Subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts
- Sexual acts to which the individual has not given consent or was pressured into
- Sexual acts where there can be no consent because of an imbalance of power

Psychological Abuse includes:

- Emotional abuse
- Threats of harm or abandonment

- Deprivation of contact
- Humiliation
- Blaming, controlling and intimidating behaviour
- Intimidation and coercion
- Restricting personal choice and refusing to respect privacy
- Harassment
- Verbal abuse
- Cyber bullying
- Isolation
- Unreasonable and unjustified withdrawal of services or supportive networks

Financial or material abuse includes:

- Theft
- Fraud
- Coercion in relation to an adult's financial affairs or arrangements
- Forced labour and domestic servitude

Discriminatory abuse includes forms of harassment because of:

- Race
- Gender
- Gender identity
- Age
- Disability
- Sexual orientation
- Religion

Organisational abuse includes:

- Inappropriate use of power or control
- No flexibility in daily routine
- Lack of personal clothes and belongings
- Stark living environments
- Deprived environmental conditions
- Illegal confinement or restriction
- Being spoken to with disrespect
- Inflexible services based on convenience of the organisation's leaders, rather than the needs of the individual
- Inappropriate physical intervention
- Removal from the establishment with no discussion with appropriate people or agencies, because of staff inability to manage behaviour (such as mental illness)

Neglect includes:

- Ignoring medical, emotional or physical needs
- Failure to provide access to appropriate health care and support, or educational services

- Withholding the necessities of life, such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating

Physical abuse includes:

- Assault
- Hitting
- Slapping
- Pushing
- Restraint or inappropriate physical sanctions

Sexual Grooming Process

Grooming is a deliberate process of cultivating a relationship with an individual, generally a vulnerable one, with the purpose of preparing that person for exploitation or abuse. It is done so gradually, making the person feel special, marking them out for attention, establishing trust, that when the inappropriate behaviour begins, the victim has been desensitised to the warning signals, and may even see it as positive.¹⁶

Impact of Sexual Violence

The consequences of sexual violence are physical, like bruising and genital injuries, and psychological, such as depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

The consequences may also be chronic. Victims may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, experience re-occurring gynaecological, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular and sexual health problems.¹⁷

Trauma of Sexual Assault

During a traumatic event like sexual assault, the brain only concerns itself with staying alive. The prefrontal cortex, which controls logical decision-making, shuts down and an autonomic “fight, flight or freeze” response occurs. This “freeze” is known as tonic immobility, a situation in which the body is unable to move, the mouth is unable to talk, but the mind is aware of the situation.

¹⁶ Sinnamon, G. (2017). The Psychology of Adult Sexual Grooming: Sinnamon’s Seven-Stage Model of Adult Sexual Grooming. In: *The Psychology of Criminal and Antisocial Behavior: Victim and offender perspectives*, pp. 459-487.

¹⁷ Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.
<https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/discover/student-experience/safety-and-security/sexual-assault-and-violence-prevention-resources>

Dr. Rebecca Campbell, professor of psychology, explains that this is why victims of sexual assault don't always act the way that society thinks that they "should have" acted.¹⁸

Institutional Betrayal

According to Smith and Freyd (2014), Institutional Betrayal occurs when an imbalance of power exists in an organisation, and where this power is used to perpetrate abuse on an individual. It includes the failure to respond when a victim seeks help in the situation, the institution seeing reputation and status as more important than the well-being of the person seeking help. Often a victim is punished in some way for reporting their abuse, and the result is additional trauma, causing further emotional and physical health problems. Such betrayal experiences have been linked to post-traumatic stress disorder, personality disorders, as well as substance abuse (Freyd, no date).¹⁹

Impact of Institutional Betrayal on Sexual Trauma

Research indicates that when traumatic experiences are interpersonal, the resulting damage is greater, and when betrayal is perpetrated by a trusted person on whom the victim is dependent, then the results are particularly profound. Whilst the victim may suppress any memory of abuse, the physical and psychological symptoms indicate their negative impact. If this abuse occurs within the context of an institution, which then fails to support the victim, then the resulting post-traumatic stress is significantly increased (Smith & Freyd, 2013).

Carly Smith and Jennifer Freyd (2013) have developed the Institutional Betrayal Questionnaire (IBQ) to measure institutional betrayal regarding sexual assault. The IBQ is designed to measure institutional betrayal that occurs leading up to, or following a sexual assault (e.g., [The institution] "... created an environment where sexual assault seemed like no big deal"; "... responded inadequately to reports of sexual assault").²⁰

Counter-Reactions of Abusers

The acronym, **DARVO**, conceptualised by Freyd (1997), describes the reaction of abusers when confronted by the victim. It stands for *Deny, Attack and Reverse Victim and Offender*. According to Freyd, the abuser will deny the abuse ever took place,

¹⁸ Campbell, R. (2018). Available from: https://statenews.com/article/2018/10/understanding-the-trauma-of-sexual-assault-discussion-at-wonders?fbclid=IwAR0hjdX-9E3vGsmJtdX76fs7TICpAjEk44xRDJsRQqj1_NrU2uJbe8GB3A

¹⁹ Smith, C.P. & Freyd, J. (2014). Institutional Betrayal. *American Psychologist*. 69(6), pp. 575-587. <https://theconversation.com/when-sexual-assault-victims-speak-out-their-institutions-often-betray-them-87050>

²⁰ Smith, C.P. & Freyd, J.J. (2013). Dangerous Safe Havens: Institutional Betrayal Exacerbates Sexual Trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. 26, pp. 119-124.

become threatening, following which they will then propose themselves as the victim, and the victim as the offender.²¹

Enablers are people who may apply DARVO or justify, legitimise or downplay the misconduct of an offender. For example, in Ashtanga Yoga, these were mainly people who said that the actions of Pattabhi Jois, founder of Ashtanga Yoga, were not sexual, that it was not possible to judge him, as his intentions were not known. Karen Rain is a writer, an activist and sexual abuse survivor of Pattabhi Jois. She responds to these 'enablers' by pointing out that ultimately, perpetrators and their enablers are responsible for their actions, and the blame cannot be shifted to the victims.²²

Charisma, Leadership, and the Social Psychology of Influence and Control

Charismatic people have a certain quality that sets them apart from other people who do not share the same charisma. These people are perceived to have exceptional insight or outstanding accomplishments, and this prompts others to treat them as having supernatural or superhuman traits. Because these qualities are so out of the range of ordinary people, followers see them as divine and place them in positions of leadership. Their power, therefore, is accorded purely by the loyalty and obedience of his followers, based on these perceived qualities.²³ *The Cult Research & Information Center* lists numerous examples of charismatic leaders who have abused their power.²⁴

²¹ Freyd, J.J. (1997). Violations of Power, Adaptive Blindness and Betrayal Trauma Theory. *Feminism and Psychology*. Vol 7, pp. 22-32.

²² Rain, K. (2020). Understanding Sexual Violence in Context. The Medium, 29 April 2020, <https://medium.com/an-injustice/understanding-sexual-violence-in-context-2b8dc5453ded>

²³ Kendall, Diana, Jane Lothian Murray, and Rick Linden. *Sociology in our time* (2nd ed.), 200. Scarborough, On: Nelson, pp. 438–439.

²⁴ Lalich, J. (2016). Cult Research: Recommended Reading, Sept 2016, <http://cultresearch.org/recommended-reading/>

Abuse in Yoga

The guru-disciple pedagogy, which is inherent in many schools of yoga in India, has proven to be a vulnerable juncture in the transmission of transnational yoga. Although there are many individual gurus that have made formative contributions to the practice of contemporary yoga worldwide, few organisations that support such a teaching model have managed to navigate the power dynamics without scandal and abuse.²⁵

The following is a list of some of those yoga teachers and ‘gurus’ publicly accused of abuse by students. More information can be found at The Yoga Lunchbox’s *List of Yoga Scandals Involving Gurus, Teachers, Students, Sex and Other Inappropriate Behaviour*.²⁶ Other sources, where available, are additionally linked in the footnotes.

- Pattabhi Jois - Astanga Yoga ²⁷
- Yogi Bhasan - Kundalini Yoga ²⁸
- BKS Iyengar - Founder, Iyengar Yoga ²⁹
- Manousos Manos and others within IYNAUS ³⁰
- Mark Whitwell - Heart of Yoga ³¹
- John Friend - Anusara Yoga
- Bikram Choudhury - Founder, Bikram Yoga
- Osho/Rajneesh
- Kausthub Desikachar, grandson of Krishnamacharya
- Amrit Desai - Creator, Kripalu Yoga

²⁵ Pankhania, J. and J. Hargreaves 2017. “A culture of silence: Satyananda Yoga”. Friday 22 December. <http://theluminescent.blogspot.com/2017/12/a-culture-of-silence-satyananda-yoga.html>

²⁶ Grant, Kara-Leah & Standiland, Lucinda “A List of Yoga Scandals Involving Gurus, Teachers, Students, Sex and Other Inappropriate Behaviour.” Yoga LunchBox, Feb. 17, 2015, updated May 30, 2019, <https://theyogalunchbox.co.nz/a-comprehensive-list-of-yoga-scandals-involving-gurus-sex-and-other-inappropriate-behaviour/>

²⁷ Remski, Matthew “Yoga’s Culture of Sexual Abuse: Nine Women Tell Their Stories.” The Walrus, Feb. 5, 2020, <https://thewalrus.ca/yogas-culture-of-sexual-abuse-nine-women-tell-their-stories/>

²⁸ An Olive Branch Associates, LLC “Report on an Investigation into Allegations of Sexual and Related Misconduct by Yogi Bhasan.” August 10, 2020, http://asiasamachar.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Olive-Branch-Yogi-Bhasan-Investigation_10Aug2020.pdf

²⁹ Griswold, Eliza “Yoga Reconsiders The Role of The Guru In The Age Of #Metoo.” The New Yorker, July 23, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/yoga-reconsiders-the-role-of-the-guru-in-the-age-of-metoo>

³⁰ Sargeant, Bernadette C. “Report of Investigation of Allegations of Inappropriate Sexual Touching During Yoga Instruction Made Against Manousos Manos.” Iyanaus, March 26, 2019, https://iyanaus.org/sites/default/files/redacted_report_of_investigation_for_iyanaus_-_march_26_2019_redacted_4_4_19.pdf

³¹ Roe, Christie “Breath to Speak” Medium, Jan. 5, 2020, <https://medium.com/@dighyself/breath-to-speak-c5606af5db69>

- Muktananda - Founder, Siddha Yoga
- Swami Rama - Founder, Himalayan Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy
- Swami Satyananda & Swami Akhandananda - Satyananda Yoga ^{32 33}
- Swami Satchidananda - Integral Yoga
- Swami Shankarananda - Shiva Yoga
- Swami Vivekananda - Agama Yoga ³⁴
- Paramahansa Yogananda
- Swami Kriyananda - Ananda Sangha Worldwide
- Swami Maheshwarananda
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi - Leader, Transcendental Meditation Movement
- Ruth Lauer - Manenti - Jivamukti Teacher
- Swami Sathya Sai Baba

Both Uma Dinsmore-Tuli and Matthew Remski, in their books represent two of several efforts to facilitate the process of re-writing the history of sexual abuse in Yoga communities through the lens of survivors.

Uma Dinsmore-Tuli is a writer and radical yogini. In her book, *Yoni Shakti* (2014), she presents testimonies from survivors of sexual and psychological abuse in yoga communities, maintaining that it is still occurring around the world. She discusses the harm, the damage done in these communities by yoga teachers and trainers they trusted. ³⁵

Matthew Remski is a researcher of cultic dynamics and abuse in yoga. In his book *Practice And All Is Coming* (2019), he presents survivors' reports of sexual abuse in Yoga communities, as well as examining the wider contexts that allow such abuse to occur. He explains how isolation, powerlessness, victim-blaming and silencing create

³² Coate, Justice Jennifer & Milroy, Professor Helen "Report of Case Study No. 21: The response of the Satyananda Yoga Ashram at Mangrove Mountain to allegations of child sexual abuse by the ashram's former spiritual leader in the 1970s and 1980s." Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, April 2016, <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Case%20Study%2021%20-%20Findings%20Report%20-%20Satyananda%20Yoga%20Ashram.pdf>

³³ Pankhania, J. 2017. "The ethical and leadership challenges posed by the Royal Commission's revelations of sexual abuse at a Satyananda Yoga ashram in Australia". In Sunil Savur and Sukhbir Sandhu (eds.) *Responsible Leadership and Ethical Decision-Making (Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, vol. 17) (pp. 105–123). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwrH-vQ6M6nsVk5IcDI5cHZ0MDg/view>

³⁴ Tempesta, Erica "Tantra students reveal how they were sexually assaulted and pressured into group sex by a guru at a Thai yoga retreat who claimed that abuse was a 'ritual' for achieving enlightenment." Daily Mail, Aug.12, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-8620357/Tantra-students-reveal-raped-abused-guru-yoga-retreat.html>

³⁵ Dinsmore-Tuli, U. (2020). *Yoni Shakti: A Woman's Guide to Power and Freedom Through Yoga and Tantra*. Pinter & Marlin.

the conditions for such abuse in the yoga community, effectively turning them into cults.³⁶

In *Yoga's Culture of Sexual Abuse: Nine Women Tell Their Stories: Disturbing accounts of misconduct against the founder of one of North America's most popular forms of yoga*, Remski honours the testimonies of survivors of abuse in yoga.³⁷

Jubilee Cooke and Karen Rain are two examples of survivors who have begun a process of recounting personal stories and sharing them with the wider community, and in doing so have started to bring about radical and revolutionary change in yoga.

Jubilee Cooke, in *Why didn't somebody warn me? A Pattabhi Jois #Me Too Story*, documents her story of abuse by a teacher who was a world-renowned yoga leader. It took years of carrying the ordeal, but she finally shares her personal story with the wider community.³⁸

Karen Rain was also abused by Pattabhi Jois, and also kept quiet for years. In trying to make sense of what people said about him, that his actions were not sexual, she says the following:

At times I even tried to glorify the sexual assaults. I wanted to believe what some people claimed, and still do, that Pattabhi Jois was transferring a healing energy to me by touching me that way. Rather than feeling pitiable, that thinking would allow me to feel lucky, like I was being blessed. This may sound like consent on my part, but the power differential, and my fear of the repercussions if I protested — losing my friends, my career, and my sense of belonging — made consent impossible. I was powerless. Here was a yoga master, a heavy man, lying on top of me, humping me, while I was in compromising postures. I acquiesced. I endured. I tried to tune it out.

I did not consent.

Rain now believes that sexual violence is defined by the behaviour of the perpetrator, not by the response of the victim, and further, that it is often more about power than about sex.³⁹

³⁶ Remski, M. (2019). *Practice and All is Coming: Abuse, cult dynamics, and healing in Yoga and beyond*. Embodied Wisdom Publishing Limited: New Zealand

³⁷ Remski, Matthew "Yoga's Culture of Sexual Abuse: Nine Women Tell Their Stories." *The Walrus*, Feb. 5, 2020, <https://thewalrus.ca/yogas-culture-of-sexual-abuse-nine-women-tell-their-stories/>

³⁸ Cooke, J. (2018). *Why Didn't Somebody Warn Me? A Pattabhi Jois #MeToo Story*. *Decolonizing Yoga*, 11 July 2018, <https://decolonizingyoga.com/why-didnt-somebody-warn-me-a-pattabhi-jois-metoo-story-jubilee-cooke/>

³⁹ Rain, K. (2018). *Yoga Guru Pattabhi Jois Sexually Assaulted Me for Years*. Available from: <https://medium.com/s/powertrip/yoga-guru-pattabhi-jois-sexually-assaulted-me-for-years->

When the subject of abuse in yoga communities arises, the response is often an attempt to preserve the practice, rather than focus on the harm done by the institution. Consequently, the issue is rarely dealt with. These two women have outlined clearly how to respond to sexual abuse in yoga communities, stressing that the perpetrator must be made accountable and the institution must acknowledge and apologise when such abuse occurs and is covered up. They argue that a culture of belief, rather than disbelief, must be established, but one which goes further by offering encouragement and dignity to the victims. Education and prevention should also be an integral part of this culture.⁴⁰

[48b3d04c9456](#) and <https://medium.com/an-injustice/understanding-sexual-violence-in-context-2b8dc5453ded>

⁴⁰ Rain, K. & Cooke, J. (No date). How to respond to sexual abuse within a yoga or spiritual community. Available from: <https://yogainternational.com/article/view/how-to-respond-to-sexual-abuse-within-a-yoga-or-spiritual-community/>

The Role of the Guru

The role of the *guru* in India is a specialised one, and is derived from the notion that all knowledge, whether philosophical, religious, mystical or cosmological, must be acquired orally via a master. Over time this came to be applied to other disciplines, such as music, medicine and law. The guru became the ultimate guide in any endeavour towards self-discovery and was considered the best judge of the development of the *śiṣya* (disciple). It was up to the guru to prescribe the practices necessary for the disciple on the journey of self-discovery. They were seen as an essential link in the transmission of knowledge and this secured them a significance in Indian society that has thus been reinforced, again and again, in the sacred books of India. Without that master to guide them, there was no possibility of experiencing the true nature of the soul.⁴¹

This process of passing on knowledge from *guru* to disciple is, in itself, a spiritual institution in India. It is called *guru-śiṣya paramparā*. *Paramparā*, means uninterrupted succession, and is formally established in a structured initiation ceremony (*dīkṣā*). The *guru* accepts the initiate as a disciple and assumes responsibility for their spiritual well-being and progress. It is a relationship based on respect, commitment, and devotion. This initiation process can also extend to the teaching of other esoteric wisdom and yogic techniques, and the disciple, out of gratitude, may give the guru a gift.

The Sanskrit word *dīkṣā* is derived from two words: *dīks*, which means to consecrate or dedicate; and *dakś*, which means to grow, to become strong or to expand. The word *dīkṣā* means to dedicate oneself. *Dīkṣā* initiation offers a framework to discover one's Self and expand one's consciousness through a process of dedication, which involves both giving and receiving: giving of oneself, and receiving from the *guru*. *Dīkṣā* offers an opportunity to explore the goal or path of our inner life. *Dīkṣā* illumines the spiritual path:

The guru is considered as a vast ocean, a holy place of pilgrimage, a ship, a sailor, a touchstone, a guide, a mediator, etc. He helps the *śiṣya* to go through the experience of self-realisation by being with him in various forms. Thus, in the physical form, the guru also appears as a human being. When the *śiṣya* is able to withdraw his attention and focus it upon his inner astral form he (the *guru*) guides him. When the *śiṣya* transcends the astral and goes to the region of Brahmān or causal form, the *guru* also appears in the causal form. Finally when all those that cover the physical body, sensory perceptions and mind are removed and the *śiṣya* discovers his reality as the immortal soul or the *jīva-ātma* the guru also appears in the form of a radiant soul to guide the disciple in his onward journey. Finally, when the disciple arrives at the level of total consciousness of *sat loka* he discovers that his guru was indeed the total consciousness with whom the *śiṣya* then merges and unites. The guru's role, therefore, is not confined to the oral instructions given in the physical form alone. He remains with the disciple till the end of his spiritual journey.

⁴¹ Raina, 2002

It is because of this that the devotion of the *guru* is equated with the devotion to God.⁴²

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the process of initiation into *Sannyāsa* was offered to men and women from the West. Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, was one of the first to do so. It then became more prominent when, in the 1960s and 1970s, teachers such as Swami Sivananda, and his disciples Swami Satyananda, Swami Vishnu-devananda and Swami Satchidananda attracted a considerable number of followers. For these disciples, the goals varied:

The world weary and forlorn wanted health and vigour; those who had thirst for knowledge and a consuming curiosity sought enlightenment; those who had a worldly end came in pursuit of means to secure that end and the men of vision sought the highest spiritual end.⁴³

Bilimoria (1982, 1989) tracks the history of yoga, from the Indus Valley where it began, to its transition to the West. He is aware, and warns of, its potential for good and evil, and offers advice in choosing the best guru, and how to avoid questionable teachers, offering a critique of the ethical framework and some practical advice to novices.

It might not be an exaggeration to say that problems have been created, and perhaps some damage done, by virtue of the sheer inability on the part of some earnest seekers to discern the wheat from the chaff, in their quest for self-actualisation. What is required of a guru, as what is expected of a yogi however is not always clear cut, especially when we notice how different gurus are good at parading under divergent banners without fear of contradicting themselves and each other in the process.⁴⁴

In pre-modern yoga, medicine and alchemy, ancient yoga texts offer guidance for individual teacher-student relationships, particularly in relation to the desired qualities of student and teacher for success in the practice.⁴⁵ The historical discourses have no discussion about issues that may arise from institutional structures, the imbalance of power in these relationships, gender inequality, or a lack of regulation. Wujastyk, Birch, and Hargreaves (2019), point out that the conditions under which yoga was practised in the past differs significantly from contemporary environments. However, certain aspects of the teacher-student relationship have continued, such as devotion to guru, and the unquestioning authority of teachers. This highlights the vulnerable aspects of

⁴² Raina, 2002, p. 177

⁴³ Ibid., p. 185

⁴⁴ Bilimoria, P. (1982). *The world of yoga and guru: Good bad and the odd*. Waurin Ponds: Vic. School of Humanities, Deakin University, pp. xv–xvi).

⁴⁵ Wujastyk, D., Birch, J. and Hargreaves, J. (2019): *What is the role of the teacher: Considering primary sources of yoga, medicine and alchemy for contemporary issues*. Co-publication by The Luminescent and AyurYog Project. Available from: <https://www.theluminescent.org/2019/05/what-is-role-of-teacher.html>

the teacher-student relationship and the conditions where power imbalances may persist into the future.⁴⁶

In terms of the guru-disciple relationship, transmission of transnational yoga has proved problematic.⁴⁷ There are few organisations that have been successful in negotiating the power dynamics without abuse and scandal. Caldwell highlights two totally opposing viewpoints of Swami Muktananda (1908 – 1982), founder of Siddha yoga. He is seen, on the one hand, as an enlightened teacher of an esoteric form of Tantric sexual yoga, and on the other, a teacher who engaged in unethical and illegal actions with many of his disciples. She argues that it is the culture of power and secrecy which allowed the abuse to happen.⁴⁸ Kramer and Alstad⁴⁹ also look at the way authoritarianism can indoctrinate religious beliefs and hinder the development of the personality of the student, a guru-disciple dynamic that can extend beyond the religious and political context to others, such as parents, friends and lovers.

The guru-disciple relationship is sometimes compared to the analyst-analysand (therapist-client) relationship, and it has been suggested that transference⁵⁰ is inherent in both these healing, therapeutic relationships. According to Kakar (2003), an Indian psychoanalyst who has researched the psychotherapeutic dimension of the guru-disciple relationship:

The disciples' accounts of healing interaction with the spiritual guide also make it evident that the seeker-patient's interactions with the teacher have the aim of establishing him as a highly reliable, always available self-object for merging experiences. The teacher furthers this process by his willingness to let the seeker merge with what the latter perceives to be the teacher's greatness, strength, calmness, just as the mother once did when she lifted the anxious infant and held him against her body.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Pankhania, J. and J. Hargreaves. 2017. "A Culture of Silence: Satyananda Yoga", Friday 22 December. <https://www.theluminescent.org/2017/12/a-culture-of-silence-satyananda-yoga.html>

⁴⁸ Caldwell, S.L. (2001). The Heart of the Secret: A Personal and Scholarly Encounter With Shakta Tantrism in Siddha Yoga, *Nova Religion* 5(1): pp. 9-51.

⁴⁹ Kramer, J. & Alstad, D. (1993). *The Guru Papers: masks of authoritarian power*. Frog Books: Berkeley, California.

⁵⁰ Transference - "The redirection to a substitute, usually a therapist, of emotions that were originally felt in childhood"; *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, Lexico Dictionaries, www.lexico.com/definition/transference.

⁵¹ Kakar, S. (2003). Psychoanalysis and Eastern spiritual healing traditions. *Analytical Psychology*. 48:5. p.663.

He argues that the guru-disciple interaction touches deeper, more regressed layers of the psyche than is normally the case of psychoanalysis and is similar to the transference and countertransference⁵² field encountered in work with borderline or psychotic patients. The relationship between disciple and guru, therefore, can resemble the child-parent relationship, irrespective of the age of either of them, or the age difference between them. This is because the identity between the actual and the child selves of the disciple and the real and parental representations of the guru, in the spiritual healing relationship, overlap to a much greater extent and for longer periods than in psychoanalysis.

Kakar writes of a man sick and feverish with jaundice who reported:

I do not know if I used to dream or it was reality. I always felt Baba constantly with me. He was caressing me, touching my hands. I never felt lonely. He was there all the time.⁵³

According to Kakar, this describes access to archaic modes of contact. In these, the disciples sometimes even unconsciously create a hallucinatory image of the guru to sustain a self in danger of losing its cohesion. This is reported by disciples of various traditions and seems to be an integral part of the Indian spiritual healing discourse. The idealising transference, which leads to the merging experience is the core of the healing process in the guru-disciple relationship.⁵⁴

The following Sanskrit chant, taken from the Mahabharata, illustrates the intensity of such relationships:

***Tvameva mātā cha pitā tvameva
Tvameva bandhuścha sakhā tvameva
Tvameva vidyā draviṇaṃ tvameva
Tvameva sarvaṃ mama devadeva***

***Thou art my mother and my father thou art
Thou art my family and my friend thou art
Thou art my knowledge and my wealth thou art
Thou art my everything Light of all lights***

Some disciples are told by their guru, that 'till you get perfect knowledge, try to remain like one who is blind, deaf, and dumb' (Yogaswami, n.d.). Whereas other gurus such

⁵² Countertransference - "The emotional reaction of the analyst to the subject's contribution."; *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, Lexico Dictionaries, www.lexico.com/definition/countertransference.

⁵³ Kakar, S. (2003). Psychoanalysis and Eastern spiritual healing traditions. *Analytical Psychology*. 48:5. p.663 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1465-5922.00426>

⁵⁴ Kakar, S. (2003). Psychoanalysis and Eastern spiritual healing traditions. *Psychoanalysis and Eastern Spiritualist and Healing Traditions*. 48:5. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1465-5922.00426>

as Desikachar explain that ‘never has it been said you should be blind, you should be deaf, and you should be dumb’ (Desikachar, in Dobia, 1999). Pankhania (2017) argues, “(g)iven that gurus are in positions of power and seen as healers, it is vital that their relationships with disciples encompass ethical boundaries”.⁵⁵

It is important to note that the three disciples of Swami Sivananda’s, Swami Satyananda, Swami Vishnu-devananda and Swami Satchidananda now have accusations of sexual abuse directed at them.⁵⁶ There is a tradition of venerating founding gurus as saints and healers, but for these three disciples of Swami Sivananda, there now exist two versions of history. One is the mythical, hagiographical story, and the other, a history of sexual and other abuses told by survivors, who liberated themselves from the former.

⁵⁵ Pankhania, J. (2017) “The ethical and leadership challenges posed by the Royal Commission’s revelations of sexual abuse at a Satyananda Yoga ashram in Australia”. In Sunil Savur and Sukhbir Sandhu (eds.) *Responsible Leadership and Ethical Decision-Making (Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, vol. 17) (pp. 105–123). Emerald Publishing Limited.

⁵⁶ Information about the Satyananda Yoga Ashram at Mangrove can be found at: <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/case-studies/case-study-21-satyananda-yoga-ashram>

Personal narratives
(abuse allegations against Vishnu-devananda)

The following are the personal narratives written by the survivors in their own words. The survivors are named with their consent.

Some of the narratives are several pages long, and each narrative will start on a new page. At the end of this section follows a postscript with my reflections.

Please note that each survivor chose to include what they found most important or healing to write about. These narratives did not form the basis of the legal investigation run by Carol Merchasin but were part of a separate process. To learn more about the process through which the personal narratives emerged, please revisit the methodology section.

Personal narrative by Paddy Erwin

My name is Paddy and I became involved with the SYV organization in 1967 after taking yoga classes here in Ottawa. At that time one of SVD's senior disciples was an older woman named Dora von Herrnritt, originally from Vienna, Austria, she would go on to become Swami Ramanananda. I was 16 and 17 at that time and still in high school. Dora traveled by bus from the Montreal SYVC where she was based then to teach two or three days a week in Ottawa. The classes were held on Cooper Street, only a few blocks from my school. Dora took me under her wing and began to invite me to join her for her morning meditation, asanas and a small breakfast, apart from the class held in the evenings. What I remember most about her was an unwavering devotion to SVD. I'd been reading books like "Autobiography of a Yogi", had been practicing asanas and was already vegetarian. Meeting her and being able to practice more intensely was like a dream come true. She let me borrow a copy of SVD's Complete Illustrated book and I became interested in Sivananda and this intriguing Western disciple SVD. Eventually my parents allowed me to join Dora for weekend visits to the ashram in Val Morin.

My physical health has never been strong although I became adept at asanas and at 69 my memory is still very clear about those few years. Along with others, I travelled a little with SVD spending time in both Val Morin and Nassau, Bahamas as well as visiting several centres in the U.S. While I began initially with weekend visits to Val Morin, this became summers spent on staff and after graduation, although I had applied to nursing college, chose instead to move to Val Morin and remain on staff. There were reasons I would gradually become disillusioned with both SVD and the organization and eventually left after my marriage to pursue educational interests and an independent life.

For the most part I view my time and experiences in Val Morin to be more positive than negative, but the negatives did involve SVD who had begun to appear less guru-like and more like an impatient tyrant. When I read Julie Salter's statement and the subsequent Facebook post by the SYVC, it sent me into quite a tailspin for days, even weeks. While her revelation was shocking and extremely sad, on some level I was also not surprised. My thoughts also went to Irene Roy who had become Swami Saradananda. She was SVD's personal assistant/secretary and I can remember cringing over his treatment of her at times. She was a lovely, kind individual. Now I can call his treatment of her what it was: verbal and emotional abuse (I witnessed his abuse towards others as well). Even though this goes against everything I stand for, somehow back then I was able to tolerate it and find a way to rationalize everything - it must be for her own betterment and 'guru-god-knows-all' kind of nonsense. Still, I was never aware of any sexual activity or abuse going on involving SVD while I was in Val Morin.

I did have my own inappropriate experiences with SVD in the early summer of 1969 in my 18th year, although I'd long ago put this out of mind and will state I was never sexually attacked or abused. Even prior to those experiences, I suspect now he'd already begun to get me used to his touch and become more familiar, slowly but surely, by patting my arms or shoulders, praising me, calling me a "good girl", teasing me, tickling me and so on. This only happened when we were alone and it made me uncomfortable. SVD was the same age as my father and I was very young and naïve. I was too conflicted to tell anyone and couldn't really process what was going on, wondering if perhaps he was testing me or I

was only imagining something inappropriate in his mind. Although never attacked or threatened, his advances were uninvited, inappropriate and now I do believe they were sexually motivated. At the time I tried to make light of everything, dismissed what he was doing and saying, and removed myself whenever I became too uncomfortable. I can still feel my shock and remember my cheeks burning as I ran from his house for the last time, vowing to never be alone with him again. Nothing was ever spoken or acknowledged between us, I never complained or expressed my discomfort or dislike, only avoided encounters when I could.

To avoid any confusion about what actually happened, I can say that SVD began approaching me whenever I was alone working at his house. At first this involved lots of praise, touching my arm or patting my shoulder or pulling me in to hug him. He told me he noticed how well I did asanas, called me a “good girl”, etc. He would sometimes insist I watch tv with him when I was there working in another room alone – there was a room filled with photographs and paraphernalia to catalog that several of us were working on. He’d call me into the room over and over again, patting the sofa beside him until I sat down, usually in a chair, or at the far end of the sofa. He dismissed with a laugh any polite excuse I might have, like I had to leave soon, had this or that task to complete, etc. He would not stop until I was beside him and he’d put his arm up and around me firmly (I was taller than he was). His feet would always be up and crossed on the coffee table. So there we’d sit while he watched tv and I remember watching an entire episode of the old The Dick Van Dyke show this way in black and white once while he chuckled throughout. At the end of the show I’d literally have to peel myself away while he’d try to cajole me to stay. It made me very uncomfortable and I didn’t know quite what to make of it, so simply tried to assume all was innocent, and to take delight in SVD’s child-like enjoyment. That progressed to him calling me repeatedly to do something in his bedroom when he knew I was there. It was shocking to find the lights low and to see him lying flat on his back with his legs apart, wearing only white jockey shorts. I’d only ever seen him in a dhoti. It was always for something silly and he tried to get me to reach over his body for something within his reach, which I found any way to avoid doing. Every time he called me into the bedroom it was the same, his eyes would be closed and he’d point and direct me to what he wanted. He didn’t move otherwise and I have no idea if he was peeking through closed eyes and watching me. I’d leave the room staring wide-eyed and he’d call me in again, “Padma, come move this for me”; “Padma, get me a glass of water”; “Padma...”. After several trips in and out, I stood outside the bedroom, told him sorry I had to go and would leave, my original tasks there undone.

The last time this uncomfortable ‘game’ began, I told him I had to finish something before getting ready for evening satsang. He came out to the kitchen where I was and sat in a chair watching me tidy up a few things, thankfully wearing his dhoti. He began praising me again and kept patting his lap for me to come and sit down. Unbelievably, after much cajoling and me shaking my head to say no, I sat stiffly on one side of his right leg, while he tried to bounce me on his lap awkwardly. He had his right arm around me firmly, began touching me, tickling me on the front of my torso and trying to kiss me around my neck. When I tried to pull away, he held me even tighter and tried to kiss me on the mouth. I pulled away firmly freeing myself, told him I had to leave now and ran out of the house, the old screen door banging shut behind me. I literally ran with my cheeks burning across the camp to the back of the yoga hall where I was staying. I missed satsang and went to bed trying to make sense of what had happened - although unsure if anything in fact had happened.

Not long after that last uncomfortable incident at his house, I was taking part in morning asana class, SVD suddenly stopped teaching, said, "OM, Padma take over the class", walked swiftly by me and out of the hall. That was unexpected, but almost served to convince me that his earlier actions had likely been harmless, to let it go and move on.

So, that is what happened to me in the summer of 1969 just prior to the first TTC. I wouldn't have shared this at all, but after reading of Julie Salter's sad abuse and experience I finally understood that SVD's behaviour with me had not been so harmless. I'm still sorry I allowed him to plan my wedding and perform the ceremony in 1970, sad that I didn't know I had a voice. However, that was where I met my American husband, he was a remarkable human being, we were blessed with three children and together until his death 29 years later. The two of us left the ashram in the latter part of 1970, we opened and ran a SYVC in Ottawa, but eventually parted ways with the organization.

It is still difficult for me to feel I was a victim of SVD. Perhaps if I could have appreciated what was actually going on at the time, I might have been able to confront him or tell others and this in turn could have prevented his abuse of others. I see things more clearly now, but at the time I wasn't even certain what I could have said to anyone. I wasn't aware of anyone above SVD to go to or even what I could have said: Swamiji tried to hold and kiss me? He touches and tickles me when we're alone? He makes me sit beside him watching tv with his arm around me? It makes me uncomfortable when he calls me into his bedroom for silly tasks while he's relaxing in his underwear? Although it felt inappropriate and very weird, I still had that 'guru-god-knows-everything' mindset. I learned to keep a safe distance from him after that last experience, he showed no outward sign that anything had happened and it reinforced my belief that nothing had happened and made it easier to eventually dismiss. SVD also had many positive qualities and helped others, including me, so it all left me rather conflicted at the time. I'm far less conflicted now, just left with the sombre realization that SVD was an opportunistic, serial abuser and thankful I was able to get away when I did.

Personal narrative by Lucille Campbell

I was 17 years old when ran away from home for 3 months. Of course, when I came back home my mother was very upset and worried. My father died at the age of 55 when I was 14 and I am the youngest. At 17, my siblings were gone, and I was alone with my mother. She had some drinking problems and it was extremely difficult for me. I felt abandoned. When I came back the week before college started, she did not want me to go back to school, I had to find a job.

I moved up north with my sister, who lived close to the ashram, and as we were walking, I saw this little man in orange walking in silence with a group of people. I was attracted and joined the group. Not long after, I was on staff in Val-Morin at 17 years of age.

I moved to the camp in autumn 1971 with a friend. I felt at home and secure right away. I discovered a new and fantastic way of life. Yoga, meditation, vegetarian food and karma yoga. I was absolutely happy. This was my dream life.

I stayed 6 months in Val-morin. I was happy to do anything, cooking, cleaning and all the practices. After that, I went to Montreal for 2 years with Swami Mahadevananda. and then to Toronto and Vancouver where I was the director. I came back to Montreal from Vancouver, teaching and cooking and became director of the Montreal centre. Then in 1978, I went to Europe. First Geneva, later to Spain, and then I left Spain to go back to Montreal. I was preparing my way out.

When I met SV (Swami Vishnu Devananda), I was 17 years old and he was 47. I followed him in the silent walk in 1971, and right away I became a follower. I met him just few times in the following year in the summer and at Christmas.

The first time I saw him, I trusted him. My father had died and now I had a spiritual father who would show me the way to enlightenment. I read all the spiritual Indian text, I learned about the meaning of a guru, devotion, bhakti yoga. Yoga became an absolute love of the divine on earth.

1975 First sexual interaction after a meditation during Christmas in Val-morin.

1977 The second sexual interaction, in Val-Morin during the summer.

1978 The third sexual interaction in Germany

Impact

In 1975, during a retreat, I open the door of his room and I saw that he was having a sexual encounter with a member of staff. I was shocked and deceived, but soon I blocked it out of my consciousness. I preferred not to think about it because I loved my life.

Then, my first and second interaction was not traumatising. It happened during a massage and was oral sex. There was no ejaculation, and I thought that this must be tantra yoga. I actually felt a boost of energy.

The third did not let me feel right. I felt like a prostitute.

In these first two interactions I thought it was tantra Yoga, but after the third I considered this to be totally ridiculous. It was not right, and from there I changed my expectation of a guru. At the loss of my divine image of the guru, I felt deceived and sad. It was like a sad

love story. I was still very involved in teaching and I focused on that. I simply loved this life and was not ready to leave.

SV kicked me out. It was wrong to be kicked out after 10 years with no money. I was in the Montreal centre and a swami friend of mine from Spain was hospitalised in Montreal. He was a friend and I wanted to go and see him. SV was at the centre that particular day and he did not allow me to go. I said I was going anyway, and he said that I had to leave the organisation that very moment. After 10 years I had to leave without a penny in my pocket. Thank god, that the person in charge of the Montreal Centre then told me, after SV left, to take the time to find a place. A student of the centre invited me to a beautiful home and others organised a weekend retreat so that I could get some money.

That was 40 years ago, and it took 20 years of life experiences and empowerment to see that that I did not know anything. Thus, began the questioning period when I could doubt everything. It took me an even longer time to talk about my mother. It is hard to clarify the mind and see facts as they are when family and spiritual organisations create such entwined bonds.

How does one desacralize the ones we trust? By this I mean, how does one stop seeing people we want to love and adore, as gods? People such as our father or mother or guru? For me, it was first the acceptance that I was naïve. I had to accept that when I saw SVD as my guru, I was caught up living a wonderful dream, created by my own concepts and mind. Indeed, there were times when I did not have the power to react.

It has been a long journey to let go of what I do not agree with in the scriptures and take what I need one step at the time. To let go of my concepts of God, gurus and lineage has taken decades. I have tried to find inspiration everywhere, in all different schools and teachers but without letting this become a certitude, a cult.

It was a lie that he was a celibate monk. I would have preferred transparency and truth about his sexual life. It was a lie to venerate this guru. I was young, in a platonic love with my saviour, and I lacked experience. I now believe that bhakti yoga is just a children's fairy tale. It can help people to focus on ideal representation, but it can be dangerous to believe it as an absolute truth.

SV was not the best teacher.

In a way, through this cult, I received a great lesson: not to venerate God in a personality. Maybe that is what was needed to wake me up. My best gurus, after I left SV, the ones that woke me up a little at a time, were the ones that gave me so much stress, my kids in adolescence, a boyfriend after my divorce. The worry, pain and suffering pushed me to find new paths in my patterns of thinking. I call that little enlightenment. To find peace in the mist of total chaos. I think I have to press the lemon to get the juice. The patterns in my mind are like glue and need sometimes a very strong agent.

It has been important for me to free myself from the cult.

The cult of a personality is like a teenager falling in love for the first time, and is probably part of our human experience. I still need this bhakti.... for love to be joyful, it is more a state of mind than dependent on outside things.

It was wrong of course to invite me into sexual exercise. I did not understand and I tried to idealise it as a tantra yoga exercise.

It was wrong to believe. We need to know or at least to doubt before we know.

It was a cult. I was mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually totally dependent on the organisation.

The attachment was to ideas. I was ignorant, but so happy there. All aspects of my life seemed fine and I believed I was on the right path.

I am now free to learn, to inform myself, to study from all the ancient and new sages, philosophers, psychologists, science. Free to think and analyse. I do not have to accept what I do not agree with or understand. I am free to know. I do not have a close-minded environment that refuses to let me search.

I did not know anything, but I know I was wrong to believe what we were told as truth in this yoga organisation of SVD.

I was in a pretty negative environment after the death of my father, and my mind was hopeless, aimless and sad. The camp washed that away with exercise, singing and praying. I also found a guide. I still appreciate that I had this opportunity, but I was too young, without enough education to evaluate the teachings. I believed everything and replaced my sadness by something that felt much better. I would not say I was wrong, but just did not have enough discernment.

I do not know if I could have found truth in the world. This was an experience that enabled me to evaluate my understanding later.

I do not agree anymore with what I was then told:

The guru is to be worshiped.

The organisation is the best Yoga school.

You have to keep studying in one school.

We were all fooled.

Idealists we were, and young and we did not like the way the world was going. We thought that this was better, but we were slaves, who enriched an organisation, thinking that we were the elite of the world.

When I left, I left all the practices, yoga and pictures.

Just as when I joined the organisation, I needed to clear my mind when I left it, I needed to wash my brain again of all that teaching and start anew.

Yet underneath in my subconscious there was still a binding link, and I ask myself, why it is so hard to let go. We think the guru is a secure way to God, and that if we leave the relationship, we will feel abandoned. It is, therefore, fear of punishment, hell or whatever our concept of religion is. Just like children, we need someone to hold our hands to walk from ignorance to knowledge, from hell to heaven, or from bondage to enlightenment.

To break that link, I had to give up the idea of enlightenment. I search new ways, from ancient and new sages, to achieve mindfulness of the body and state of mind. At present I have faith.

My boyfriend used to tease me about the hook. It made me conscious. He is not my husband, the father of my kids. I do not remember how he could see I was still hooked to this yoga school, but his awareness of it helped me to realise that I was still spiritually hooked. It has been a lot of work to release myself.

Now I am free. We had to follow one teacher, one school, a lineage. Now I have the freedom to go anywhere. Just like a kid who thinks his father is the strongest, we were forced to think that this was the best school. SV used to criticise just about all the other gurus in the west as well as the ones at the Divine Society.

I also gave up Sivananda too. As I am not a realised person, I can't evaluate another one. Sivananda and all those saints are a representation of an ideal we make up individually. A lot of his writings do not make any sense for me now.

I do not feel guilt. That was hard to say and do, and I had to figure out how not to feel guilt when being such a blasphemer of saints. Well, I told myself the saints would approve my demarche. They do not need my love.

Yoga is still the purpose of my life, to learn, to understand body, mind and spirit. Instead of focusing on the outside or focusing on the guru, I pay more attention now to develop awareness of my body reactions, emotions and thoughts. This is the vipassana, mindfulness school. This is a very interesting journey that helps me to understand more. Rather than believe, I try to see and experience. Focussing on God and mantras used to help me focus, but I was still ignorant of my own self, my reactions in daily life were not as conscious.

Through education we received so many stories, so much data, and that sticks in the brain as truth and brings reactions when confronted. The subconscious mind drives us, but I learn to become aware a little at a time of these impressions.

To untie and release after 10 years of studying yoga in Sivananda school, asanas, meditation, chanting, pujas, mantras, reading all the sacred books, took me a lot of time. I practiced at the Sivananda school for 10 years, from 17 years of age. It has been a great lesson to look back on the effect of all these practices, both good and negative. The practice of bhakti yoga to soften my troubled heart with love and devotion; the repetition of mantra to change the channel in my mind; asanas and pranayama for health.

After such deception, I prefer to thank the teachers for their teaching, I do not ask them to be perfect. I am less in need of being totally in communion with the teacher.

All this devotion is dangerous. Bhakti yoga with all the representation of the most amazing beings is nice, comforting like a lullaby, and why not, when we need a little tenderness, sweetness and help from our divine imagination? This did not solve the problem of who I am, so alone, it is not enough. I thought to start from where I am now, in a body with emotions and thoughts This is what really helps me in daily life not just the intoxication feeling of love.

It is fanatical. If, by devoting myself to a specific God or guru, I experienced a blissful effect from the concentration, I will think that that God or guru is the one. This is a current mental sickness of the mind and shows a lack of scientific knowledge of the brain's reactions to all those practices. Gurus then profit from those experiences, and teachings will nourish that, too. We get so attached and we fear hell if we leave.

All this love and bhakti is dangerous for the emotional.

Of course, it is useful when we need help, an uplift, because we need a feeling of tender loving care. This is a plaster for a bleeding heart and useful for a moment only. But emotions in daily life are a mixture of pleasant and unpleasant ones, so if I wanted a little peace in this chaos, I first had to face them, become aware of them and see how to deal with them. I have to see and feel fear, anger, jealousy, excitement, joy, become aware of their effect on my body, accept them without judgement as they come. Give them space this way and I became more cool, less reactive. Bhakti yoga for me is a plaster and not a cure. For real medicine, I have to become more aware. I do not force myself, for it is exhausting. When something is bothering me, I try to see what is there and if I can't understand I let it be until it passes. But to be aware is important, because I may act unconsciously on it. For people in profound depression this could be more painful, so visualisation, repetition of positive phrases might help them better in the beginning. I use bhakti if I want, and awareness is my main path. Not to resist pain when it is there, being aware of it make it easier.

I do not want to worship the cult of a human being.

My guru is life, events that wake me up a little at the time, through all kinds of people, and the image of a guru as a source of elevation of my spirit does not help me anymore. I do not need representations of god in my house, but if it inspires others it is just great. I sometimes use a mental picture of my Ishta Devata, for it corresponds well to the attributes I want. I like the one sitting in the mountains, half naked, in the midst of scorpions and worms, not the prettiest things, but he is a totally balanced mind, accepting the ugliest. I do not question about Siva being a real, existing divinity or a mythological creation. This is not important to me.

God is not in the incarnation of one human. The guru for me is not a single person but anybody from the worst to the best that gave me a great lesson in life. I have a love of nature and birds now. Gardening and the beauty in birds and animals brings great grounding energy in my unsteady moods.

I am happy that I freed myself from that cult.

I am so happy not to belong to a spiritual group, a specific teacher or teaching. I did not make much progress, but the little, tiny bit of awareness makes a big difference in the way I live, my interaction with others, my way to adapt, listen and talk. I am 66 years old and it took a lifelong journey to make few steps, but I do not think about self-realisation anymore. I just want to understand what I can, and I am just a lazy, undisciplined yogi so...

Thank you, Josna. I feel sorry that this is the end. I liked the interaction. It is moving to put into words what I learnt in all those years from life: pain, teachers and different schools of thoughts. A lot of it is data from many books that have helped me a great deal. I do not know the truth, but for now this is what it is.

Personal narrative by Pamela Kyssa

When I was 20 years of age, although reasonably happy, I was searching for some spiritual connection in my life. I had tried a few different careers but ended up in the computer industry, which was well paid. I could afford fashionable clothes and liked to dress well. Once when the computers were down, I found an advertisement for a 'fasting' clinic, no mention of yoga, but I was interested in fasting with a group. I went and was blown away by the love. I learned about yoga and it felt as though it was what I had been searching for. I did not, however, feel comfortable with bowing down before photographs. It felt wrong, but I was told that it was my ego, and that I needed to overcome this. I moved into ashram life and made a complete lifestyle change. Instead of all my fancy clothes and shoes, which I gave away, I owned two pairs of puja pants, two t-shirts and one pair of flip-flops and a toothbrush. I slept on the floor, took cold showers – all in an effort to purify myself.

S.V.D. (S Vishnu-Devananda.) visited the London centre and took a shine to me, giving me my spiritual name, Padma. I was 21 and he was 52. Although others worshipped him, I never really took to him. I had deep respect for the fact that he had written the complete illustrated book of yoga. He used to shout at so many powerful people who were submissive to him. He never shouted at me, though. There was 'something' ... I can't name it. He raised his voice only once, a year before his death, when I went to confront him at Val Morin.

I went on a Yoga and Ski Trip to Val Morin. It was suggested that I take Brahmacharya, but I felt it was not right for me at that time. I was yelled at (by the London Centre Director) until I agreed to take the vows. On returning to England, he then wanted me to take TTC, so that I could teach at the London Centre, but I preferred to do this in the Bahamas. I was however, given no say in where I should do the training.

S.V.D. came back over to England, to a yoga retreat at Windsor Castle, and it was there that he raped me. I massaged him in his room, and we practiced yoga afterwards, which was an honour in a way. I did a very deep practice. My eyes were mostly closed though I did see him struggling, with his own movements which surprised me. He modified a shoulder stand using the chair. I kept my mind clear, as I usually did with him since I believed he could likely read my thoughts. I am embarrassed now to say this, but people I respected had said that this was the case, that he could read peoples thoughts.

In final relaxation when I lay on the floor with my eyes closed, he rolled on top of me. Heavy. Old man. His right hand pulled down my puja pants and underwear together. I took his hand and said, 'Swamiji I don't want to get pregnant', and he said, 'Padmaji you will not get pregnant'. He pulled stronger than my hand. I thought, wow, he can control his sperm. I cleared my mind, because I was ashamed of feeling disgust toward him. He just slid into me. I was embarrassed. I left my body (years later I learned that this is disassociation). We went for a walk afterwards, which was weird, to walk out in public with him, his dhoti on his head, and another dhoti on. We bumped into a woman from the ashram. He had his arm around me, and the next day she told me I was really lucky, as so many people would have liked to have that closeness with S.V.D. We walked around the street, and he sat on a low wall, pulled me toward him, and acted like he was my boyfriend, I was between his legs. I wanted it to be over. I was embarrassed to be out in public with him, like that, his dhoti on his head. I could feel the vibe of people who looked at us, some younger people. With my lifestyle change, giving up everything, clothing and

makeup, I was used to that, it had made me invisible. I didn't count. I felt safe in this invisibility, but safe no more. I wondered why me, was it because I was kind and giving? I had massaged him for ages with all I had, heart and vibrational attunement.

After the Retreat at Windsor Castle, back at Chepstow Villas (Sivananda London Centre) I had a migraine and was ill in bed up in the attic. He climbed up. A friend was with me and SV shooed him away and sat with me, brushed my hair and looked into my eyes. Yucky for me. I wanted him to go away.

I came from an abusive family that was full of chaos. I used to sit silently with S.V.D. whenever I could. I used to empty my mind because I believed he could read my thoughts. Once a senior swami came to sit in front of him ... S.V.D. 'screamed' (literally) at this senior swami, chastising him, and brought him to tears. My guts churned, and I felt so deeply upset for the swami, it was shocking. I made myself disappear while still sitting there.

I served and served and served. And served some more. I gave and gave and gave. Being staff was exhausting. I loved to serve, but I was exhausted and didn't get enough sleep, and to this day my sleep is disrupted.

On TTC I was injured in a plane crash, caused by pilot error. I did not pursue claims, because the life I led did not really focus on money, but I broke the last bones of my coccyx, and had cuts and bruises.

Instead of returning to the UK, I went to New York and taught lots of classes. I loved to teach but I got burned out. I went to the Ranch, where I was summoned to bathe S.V.D. He pulled my head toward his penis. I was angry and left and slammed the door. And then that night, he left the Ranch. I was told he went to his cave in India. Later in the Bahamas, where I was teaching, not knowing when he would return, it was about 3 months later that he walked down the path with some other people I was surprised to see him, later on that day I did manage to confront him in his little house I went in to tell him I was leaving the organization and getting married. I noticed he had tears in his eyes, which was confusing. I slammed the door hard, and that night he got someone to wake me up in the middle of the night with a flashlight shining on me. He ran around the tennis courts after speaking with me. He ran heavy footed. It was confusing to see him running like this in the middle of the night and I remember feeling worried because he was not fit and he had not been well recently. He left an envelope for me with a couple of hundred dollars in it, which Ganga gave me the next morning.

I left and got married and lived in Toronto. I was a wreck and could not function in daily life. I could not tell my husband until about 20 years later. He never liked S.V.D. I thought I was the only one. It was awful to leave my spiritual family. I think I had a breakdown. I could not function. It was more awful than I knew how to feel at the time. I could not do yoga practice without disappearing – disassociating, but I didn't know it at the time.

Finding out just lately that there were so many victims, has blown the circuits, and I am kind of numb. I feel added shame. The shame of being an idiot. A used idiot. I think of the decades. The aloneness, leaving my chaotic abusive family, finding a new family and then having to leave that family. It has even had an effect on the way I raised my son. I have spoken to him about it, when I felt he was mature enough.

The way the board of directors treated Julie is just wrong. I am standing with her. It is because of her that I can now speak out. Initially I would just shake, and my teeth would chatter. Now I don't shake so much. I am learning to speak with power, but I am

exhausted. I feel like I am breaking an ages old taboo, by speaking the truth about sexual assault by a man who many held in such high esteem. I could not have spoken out until the #MeToo movement facilitated a 'listening' that was not available before. Knowing I was believed and being supported by Project SATYA and Dr. Josna Pankhania has given me the courage to speak the truth openly. Prior to this if I mentioned the sexual abuse to anyone, I noticed those people disappeared from my life. I regret, due to a lack of information, that I reached out to Swami Mahadevananda.

As a single mother with very little support, I wanted my son to experience the sense of family and community I had received from the organisation. Since I thought I was the only victim, I put that aside, and encouraged him to go, something I very much regret since, given the very toxic and abusive nature of the organisation. VishnuDevananda, the EBM and staff used me, made me doubt my own judgement, and turned my life into something shameful. I have now been liberated, but it is time the organisation acknowledges it, listens to the voices of the survivors.

Over time, few therapists have understood the nuances of spiritual life, and one who was a follower of Vishnu-Devananda (unbeknown to me) even told me to stop in the middle of telling my story of sexual abuse when she realized who I was referring to. I left her office upset and apologetic as if I had done something wrong, which I now know was not the case. Of the many therapists, I have seen, one diagnosed me with post-traumatic stress syndrome which I found to be helpful in understanding my high level of anxiety. This investigation has been a deeply healing process, and I have begun to feel trust and safety. I believe this is because Josna is a 'trauma informed' therapist, something that seemed to be missing in previous therapy, kind as some were. It has made the world of difference too that Josna understands the Yoga world.

The disclosures of the past months have been shocking to me, though now I feel empowered. Thank you to Josna Pankhania and to Carol Merchasin for believing the voices of survivors and thank you to the admins of Project SATYA for seeking to bring truth to the light of day where it belongs.

Personal narrative by Julie Salter

First, I want to acknowledge the women who worked as assistant secretaries to Swami Vishnu-devananda, and who died not being heard. I cannot speak for them, (nor do I know of their experiences), but I hope some of what I say on my own behalf, resonates with what they would have wanted said, whether or not they would have come forward at this time. In particular I acknowledge Irene Roy, the first swami Saradananda, and the woman known as swami Gokulananda, previously known as Gopi, who (left staff in the '70's); both died in their early '50s. But for the help I received from a couple of good friends, I have no doubt that I would have been dead in my '40's. There are probably many other women still living and in their 60s and 70s, who have been affected by past sexual and other abuse from Swami Vishnu-devananda, but who are unaware of this investigation. I would also like to acknowledge all other ex-staff who were treated as disposable, damaged humans, and who, if living, may feel they are unable to give testimonies.

I joined the Sivananda organization at the age of 20. I started working directly with Swami Vishnu-devananda in 1982. I was 25 and he was 54.

The experience of being staff, including being sexually used by swami Vishnu-d, and then the institutional betrayal from the board, completely affected all aspects of my life: physical, mental, financial, familial, social.

I gave the most vital years, both physically and mentally, of my life to the organization. I left, broken in health, financially destitute, psychologically very fragile, with no established support system.

I left in terror.

The daily regimen I lived in the organization as assistant to Swami V-d affected my health in the short term and in the long term. Not only was there NO regularity for fulfilling basic needs - but a culture existed to make it feel that fulfilling basic needs was somehow selfish, and that I was guilty of taking up that time (for example, I was once scolded for 5 hours straight, for mentioning I was tired)...Basic needs included eating, drinking, sleeping, proper clothing, and housing (for much of the time I did not have my own room).

Sleep was erratic, there was very little of it, and it was disturbed daily by the need to be available to work at all hours, since S.V-d did not have regular hours). Insomnia has remained with me throughout my life, with some extreme cycles. I literally heard my brain "snap" one day while working at his house. I have also strongly smelt fear during a scolding from Swami Vishnu-d. I interpret this as the burning out of the adrenals. As for food, for much of the time, while working directly for S. V-d, there were no regular meals. I ate when I could, where I could, what I could, often not proper meals at all, but snacks while working. In the short and long term my digestion has been compromised.

I answered telephone calls all hours of the day and night, and for years afterwards my body would do a little "jump" when the phone rang. I left whatever I was doing to answer. I worked seven days a week, working well into the night, with many broken nights. After leaving staff, I did not have the rhythm or understanding of natural "time off" cycles, either daily, or weekly: there was no day or two off for all those years with, and after, Swami Vishnu-d. Even years later I would agree to work through the weekends, with little compensation, and always overwhelmed.

My own “practice” over the years as staff eventually amounted to almost nil, except when able to go to a satsang. The logic being that since I was doing “Karma Yoga”, it was equal to “spiritual” work, as if it replaced other practices. Even when I left, the sense that I had to do certain practices, for example, meditation, pranayama, was a compelling internal message, as if I was doing something wrong if I didn’t. Even if, in fact, my needs at the time were contrary to what these practices as they were done gave me.

I had no idea of what my personal basic needs were. I didn’t even think I deserved help although desperately needing it, and I did not understand my own needs or wants for many years, nor did I take steps to address this. For so long, everything for me revolved around what Swami Vishnu-d wanted or needed. By the time I left staff, I still had no idea of what my own needs or desires were. My life for several years had revolved around; what does he need? who does he need me to call? what letter does he need me to write? For a long time, it seemed counter-intuitive to pick up the phone because I wanted to talk to someone or write to someone, to communicate on my own behalf.

About four months before I left the organization, I requested leave. I was so far gone I had only a mouse voice to use, and I shut up when leave was denied. I would not have asked unless the need was extreme, as I had overridden my inner guidance system for so long. I was out of touch with normal human needs, unable to take, or ask for, proper “time out” until almost too late. This, I have learned, is quite common among caregivers, and many become extremely sick and even die before the care receiver. Me? Have needs? Food? (after swami V.d. died I was often too exhausted to go to regular camp meals, and subsisted for long periods on oats). Sleep? How to even do that? How to talk about any of this?

The culture of the organization was an autocratic and misogynistic power structure. I entered the organization with the assumption of basic goodness and truth, and left broken, with breach of trust and the consequences of having lived a lie for so many years. I had denied my own aliveness, and truth.

Central to the culture of the organization was obedience to the teacher. We were told of the spiritual darkness, the negative consequences of breaking with teacher. There were messages regarding the teacher (the guru in a general sense; even though swami V.d said he was not a guru, yet obedience was the rule; and the organization was regarded as an extension of him): do not look at him as human, see divinity; teacher must know best. The consequence was an overriding of inner perceptual cues, agency and critical thinking. Self-negative judgement became extreme. If I didn’t do certain things, I felt I was morally compromised. If I left staff, it was because I wasn’t pure enough or good enough. A failure, even if dying. If I didn’t maintain his secrecy, I have failed him.

My role brought jealousy - from the teachers, and from staff who were jealous of the idea of my proximity to the power. And distorted behaviours played out as a result. This included being hit by the teacher, being accused of affairs when there were none. From other staff, all sorts of comments (for example, one staff making it clear she wanted to be the one to travel with him. I made that possible when I broke my leg).

There was a celebration of celibacy, and a demeaning of family life, the latter regarded as the lesser path designed for those who were not able to control their desires. Complete control of desire was a virtue. In order to stay in the organization in those days, it was expected that one would go the sannyas route. And yet, when I broke the sannyas’ vow of celibacy and told Swami V-d I had done so and was leaving staff, that was the trigger that

had me established as his secretary and given work at his house. And the sexual predation followed. This entailed lying, not necessarily verbally but by presenting myself and the other (Swami Vishnu-d), as something we were not. I still wore the colours of a sannyas. I felt that the whole of my life had become a lie. (In psychological parlance, I would probably have been experiencing dissociation.)

For years after the death of Swami Vishnu-d, I was left with tremendous guilt, shame, and fear, and although in need of intimacy and relationship, including sexual, the unadmitted false life I had led made that very difficult. Maintaining the secrecy of the sexual life of Swami Vishnu-d coloured all relationships, both professional and intimate friends and partner.

In the long term, when I left staff my throat was extremely tight, choking on what I couldn't speak about, the secret that seemed to overwhelm my thoughts.

In fact, there was a confusion of role. I was one person in the role of student, mother, an object for sex (definitely not a partnership), nurse (injections, later dialysis etc.), servant and secretary. This was difficult to navigate and contributed to deep exhaustion. The role of caretaker, seven days a week, unbroken for years, which included attending to his personal needs and including medical issues of diabetes, and eventually stroke, kidney failure necessitating dialysis, and multiple injuries from two car accidents, including punctured lung and broken neck, while continuing secretarial and other roles and travelling, was debilitating in the extreme.

There was a culture of financial dependence. Staff did not get paid and in those days, we did not have personal bank accounts or credit cards. When I came to Canada from Australia (after saying that I was leaving staff), I did not have a ticket back; there was now a physical as well as a psychological distance from my family, and I felt too ashamed to ask them for help. When I finally did leave staff, I had no bank account, no savings, no pension, no easily marketable skills.

For the first three years after departure, I attempted to regain some basic level of health and was not in a position to work. Later, still compromised physically but in need of income, I was offered some "yoga" classes and accepted, although I was still cynical of the "yoga world" generally and also did not have the standard of skills that I considered necessary. I explored pedagogical models in the yoga field as I tried to find a meaningful way in for me; I continued to study different aspects relating to sound practice; as well as yoga workshops, I attended classes in for example other movement modalities such as feldenkrais, body-mind centering.

I have not been in a position to buy a house, having no down-payment and being self-employed, with an income of the working poor. I do not have a car.

Another aspect of the organization's life and my role in particular, was Isolation - the idea that self-realisation is a goal, that it is to be done alone. As staff in those days, it was almost virtuous not to be connecting with family and to have no real bonds of friendship. This was particularly discouraged but would not have been possible anyway as Swami Vishnu-d's assistant.

The Ideal of dispassion was wrongly equated with emotionlessness and regarded as a virtue. This easily translated in the world of the ashram into dissociation from physical and psychological needs, and from one's centre. "Selfless service" was a virtue and was equated with obedience, and with having no insurance or income.

The celebration of silence (mauna), and of “ego-lessness”, self-abnegation: these teachings contributed to the confusion, and idea of silence was mis-used to discourage any talk of one’s own difficulties including emotional, or of the human frailties of the teacher.

I became unable to leave staff, not knowing how to do so anymore. It took the help of a couple of people in whom I recognized friendship, to be able to do so. When I finally did leave, I was in a state of complete terror, my physical health broken, and financially with nothing. I mentioned this to the facilitator in the 2006 meeting, when he asked me how I felt when I left. I would add that I had a complete mental and physical “breakdown”, my nervous system in a constant state of hypervigilance.

It has only recently started to re-set towards a calmer state, though it is easily thrown out (for example, posting on FB. Also, I was unable to read for more than a page or so at a time, even up until the last four or so years).

My level of energy frequently collapses, and I do not know what it is to NOT be fatigued. Other physical manifestations at the time of leaving staff, include heart palpitations with convulsions, extreme insomnia, peeing several times in the hour (severe urinary infection), digestive issues such as indigestion, and alternating between constipation and diarrhea, constant cough,...When I talked, I spoke *rapidly*, breathlessly. I have been deeply depressed. For the first three years, I could not have contemplated travelling any significant distance, and when I finally did, it was extremely unsettling. My communication with family at the time was severely limited, and I had no real friendship skills, as I didn’t feel I had anything to give.

I am grateful to friends reaching in to keep me alive and I am here only because of their efforts. A new friend who lived locally, (a body worker who had been hired to work with guests and occasionally staff) took a risk to reach in, in an attempt to pull me out of the inner cavern. When I left staff, she helped me with body work and walked and talked with me; she, her husband and children found for me a cheap apartment nearby and initially watched out and looked after me, making sure I ate, walked, and at least minimally socialized. A second new friend came, and over time in addition to friendship, gave hundreds of acupuncture treatments to help me to come to some semblance of stability.

It is, in fact, only because of the power of friendship outside the organization, that I was able to leave it.

Eventually, I had to touch deep rage, and other emotions that had been blocked for so long, and I needed help to process.

There was a notable lack of social participation in the greater community, “like straightening the curly tail of a dog”. There was no interaction with the community around, no learning the local language (French); I was not voting.

Rootless: “the Self is Supportless” was also part of the philosophy. There was travelling and the exhortation not to be attached to people or place. Afterwards when I left, I experienced long term instability, but this was also from a lack of health and income. I needed deep roots somewhere, including physical roots to place - gardening etc., as I had insufficient internal stability.

After three years in a nearby village and some months housesitting in the countryside, I was invited to visit, and then moved to a city and lived in rented rooms in six places in as

many years before settling in the present apartment with my partner in 2009. I keep fairly isolated. My capacity to interact with people was initially poor; nowadays I still need to manage my few social interactions, as I tire very easily. I am physically removed from family, though we have good connections and communicate much more frequently thanks to virtual tools.

The institutional betrayal of the board members was at very least as harmful as the actions of Swami V-d. There were intense power games between EBMs, and a lack of support or empathy for me when my frailty was obvious. What went on destroyed any possibility for normal human relationships. I experienced this to the point of almost dying, and internally debating whether I would do what I subjectively felt was wanted, that I lie down and die.

Their continued desire to silence me, and to negate my experiences and life itself when I was fragile, was harmful in the extreme. As was the subjective realization that the people who were supposed to be the supportive community did not care, and in fact probably desired my silence, if not my demise, as I knew too much. They did not speak openly of what they knew, and even actively denied it in public. They shunned me and presented my contribution to the organization for less than it was.

You ask me, Josna, what was it that kept me going all those years. What was it that helped me to get up each morning? I was depressed; I lived with shame, guilt and fear. Yet it is true, I still discovered I had the will to live. I wanted to truly re-connect with others, and with the natural environment around. Perhaps I still had a belief that I could make a difference to myself and to others. Truth, too, helped me to get up each day. Truth with kindness was and is important to me. I tried to speak out before I left but I was burnt out and shut down. Yet I kept going, I wanted to learn more, understand more, find a way that could resolve this terror and conflict within me and in the organization, even as I attempted to re-discover what gave me a sense of aliveness. I wanted to find a way within the organization at first, to make necessary changes that could bring healing for all. At first, I wanted to do this privately with senior staff but the EBM shut me out over and over again.

At one point after #MeToo, one of the board actually offered me a job. He said that they would pay me if I transcribed S V-d's talks. I was struggling in a rental property, but I am glad that I knew I could not accept. It would have been a way for them to lock me in servitude once again. And though I have struggled greatly with my health and have often come so close to dying, through sheer nervous exhaustion, the spark that has kept me going is the spark of truth. Even though the EBM may quietly wish that I would just disappear, I cannot, and I will not. For to do so, would be to deny my lived experience. They may if they wish, deny our shared experience of what was wrong and what we have seen that was not right, but I cannot, and will not.

The EBM have not been able to say to me that they saw, they know, they believe. But now, many others have said this to me. People in the SATYA community have listened and have said they believe me. They stand with me. They stand with all the others who have been abused and harmed. And while the EBM may choose to do Kali Puja in the hope of getting rid of all this "negativity" coming from people who question them and their organization, I know that there are now many in the community who are carving new pathways forward. They will not be silenced.

I have been asked how I would like to mark the anniversary of my “coming out” this December. What comes to mind immediately is gratitude. Deepest gratitude, to those who have listened, and aligned with truth, even while for many, they have simultaneously been experiencing deep grief and uncertainty.

I want to express gratitude personally to Matthew Remski, who first deeply listened at the other end of the phone, with immense kindness and compassion, and who gave freely of so much of his time. Matthew was online when I first posted and staved off negative comments as they came fast and furious. When an apologist published a lengthy post that left me too shaky to type, Matthew asked my permission to reply. I am immensely grateful.

To Pam and Lucille and all the brave women and men who have spoken out about the abuses they suffered in the ISYVC, even while quaking inside. Words are insufficient. To the admins of the Project SATYA group- Antonia Abu Matar, Jens Augspurger and Angela Gollat, who have worked so hard maintaining the integrity of the group and have consistently and steadfastly provided support; and to all the participants in Project SATYA who have chosen to stand together, side by side, aligning with Truth. And to those outside of Project SATYA who gave such wonderful support. I no longer feel alone.

To the investigative team, Carol Merchasin and Josna Pankhania, and all the professionalism and tenacity they have applied to bring the truth to light. And to all those who have shared the power of real friendship over the years. Thankyou.

I would like it (the anniversary) to be a celebration. A celebration of the spirit that I have witnessed in the community of SATYA and beyond: the spirit of the heart of real kindness, of satya with ahimsa. The spirit of intelligence and creativity. I am heartened by the many groups of yogis that are now emerging across the world, daring to move towards uncharted territory. Finding grounded wisdom within and together, mindful of the many deceptions that they have had to encounter or witnessed in this organization. This gives me hope. Though I still struggle with my health, I now feel hope in my heart.

Postscript and Reflections
on narratives with allegations against Vishnu-devananda

by Dr Josna Pankhania

The significant theme that emerged through the allegations in the testimonies survivors Paddy, Lucille, Pamela and Julie is that of the grooming process. Grooming is the process in which the perpetrator is preparing victims for future abuse, testing and pushing their boundaries. The other theme that emerged through the testimonies is the survivors' vulnerability. Vishnu-devananda, was a swami, a guru, a disciple of Swami Sivananda and founder of The International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres Organisation. These four survivors were only in their twenties or younger when they met Vishnu-devananda, who was then about the age of their fathers. The Sivananda organisation was and still is an international community. It considers itself the most authentic yoga institution in the world and draws people from around the globe looking for peace, health and well-being, or a sense of belonging. Some of them, like Julie, were far away from their normal support structures, and others, like Lucille and Pamela had escaped previous abusive situations. All looked up to the guru, surrendering unconditionally to his authority. He was like a god figure. Such was the context of the organisation.

Paddy

Paddy was just eighteen years old when she reported she became a target of Vishnu-devananda's grooming. Although she had witnessed his tyrannical behaviour towards others, she did not question it because she thought that the 'guru knew best'. She did not see herself as a sexual abuse victim at the time but has documented a whole process which she now recognises as sexually motivated grooming.

She tells us that Vishnu-devananda, who was the same age as her father, began by praising her, touching her, and tickling her. She notes that this only happened when they were alone. She experienced guilt at thinking his behaviour was inappropriate, and the best she could do at the time was to remove herself from the situation, which she did assiduously. She says that his attentions escalated, calling her to his bedroom, where he lay half clothed, which felt like a ruse. Later he insisted she sit on his lap and he began to tickle her and kiss her first on the neck and then on the mouth. She ran, face burning and hid herself away.

The pure image of the guru was so powerfully portrayed as someone who could do no wrong, that she still questioned her own understanding of the situation. So much so that even after the last incident, when she fled, she still accepted his offer to preside over her wedding—something she now deeply regrets. For her, there was no one above him to go to, and she felt at that time that she had little to report anyway. Her only recourse was to avoid him. She states that she is now left with the sombre realisation that Vishnu-devananda was an opportunistic serial abuser. She is thankful that she was able to get away when she did.

Lucille

Lucille was seventeen years old when she joined this organisation, and it was not long after that she became staff at Val-Morin. Her mother struggled with alcohol addiction and Lucille was trying to come to terms with the death of her father. She had already run away from a problematic home. Vishnu-devananda was 47 years old when she met him, and she was immediately drawn to him as a 'spiritual father' who she thought could lead her to the enlightenment she sought. Yoga had met all her needs and she was happy. She had witnessed Vishnu-devananda in a sexual encounter with another member of staff, but blocked this from her consciousness as she wanted nothing to cloud her view of the community. Vishnu-devananda's first and second sexual encounters with Lucille involved oral sex, which she thought was tantra yoga. Tantra yoga, some believe, works on bodily energy to enhance spiritual growth and well-being. By the third encounter she was thoroughly disillusioned and her view of the guru changed forever.

Reflecting on her experience, its impact on her, and how much she had become dependent on the organisation mentally, emotionally, financially and spiritually, she says that she naively idealised oral sex as tantra yoga. Her wish to uphold her guru in a venerated, idealised position, and hold onto her newfound family, was a result of this dependence. Having to come to terms with seeing the guru in a different light was devastating for her. She says that she was 'fooled' into worshipping the guru. As for the organisation, she now sees very clearly that it is a cult, and she surrendered herself wholeheartedly to it, mentally and emotionally. To free herself from it was difficult and took a long time.

Pamela

Pamela was 20 years of age, came from an abusive and chaotic family, and was searching for a spiritual dimension to her life when she was introduced to yoga through a 'fasting clinic'. She experienced overwhelming love, and was convinced it was what she had been looking for. Giving up all material things, nice clothes, make-up, and fancy shoes, she joined the Sivananda Yoga organisation. When she first met Vishnu-devananda, he was immediately taken with her. But, although she respected him, she did not feel particularly drawn to him. At that time, Pamela was 21 and he was 52. She was invited to give him a massage, and she was honoured to be asked. Then, during the final relaxation, after what she experienced as a deep practice together, she was in a profoundly relaxed state. In that state, she reports, that he raped her. When she held him off, concerned about becoming pregnant, he assured her she would not. So powerful was his image, that she truly believed that he could control that. And although she felt repulsion, the act continued. Embarrassed, disgusted, and ashamed for feeling this way, she 'left her body' (disassociation). The embarrassment continued when he took her for a walk, acting rather like a teenager out with his girlfriend. Her time in the organisation, however, had rendered her sense of self almost negligible. She felt 'invisible'. She worried if she was at fault. Eventually leaving the organisation, she has had to deal with the impact of the abuse for many years, resulting in many hours in therapy. Few of these therapists understood the spiritual life context, and one therapist

even told her to stop her description of sexual abuse by Vishnu-devananda. This therapist then turned out to be a follower of his. Only one therapist was able to identify post-traumatic stress syndrome, which finally offered her an explanation for her high levels of stress. Pamela continues to be impacted by the abuse and revisiting her past has shaken her to the core. The response of the EBM has shocked her and severely added to her trauma but finding out that she is not alone has given her the power to speak out.

Julie

Julie was 20 years old when she joined the ISYVC organisation. During her years there, she worked slavishly, doing long days, seven days a week with no regard given for basic needs, such as her sleep, which was constantly interrupted. The culture of the organisation was misogynistic and autocratic, and not, as she had believed, based on goodness and truth. At the core was total obedience to the guru, who was seen as divine, and thought to always know best. If she questioned or asked for anything, it was she who was lacking. She was then made to feel not pure enough, or not good enough. Although celibacy was celebrated, she states that when she went to Vishnu-devananda's house to work, then aged 25, and he 54, the sexual predation began. She felt her life became a lie, and that maintaining Vishnu-devananda's secret, coloured all her relationships, even after he had died. She was left with shame, guilt, and fear, unable to form wholesome relationships. She had become student, mother, sex-object, nurse, servant and secretary to him. Her caretaker role involved attending to all his personal needs, medical issues around diabetes, stroke, kidney failure, injuries from accidents (punctured lung, broken neck). When she later asked for temporary leave, she was refused, and had no energy to argue the point. Financially dependent, it was difficult to leave the organisation permanently and she had also reached the point where she did not know how to. Isolation had become a feature of her existence, having been encouraged to break family bonds and bonds of friendship which would supposedly lead to a state of self-realisation. Dispassion, wrongly interpreted as emotionlessness, was considered a virtue in this organisation, and entailed ignoring her physical and psychological needs. The organisation's expectations of silence, 'ego-lessness' and self-abnegation meant that there was no avenue open to talk to anyone. When she did finally leave with the help of friends, she left in terror, physically broken, and with nothing. She has never been able to buy a house, does not own a car, and her health has been compromised ever since. The refusal of the EBM to hear her, and their attempts to deny her experience have been harmful. The sense of betrayal she experiences is profound. Her attempts to find a way for the organisation to implement change, allowing healing to take place, have only been met with rejection.

Personal Narratives
(allegations of sexual abuse and other types of abuse)

The following are the personal narratives written by the survivors in their own words. They describe sexual abuse and other types of abuse.

Some of the narratives are several pages long, and each narrative will start on a new page. At the end of this section follows a postscript with my reflections. The order of the narratives is non-indicative and not chronological. Some survivors wished to include their name, whilst all other narratives have been anonymised.

Please note that each survivor chose to include what they found most important or healing to write about. These narratives did not form the basis of the legal investigation run by Carol Merchasin but were part of a separate process. To learn more about the process through which the personal narratives emerged, please revisit the methodology section.

Survivor I

July 3, 1990

Extracts from the report on the attack I suffered at the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Retreat in Paradise Island, Bahamas, in 1990.

I was in a room in almost total darkness and I was the only occupant. I had been moved there two days earlier. It was the night of Saturday to Sunday, June 3rd, between 1 a.m. and 2 a.m.

I woke up startled and saw the shadow of a man half leaning on my bed.

I climbed up to a sitting position and got the first punch to the bottom of the face that threw me brutally backwards.

I screamed but the blows continued. As I kept screaming, he put the pillow against my face to suffocate me. I lost consciousness. When I come to, I realized that I was dying which gave me extra energy and I managed to move the pillows. I heard the assailant mumble something unintelligible and recognized the Yoga teacher's voice. Then, the figure fled in silence, as someone who knew the place well.

The staff consists of four people: the Centre Manager who is also a cook and he has a young daughter, the Swami, the yoga teacher who is also a cook and the female employee.

I turned on the light and saw my nightgown bloodied. I went to the mirror and saw my face full of blood. I yelled, "help" several times. Someone approached. It was L (guest) and he asked, "What happened?". I replied, "Someone tried to kill me", while crying profusely. L(guest) came in.

Then R (employee), the woman employed by the Retreat, came in. I told her what happened and calmed down a bit. Then I saw the Yoga teacher in the frame of the door and I yelled, pointing at him, totally terrified, "No, no, no.....". J (guest) went to talk to him and he left. (He has a hut room quite far from mine and I wondered how he could have heard my voice if he slept there. No one else in this area was awakened. Afterwards, the Centre Manager arrived. Then he got the Swami.

The Swami and Centre Manager ordered the others to leave my room. Then they questioned me. I told the story. The Centre Manager said at one point that a similar event had occurred the previous summer. The Swami was impassive but the Centre Manager looked at me with great sympathy and said, "you are a strong woman".

Following the night of the attack:

I told the Centre Manager and Swami that they should call the police. They said they were in a third world country and that the police there were not doing that kind of investigation. The Swami asks me to listen to my heart to say whether or not I actually want to make a statement to the police. Out of fear for my personal safety and to avoid putting a possible innocent man in prison, I submitted. But I repeated to them that "deep, deep in my heart, I am convinced 99% that it was the yoga teacher."

As I continued to bleed, they decided to ask a nurse guest to examine the inside of my mouth. They told her that I had an "accident". She recommends going to the hospital to have stitches.

I went back to my room but asked that someone stay with me. R (employee) was chosen. Swami said he had telephoned Val-Morin (where the general directorate for the Retreat center in Bahamas is located) and was told to keep it secret. The Centre Manager told me to repeat to the doctor "that I got involved in an argument ... and that it is personal."

I wanted a man to accompany me to the hospital, J (guest) or the Centre Manager, but he decided that it would be R (employee). It was the Swami that drove the boat.

R (employee) and I went to the hospital alone and the swami remained in his boat. He asked us to call him when we were ready to come back. Upon registration, R(employee) firmly stated that the Retreat will pay all the fees in cash.

In the surgery room, the doctor questioned me, and I answered obediently "I got involved in an argument and that is personal." Again, I was terrified, and I did not want to provoke discontent on the part of R (employee) and others.

The doctor was sceptical and tried to make me talk more, repeating, "that was a bad punch.... that was a very bad punch." I kept saying, 'that is personal'. He did a few stitches on the outside and several on the inside. He told me I have a tear that runs through the tissue. I agreed to get a shot and take pain pills.

After it's all over, R (employee) took me back to the lobby where I was alone in the darkness, trembling and frightened at the slightest sound. She returned to the doctor, to discuss what ??? or buy his silence??? Then she came back to call the Swami but the phonenumber is broken. We had to take a taxi, and I manage to convince her to ask the driver to accompany us on the beach. The driver accepted reluctantly.

We went to see the Swami, and he asked me a lot of questions about my life and I interpreted it as kindness. (Looking back, I think he conducted an investigation to find out my life, my work and how I could talk or not talk about events back in Canada). At one point, I tell him that after reflection I preferred to report to the police, because if a similar or worse event happened in a few months or the following summer, "how would you feel and how I would feel".

At the end of the meeting he told me that if I spoke, I would be responsible for the closure of the Centre and that, in addition, I would lose my case, because they could afford lawyers more competent and effective than I could afford.

Around 5:30 a.m., it was time to prepare for meditation. I had to go back to my room and we asked to J (guest) to stay with me. At 8:00 a.m., it was the asana session on the platform that I can see from my room. The professor is none other than the yoga teacher. I was stunned.

Half an hour before the time to leave for the airport, the Swami came to my room. He said he had contacted Sivananda's international *office in Val Morin* and was advised to notify the police, but that time was running out for them to come or for me to go to the station. He said that he decided to record my testimony and then forward it to the police. We went into a room, alone with the Swami, I recounted my version of the events, he records.

J (guest) accompanied me to the airport until I got on the plane. He had already spent a month in Val Morin. He told me that he did not believe that my statement would be reported to the police and that the purpose of the recording was to make me believe in their innocence.

When I arrived at the airport, the airfare agent said that I should have confirmed my ticket, 48 hours before departure, there was no room left on the plane. After hesitating and consulting with J(guest), I finally told the officer that I had been the victim of an attack and that I could not spend another night in the Bahamas (not to mention the Retreat). I was given a first-class seat and let into the first flight with J(guest) to accompany me to my seat. As I indicated that I could not eat, I was regularly served milk and Evian water. In Toronto, an officer took care of my luggage, my papers and customs. Then I was the first to get on the plane again and I was re-installed in a first-class seat.

At the airport of my city of residence, I refused their help in an attempt to get me back on track. But I was terrified. At home, I phoned a doctor friend who immediately came to my rescue. For three days, friends had to stay close to me all the time, and for a week I needed someone to spend the night in the house.

On Monday, June 4, I went to see my family doctor and had an X-ray of my head and neck. I had no broken or cracked bones, but the infection got into my wound. I took antibiotics for ten days. I immediately had intensive therapy, twice a week to try to get over this trauma. On the fourth day of my return to my city of residence, a friend took pictures of my swollen face. I had to turn down contracts for the first two weeks.

After a month, I felt calmer though I feared any potentially violent or aggressive situation, and I still feel the need to keep a light on at night. I was deeply depressed for two days (during the third week) after receiving the pictures taken in the Bahamas and wondered if I would dare to travel alone again, especially in the third world. I feel emotionally unable to meditate and do yoga exercises because too much fear comes to the surface.

I also feel pretty scared in writing this report and especially the consequences it may have.

I feel threatened by a possible violent reaction from the Yoga teacher or other Sivananda authorities. I still have a lump on the inside of my left cheek and another bump on my chin that remains insensitive to touch. I still sometimes have ear pain due to the fact that my jaw was pressed under the shock of the blows.

On June 4, I contacted a friend from Canadian External Affairs to discuss my case. He suggested that I reflect on my ability to respond to the fact that if Interpol took matters into their own hands, I would have my name on the front page of the Canadian newspapers. I would be blackmailed and the Sivananda Group would retaliate, and it has much more money than I do and the means to prove everything it would want, especially since I do not have valid evidence in my possession. I therefore decided to keep my mouth shut for now.

Since June 3, no one from the Sivananda group has contacted me and I have not undertaken anything.

I have produced a detailed report (*this one*) to provide sufficient evidence to enable that an investigation be carried out on the basis of this document.

November 8, 2000

I kept this trauma to myself, which triggered my fibromyalgia (very severe pain and exhaustion impairing my ability to work),

For a little over a year I have been in therapy (group of 12, with occupational therapist, social worker, psychologist and physiotherapist) at a Rehabilitation Centre. It became clear that the attack is the trigger for my fibromyalgia.

I also began to participate in a growth group in September to learn how to mourn my health. It appears that I must heal myself from this attack, either by acting at the level of a prosecution, and, if it is impossible, by forgiving.

September 25, 2020

In conclusion

The post-traumatic shock (with my fearful silence) has severely handicapped all aspects of my life, especially during the 20 years that followed, and it still affects me. Loss of work, income, reputation, great respect from colleagues, many friends, physical abilities (until almost becoming a vegetable for two years), then develop extreme pain that even sometimes drugs could not relieve and almost total exhaustion. I also became hyper-vigilant, aggressive against anything that could hurt me, belittle myself, etc.

Since my return to my native village, in the countryside, an idyllic region located between the sea and the mountains, to make a large vegetable garden, etc. my health has gradually improved.

My participation in the SATYA investigation 2020

When I learned, through an article published in Le Devoir, that a community-based investigation was launched against the abuses and crimes committed at the Sivananda yoga centres, and above all that I could contribute to it, my whole being underwent shock. I kept telling myself "I'm no longer alone trying to survive." For thirty years, because of threats and blackmail, I remained silent about the crime that I suffered and still suffer from the effects of a tremendous post-traumatic shock.

I cried like I never thought I could. Fortunately, friends have surrounded me with their great and very warm friendship. Later, in a two-hour Zoom interview, Josna Pankhania and Carol Merchasin helped me to fully understand, and to understand myself better in relation to the hell I suffered under the clutches of Sivananda's rulers.

In the days that followed, I realized that the oppression I felt was gone, as if my chest had freed from a large rock that was clutching it during the last 30 years. Since then, I really feel relieved and released from the reactions of anger and fear in the face of possible abuse that lingered in my being. Now I can be spontaneously and naturally happy and a lot softer in my life. As I was, thirty years ago.

But every time that I have to look back on this painful trauma, it still makes me sick, physically and emotionally. But I know it is temporary and essential to my full long-term recovery. My examination of my story with Josna has *caused me extreme emotional reactions. I have felt like an inner explosion of liberation. I have felt understood, reassured, and supported. It has made me feel much better.*

Survivor II

I was on staff from October 1983 until February 1988.

It was on Sunday, March 29, that I read Matthew Remski's writing about Julie Salter (who I knew as Swami Kartikeya). Every several months I Google search "Sivananda" for news about the Sivananda people and happenings. I was shocked to read of Swami Vishnudevanda's sexual abuse of Julie. And I am still shocked. Not that I don't believe Julie. I do. But that there was no indication that the abuse was happening while I was on staff. I do know that Swami Vishnu was demanding of her. I witnessed at the New York Center and in the Camp in Val Morin, Canada. Also, Julie would call the NY Center with directives from Swami Vishnu. Swami Vishnu travelled a lot. There was Julie with him to service him. Julie was totally at Swami Vishnu's service. I was inspired to see how Julie served Swami Vishnu and tried to do the same for swami who was the director of the NY Center. If Swami Kartikeya can take Swami Vishnu's verbal lashings, so could do the same.

I am a little ahead of myself, but I want to say how grateful I am for Julie to come forward and make know what Swami Vishnu did to her. And I feel sorrow for Julie. Much sorrow. She was such a good person. I always wondered what happened to her. Please convey my admiration and support to Julie.

Here goes my story.

I took a beginner's course in Washington, D.C. in the fall 1982 at the Sivananda Center and as that saying goes, "got hooked." I attended a talk by Swami Vishnu at the Washington, DC Center. I don't remember my response as being anything unusual as if he captivated me. I continued to take yoga asana classes at the Center.

I was so enthused about learning yoga and meditation that I almost put aside my studies to study yoga exclusively. Also, at that time the movie about Gandhi was in the theatres. That, too, influenced me. I took mantra initiation and I practiced meditation and yoga daily. At last, I had taken a course in yoga and felt I had found the basis for my life. I put aside my Christianity for yoga which I saw to be based on Hinduism. To this day, I still try to figure out my decisions at that time.

I continued my yoga practice. In fact, I probably spent more time reading Swami Sivananda's books than studying for my master's. I had a desire to travel to India. I listened to Indian music at the city library.

Much to the dismay of my parents, I did join the staff at the Paradise Island Sivananda Retreat.. Mom and Dad did not understand what I was doing. I had my idealistic reasons which did not make sense to them. So I packed a few suitcases, bringing a tent as suggested, and flew to Nassau.

All was well until sometime during the winter. I moved into a tent to make room for guests. It was a cold December 1982. My first challenge as a staff member was not with the work. There was a lot of work with the many guests who were staying there. But I developed a cough from the cold and dampness. I began to cough more and more until it became constant. I was told to drink hot water with lemon and honey. I did so but the cough persisted. Finally, I was taken to a clinic in Nassau. I was given an x-ray and told that I had bronchitis. I was given medication and the condition eventually cleared up.

Since that bronchitis (which I think was pneumonia), I have been susceptible to bronchitis. I usually have infection at least once a year. This was my first indication that something was wrong with what I was doing. By wrong, I mean no health coverage (health insurance). Staff members were on their own, so to speak. This is negligence, I believe, to not ensure that volunteers will be cared for in all aspects of their life. I could have been easily asked to leave staff and get medical care. I believe this lack of concern for a volunteer's well-being be it psychological or physical health is an abuse. When I joined staff, I arrived and was put to work the next day. Maybe I did sign a waiver that if I left, I could not sue them for wages for the work I did. But there was no discussion about if I got sick.

Fast forward to my staff years at the New York Center. February 1984 until the fall of 1987. In July 1985, I had appendicitis. I think it was around July 4. My appendix bursts and I was rushed by a friend of the Center to the emergency room at Bellevue Hospital. My condition was so critical that I was near death. A special surgeon had to be called to the hospital. I spent 2 to 3 weeks in the hospital. After my return to the Center, the swami director of the Center told me that I would need to apply for government assistance to pay for the hospital bill. I felt abandoned.

I saw a lot of money spent during my time on the Sivananda staff. Much of it went to Swami Vishnu. Much went to publications such as the Yoga Life magazine. When it came to paying for my medical expenses, the organization would not spend the money. It was like, you work for the organization but do not expect us to pay health expenses.

Staff in the Sivananda organization are not paid a salary. Health coverage was not discussed with me when I joined the staff. I believe there was a negligence at the time I was on staff of not assuring staff that they would be cared for should medical needs come up. A staff member is making a commitment (at the time) to serve the organization full-time. I believe it is the responsibility of the organization to meet their medical needs and expenses. After my appendectomy, I realized the insecurity of being on staff. I could be asked to leave at any time. It was a humiliation for me to have to apply for government assistance for my medical expenses after my appendectomy. It was as if I was homeless and poor. The Sivananda organization, to me, was passing their responsibility off to the government. That was negligence and a lack of commitment to care for its staff members. Things might be different today for staff members or the organization. But back then, someone giving of themselves to the organization could be "put on the street" at any time.

And it happened to me. The director of the Sivananda Yoga Center in New York had been with Swami Vishnu for many years. As I soon found out when I came to help at the NY Center, the swami had anger issues. I was yelled at and belittled in front of others. On one occasion, I was told to get out of the Center. "Get out! Get out!" the director screamed. There was no disagreeing with the director.

In my years at the Center (February 1984 until fall 1987) there was always a tension. When would the swami blow up next? It seems there was always a money issue. How to make more money by offering more yoga classes. At that time, the Center was one of the few yoga centers in New York City. Our introductory six-week course was usually full with 20 persons. I believe they paid \$20 for the course. I usually taught three yoga classes a day in addition to my work (mostly cleaning). I also took care of the financial books.

There was no mentoring by the swami director. That is, a concern for how I was doing. Never do I remember having a conversation and being asked how I was doing. It was like "I am in charge and you do what I tell you."

The episodes of the swami's verbal abuse still affect me today. I ask myself why I allowed myself to be abused. I think it had something to do with accepting it as part of the process of spiritual growth. I know it sounds stupid, but that was my thinking at the time. I was learning from Swami Vishnu's disciple was my thinking. The swami was yelling at me for my own good. I am embarrassed today for having that kind of reasoning. It was abuse that I took and for which I should have stood up to. But for me to stand up to it would have been leaving the false security I had of being on staff. I did not want to face an unknown future. Eventually, when I left the Sivananda organization in February 1988, I was willing to face the future thanks to the support of my parents and sister.

I confronted the swami in a letter several years ago. I wrote of how the abuse affected me. I got an apology. I left it at that.

There was a point when I had enough of the swami director of the NY Center and left the Center to go to Val Morin to speak to Swami Vishnu. I left the Center telling one staffer where I was going. I got on a bus to Val Morin. I walked some three miles from the bus stop to the Yoga Camp. I remember it was winter. I do not remember speaking with Swami Vishnu. But he knew why I was there. I believe he understood my situation. I was transferred to the Yoga Ranch. And more abuse.

I am thankful for this opportunity to share my experience in the Sivananda organization. The time on staff had its ups and downs. The positive is the many friendships that I had with staffers and students. Unfortunately, I have lost contact with those whom I was on staff with. I do keep in touch with two students who were wonderful in their support during my time at the NY Center. They knew what I was going through.

In 1984, the NY Center was one of the few in the city. The NY Center was primitive. The bathroom downstairs which the students used was probably three feet wide by five feet length. There was a toilet, and sink, and no ventilation. None. I cleaned the bathroom every morning. The dressing rooms were not secure, so students had to bring valuables (purses, wallets) to class. The classrooms were long but narrow. We packed as many students as possible into the room because it meant more money. The floors were carpeted. Students laid on bedsheets. Yes, bedsheets. No personal yoga mats then. The bedsheets were used for two classes back to back. So if students in the first class perspired onto the bedsheets, the students in the next class laid in that person's perspiration (sweat). Being carpeted floors, so the perspiration went through the bedsheet and into the carpet (where it dried). We did shampoo the carpet once a year. I think we washed the sheets twice a week. Another one of my jobs. There were no exhaust fans in the classrooms, just open windows during summer. The rooms would stink with odor after every class, winter or summer. We served supper after the 6 p.m. class. Each class was an hour and a half long. The kitchen was downstairs near the dressing rooms. It was roach infested. If you went down in the night and turned on the lights, you would see roaches all over the counters, floor, and in the sink. As soon as you turned on the lights, they would scatter to the cracks and crevices in the kitchen. We did our own extermination by setting off roach "bombs" maybe twice a year. They did not work. Being a nonprofit organization, we did not have public inspections. The money that students gave for classes and meals were considered donations. Little money was spent on the Center. Income from the

residents was used to pay the \$1,200 monthly mortgage. Other income usually went to support the Yoga Ranch in upstate New York or to the Camp in Canada. Staffers slept on the floor in rooms, some of which were also classrooms.

I write about the condition of the Center to show how little money was spent on making the Center better. From what I remember, Swami Vishnu kept a tight rein on money. He wanted to know how much money the NY Center had available. In hindsight, I believe Swami Vishnu would not have allowed money to be spent on the Center. Actually, there was little money even available to be spent on maintenance. Whatever might have been done would have had to come from a donation for the specific purpose of a renovation project.

I am still shocked by Vishnudevananda's abuse. And I am ever so grateful for Julie coming forward. I am strengthened by other staff members coming forward with their experiences in the Sivananda organization.

Survivor III

In 2015, I went from Australia to New York Sivananda Yoga Ranch for a yoga teacher training course. I had attended Sivananda Yoga Centres in India and enjoyed this form of yoga. I had just finished my undergraduate studies and decided to take a break and explore other countries, Japan, USA... I was fortunate to have a good job and my employers were supportive.

The Yoga Ranch is located in a beautiful setting and the main hall is a fine spacious building. I was excited about training as a yoga teacher.

Half-way through the one-month training course, I had an accident.

It happened in the main hall, during a coaching session, just after morning tea.

There was a teacher supervising and students and guests practiced different asanas. I was practicing head stands and I crashed on my back. I remember the silence in the room after I fell. I remember feeling stunned as I lay on the floor. People asked me if I was ok and I remember I gestured that I could not answer, I could not communicate. They went back to what they were doing. After a while, I stood up went to my bedroom and I lay on my bed. I was in a lot of pain and in shock.

When the bell rang for lecture I walked back to the main building and tried to sit cross legged on the floor and my back was screaming so I got my things and left.

As I exited, I bust in into tears and a Bramachari, a member of staff coming out of kitchen saw me and we sat on bench outside. She tried to console me because I was crying and she said that I now had an opportunity to learn from this experience, that the body is not real and through the pain that I was experiencing I could now have a deeper understanding of the mind, that this was a good spiritual practice.

I was very distressed. I didn't even know if I needed an ice block, her response was only about how the injury would deepen my spiritual practice. She was dismissive of my injury even though I was in agony and crying.

I did not return to the class that day, and later, the person I was sharing a room with told me that the teacher had made a comment about me leaving the class and had disappeared. I did not want to hear that point, I wanted to hear the yoga teacher asking if I was ok.

I don't remember the rest of the day except being in a lot of pain. No one offered me any first aid or medical support, not even an ice pack. Nobody asked me if I needed anything.

The teacher in the coaching class where I hurt my back told me later that it was my karma, my body's way of processing something that had happened in another life.

After a couple of days when the shock had worn off, I was bitten by a tick and I called my brother and I just sobbed. The only people who were checking up on me were the students, and my roommate was lovely, she could see how much in pain and was deeply worried. She used to help me to make my bed.

My karma yoga was to clean the bathrooms and showers and toilets. On day 4, I was in so much pain that the Cleaning supervisor told me to stop. I was given other karma yoga jobs by other staff, which were also physically demanding but perhaps not as demanding

as the bathroom cleaning job. My new karma yoga job was to clean the gift shop and also included having to stand on a stool to dust and clean the items on the shelves.

My pain was such that I could not walk properly or move my body like I used to be able to.

I kept going. I did not feel that I had any other choice. I was made to feel shame, that I was somehow weak, not strong enough.

Quickly, I stopped talking about this injury, for to talk about it would result in a lecture about how the pain that I was in was good for my spiritual growth. I was not offered any help, not an ice-block, no painkillers, no time off, no modifications. Small modifications that I made for myself, for example, sitting on a chair during satsang, resulted in a teacher saying to a hall full of people that chairs should only be used by people who need them as if anyone was going to sit on a chair if they were able to sit on the floor.

I completed the course by doing the chair yoga modules.

My dominant feelings at that time were of confusion and shame.

I felt I was a nuisance. Anytime I asked for help the response was one of condescension. Being in so much pain, I found it hard to be assertive. I tried to cope by doing all I could to shut down the pain.

Some karma yogis and even some staff came and talked to me about some of the injuries that they had sustained at the centre and how they too were expected to get on with the work and the daily schedule. One of them had a hip injury. She too told me that she did not have time off to rest and recuperate. They all talked about how they had to find ways to keep going. One teacher who had torn a tendon in her foot actually needed permission to get physiotherapy. There was someone who had broken her arm and she too did not receive any support. In such an environment it seems that people just did not know how to offer help to someone who was injured.

In the outside world, if someone hurts themselves, people ask the person if they are ok and offer help. I remember when I fell off my bike once, all the cars stopped, and people came to me to offer me help. This is the humane response. At the ashram, I was met with silence or lectures about my karma and how my body is not important and how I needed to strengthen my mind and grow spiritually.

Somehow, I was expected to deal with the injury myself, but it was not something that could be fixed with a Elastoplast band aid. I needed x-rays, and other medical support and intervention, and nobody in a position of authority could see that and so I too started to switch off the troubling thoughts in my mind. When I was in shock, I needed validation, not some doctrine about body, mind and karma. I was never offered the option to leave or alternative options to complete the training.

If I had received timely medical assistance my recovery would have been different.

As it happens, the recovery was severely compromised.

Through participating in this investigation, I have come to appreciate the nature of the psychological injury that I experienced at the ashram in New York.

At the ashram I was taught my injury was something to be ashamed of. For years following the accident I found it difficult to talk about how I was treated after it happened.

I did not talk to my family or friends about how little care or help I had received, because I was taught the injury was something no-one wanted to know about and that if I did talk about it, I would not be believed for how severe the pain was. Yet part of me knew that something about this was not okay and I remained deeply confused by the response of those at the ashram. Every time I sought help at the ashram I was met with resistance from staff. I carried that feeling with me when I sought medical help after returning to Australia, that I didn't deserve to be helped. I internalised a lot of messages about the injury. I thought it was something I deserved or should be able to find ways to cope with.

Sharing my experience has helped me to see more clearly how harmful many of the systems and practices were at the ashram. I can see now that what I was taught about my injury was wrong. After the first interview with you Josna, I did talk to my family and friends and it has been most comforting.

It is important to find ways to listen to ourselves. I probably internalised a lot of the message. I was confused. I knew that something was not ok. What I was taught about my injury was wrong

For years I have thought of the physical pain, not thinking about the psychological. When you are in serious physical pain your priority is to find relief. For many years I didn't have the mental or emotional space to process the psychological impact of being at the ashram when I became injured. It was exhausting trying different physical therapies and then eventually recovering from surgery. It is only now, five years on, that I have been able to recover from the psychological abuse.

I was injured while I was training to be a yoga teacher, but I received no medical support.

Five years later, I still experience debilitating pain. Here is the chronology of my injury and its impact:

In June 2015, at the Yoga Ranch, while training to be a yoga teacher, I had three spinal fractures to the right-side transverse processors, L2, L3, L4.

Then, in December 2016, I was referred to a sports physician (Dr Krishant Naidu, a doctor of sports medicine) for pain in my left knee, hip and foot.

In October 2017, I had foot surgery.

These days I experience on-going foot, back, hip and nerve pain.

Today, July 24, 2020, I had a consultation with Dr Naidu, who believes there is causation between the initial spinal injury and the ongoing problems with my left side. After the initial injury my body compensated and overloaded the left side, leading to the subsequent injuries.

Although I knew this fact intuitively, I wanted to get clarification and affirmation from Dr Naidu before proceeding any further.

It's true to say the injury to my back has irrevocably changed my life, limiting what I can now do with my body, and costing years in medical expenses and loss of income.

The seriousness of the injury revealed itself in subsequent years when that led to further injuries to my body. It was because of the fractures to my spine that I injured my hip, knee, and foot. This culminated in foot surgery in October 2017, and complications following that surgery.

The latest change to my mobility from which I currently suffer began in mid-2018, when following foot surgery, I began experiencing chronic nerve pain. It was around this time that I also began to experience chronic lower back pain.

This injury that I sustained at the Sivananda Yoga Ranch and the trauma from it have irreversibly changed my life.

Survivor IV

A list of some of my experiences within the Sivananda Yoga and Vedanta Organization:

Swami Sitaramananda

(Currently an EBM and director of many ashrams and centers)

- I met Swami Sitaramanda at the ashram in the Bahamas at a Yoga of Recovery retreat. She was charismatic, seductive. And she showed me special attention. I talked with her about how I wanted to do my TTC in India. She said the most important thing isn't where you do it but who you do it with. The most important thing is the guru, the teacher. She told me to come to the Yoga Farm and do TTC with her.
- During my TTC, Swami Sita assigned me to karma yoga at her house. My fellow students were jealous. She gave me special treatment and attention. Towards the end of TTC she recommended I stay at the ashram as staff. She said she saw great things for me. Sanyas maybe. I was "special."
- Within less than a year I quit my job and moved into the ashram to do ATTC and stay as staff.
- During my ATTC, Swami Sita moved me out of my cabin with my roommates and fellow students into a tool shed in the back of her house. She isolated me and gave me special treatment. It felt like an honor. I felt like her special student. My roommates and fellow students I was bonding with were jealous and in awe that I was "chosen" by the guru. They began to treat me differently. I was isolated and ostracized from my peers at the ashram.
- She had me work long hours, sometimes late into the night.
- She alternated between praise/ "love" and criticism/ "ego-annihilation."
- She gossiped and talked about the other "less than" staff and students at the bottom of the hill. She broke their confidence and told me their issues and struggles. She was condescending and degrading. Sometimes I would witness her shaming and cruelly criticizing them. Using their weaknesses and things they came to her for help with against them. I often saw her bring students seeking her help to tears or pushing them to break. Sometimes she screamed so violently I was terrified. It seemed like clear cut verbal and psychological abuse and manipulation. When I tried to confront her about it, she explained to me that the guru had to treat each student differently. She had to do what was best for them. She assured me she would never talk to me like that because I didn't need it. I was part of her "inner circle." I was her "special student." I was better than them. They were "baby souls."
- While I was sleeping in the shed behind her house, Swami Sita would call me in the night to come and help her with things, to make her tea, to help her with stuff

in her office, to massage her legs and feet, to get her eye mask, or help her into her steam tent, etc.

- She would have me do things around the house. Sometimes things that didn't make any sense. I had to set up a tent in her yard and move all these heavy boxes from a shed into the tent. When I finished, she told me she didn't like where the tent was set up. I had to move everything out of the tent onto a tarp, move the tent, and move all the boxes into the tent again. The next day she had me move everything back into the shed and take down the tent. When I asked questions, she would use the spiritual teachings to belittle me and explain that it was my ego and resistance to the guru that made me ask questions. She told me I wouldn't make true spiritual progress until I could trust and surrender to the guru without question.
- One night she had me helping her pack for a trip to the Bahamas ashram. I had to wrap all the books in saran wrap. She ridiculed me the whole night, for the way I folded things, for the way I packed things, for how I zipped the suitcase. Nothing I did was right. She chipped away at my self-esteem one comment at a time. She sat on the bed the entire time, giving me orders what to pack and precisely how to pack it. We didn't finish packing until after 2am. I had been awake since 5am. I was exhausted, confused, broken, and desperate for her approval and validation. Amidst the criticism and verbal abuse, she would occasionally smile at me or make a joke and we'd laugh. Or she'd make fun of or talk about one of the other staff, implying I was better, and we'd laugh. I felt starved for her smile. When we finished packing, she laid down on the bed. She told me to turn off the lights and massage her feet and legs. She was in pajamas. I sat on the foot of her bed and started to massage her feet. She moaned and told me how good that felt, her feet and legs hurt so bad and it was important she get the circulation going before her long flight to the Bahamas. She thanked me and praised me, giving me the validation and approval I had felt starved for after the hours of criticism and abuse while packing. It went on for a few minutes. I felt so uncomfortable. I felt trapped and confused. I felt sick and gross and I couldn't figure out why. I told her I was tired and wanted to stop. She told me, "It's a blessing to serve the guru." She told me I was very lucky to be there serving her. I told her I had to go to the bathroom and I'd be right back. It was the only thing I could think of to break the spell. In the bathroom I started shaking and crying. I felt so isolated and alone and confused. I opened her bottle of mouthwash and brought it to my lips. I wanted to drink the whole thing. After years of sobriety, I almost relapsed drinking a Swami's mouthwash in an ashram! I looked in the mirror and saw myself, at 3 in the morning, dressed in yellow and white about to chug the orange mouthwash...somehow, I snapped out of it. I put the cap back on and walked out of the house to my shed in the back. The next morning, before Swami Sita flew to the Bahamas, she told me I could move into her house into one of the extra rooms while she was away. I was her special student and she wanted me to take good care of her house for her, a "great honor".
- When she returned from the Bahamas, I told her I wanted to move down to the main part of the ashram with the rest of the staff. She was furious. She told me there wasn't any room in the women's dorm. I told her I would stay in a tent. I had made up my mind and I no longer wanted to be at Samadhi Estates with her. One

of the karma yogis that left the ashram gave me her tent to live in so I could get out of Swami Sita's shed. I lived in a tent long into the winter. I was freezing, uncomfortable, and exhausted. Swami Sita told me a few times that I could move back up to Samadhi Estates if I wanted but that there was no room in the dorms.

- Although I no longer lived there, she had me continue to go up there and help her in her office and to drive her into town. One day I got sick and fell asleep in my tent. I was feverish and completely sleep deprived. I slept for over 19 hours. At some point one of the staff came to get me and told me Swami Sita wanted me to drive her into town. A Chaitanya at the time, now a Swami, came with us. They made fun of me the whole time about sleeping. Swami Sita said that a true yogi doesn't need that much sleep. It was my fault that I had slept that long, a failing. If I had done more sadhana or practiced more positive thinking I wouldn't have been so worn out. She talked about my broken, diseased, overly emotional, addict mind and how it was like a sieve leaking out all my prana. I had to learn to control my mind better. As I drove in silence, Swami Sita and the Chaitanya continued to laugh and joke about my failing and how neither of them had ever slept for 19 hours.
- Once I had moved down into the tent, I started to have phone sessions with my therapist every once in a while. When Swami Sita found out she told me I had to stop. She said it wasn't good for me. She said it would confuse me and I could get everything I needed from her and from yoga. I told her that despite her disapproval, I would still be having sessions with my therapist. She was furious. She yelled at me and told me to keep wasting my money if I wanted to.
- One of the staff asked me why I was sleeping in the tent in the winter. I was sleeping with a hat, mittens, scarf, and all my layers on, and still freezing. I couldn't get warm even throughout the day. I told her that I didn't want to live at Swami Sita's, and the women's dorms were full. She told me they weren't full. There had been a few openings for months. I was furious. I moved into the dorm, without asking Swami Sita. And that's when she really began to punish me.
- She no longer wanted me to drive her because I **thought** too loudly. (I wasn't allowed to talk while I drove her. I was supposed to mentally repeat my mantra the whole time.) But she said my mind was restless and loud and disturbing her, my mind and thoughts were too tamasic and rajasic (the ultimate yogic insult) and she wasn't comfortable being in the same car as me. Prior to that I had been her very sattvic, special student. She had done this same thing to a previous staff/ special student/ driver when he told her he'd be leaving staff in a few weeks.
- For my birthday Swami Sita did a vedic astrology reading for me, a "great honor," and "special gift." She used the session to manipulate, coerce, and terrify me into never leaving her ashram. She told me that if I left the ashram it would be dangerous, and I would fall back into my old ways and die a violent death. She knew of my history with addiction and alcoholism. She said the only way I could have a nice life would be a lifelong commitment in the ashram. She said she saw me as a renunciate/ swami. If I stayed at the ashram I would be protected. She said she read all of this in my chart.

- When I started to develop a friendship with another staff member, another one of Swami Sita's "special students," Swami Sita was furious. She sent out an e-mail to the swamis and senior staff to keep an eye on me. She told them of my history. She said I was falling into my old ways and developing an inappropriate relationship with this student. She said that we were not allowed to be alone together and that we must be watched.

It was humiliating and such a violation of privacy and trust. When I confronted her about it she told me it was for my own good and for the student's good. She said I was seducing him and distracting him from his true path of becoming a swami.

- While at the ashram my cousin died. Swami Sita would not let me go to the funeral on the East Coast. She said that my family was not my karma; they were not my obligation. She told me to go to Durga temple and say 108 Tryambakums. I listened to her. I didn't go to the funeral and I will always regret it.

I know I was an adult and not imprisoned and technically I could have just gone, with or without Swami Sita's approval. But at the time it did not feel like that. It felt like if I left the ashram without "the guru's blessing" I would not be welcomed back. I probably wouldn't have been.

- A month or so later my grandfather died. Again she told me I didn't need to go and encouraged me to stay at the ashram and mourn in my own way. She encouraged me to go to Durga temple and say 108 Tryambakums. But she wasn't at the ashram at the time, so I felt less under her control. I booked a ticket, had a friend drive me to the airport, and flew to the east coast for my grandfather's funeral instead. Thank god. Of course, Swami Sita was not happy. I e-mailed her to tell her what I did and that I would return to the ashram in a few days. She responded with a short e-mail telling me to continue to repeat Tryambakums and to "Avoid emotions as these pull the soul down."

During my time at the ashram, I was made to feel terrified of emotions. Just push them down and drown them out with mantras. Emotions are all part of maya, illusion; they are to be overcome.

Like many other things I repressed during that time, I did not begin to process and grieve the loss of my cousin and my grandfather until years after I left staff life in the ashrams.

- Once when I tried to talk to one of the senior staff, then a Chaitanya now swami, about what I was witnessing and experiencing he told me that Swami Sita had a strong Saturn, Siva energy and if I wanted someone to coddle me I was at the wrong place. He made it sound like it was my failing, like I was wimpy, fragile, and pathetic...too weak to handle the "discipline" at the ashram. I didn't have what it took to be a real yogi and have real spiritual progress.
- One day a scheduled Homa was moved indoors due to rain. We had a huge fire ceremony inside in Grass Valley, California! Smoke filled the room. When the priest poured ghee on the fire, flames shot up to the ceiling. I couldn't breathe. I

got up to leave. Swami Sita sent a Chaitanya (now a swami) to tell me that staff couldn't leave satsang. I told him the smoke was bothering me and I couldn't stop coughing. I told him I wouldn't risk my health and I was leaving. He told me the smoke was purifying and I had to stay. I left. As I was walking up the steps to the women's dorm, I heard fire trucks. Many fire trucks arrived, three or four at least. I watched from the deck as one staff exited the back door of the satsang hall with parts of the fire pit. Staff tried to keep the firemen from entering the building. A friend told me that Swami Sita instructed everyone to keep chanting and told the fire fighters it was incense that set the alarm off by accident and that they were trespassing and interrupting a religious ceremony.

- At one point when a lot of the staff were sick, overworked, overtired, and complaining about it, we had a staff meeting to address the issues. We were read a reading by Swami Sivananda about karma yoga and how when done properly it is energizing and transformative. If we were having a hard time it was simply because we weren't pure enough, it was our ego, our attachments, our desires, etc. Any struggles we were experiencing was just part of the purification. And if we weren't happy about it or had complaints it was because we weren't doing it right or weren't strong enough to handle the challenges on the spiritual path.
- Swami Sitaramananda repeatedly used the spiritual teachings to shame me for being "emotional." One day, shortly after my cousin died, I was on my hands and knees washing SwS' stairs, crying and crying and crying. She walked down the stairs and coldly said to me as she passed, "You've forgotten who you are." She had repeatedly given me the lesson that any suffering I ever felt was simply because I had forgotten my true nature, Sat Chid Anananda. If I could just manage to remember my true nature at all times, I would never be sad or angry again. "Repeat your mantra." If I was feeling emotions it was my fault because I wasn't doing enough sadhana. I wasn't remembering my true divine nature. I've now come to know this as spiritual/ religious abuse, spiritual bypassing, and for me incredibly damaging and counterproductive. For years I stuffed everything down, burying it deep beneath spiritual platitudes until it literally made me physically sick.
- When I decided to ultimately leave the ashram, Swami Sita tried everything to keep me, referencing the vedic astrology reading and that I wouldn't be safe if I left, and finally telling me I had to stay for at least a year to work off the fee for my ATTC or pay it in full before I left. I had already paid it in full months earlier. I had already seen her coerce other staff to stay because they "owed" the ashram money and was not going to let that happen to me. I was not going to be coerced into indentured servitude for something that was supposedly gifted to me. I paid for the course fee in full with a credit card. When I finally left staff life, I had over \$10,000 in debt for paying my own way with things either because Swami's refused to pay (like for my plane ticket for my grandfather's funeral) or because I didn't want to get into a situation where I felt like my independence was restricted because of a supposed debt (like with the ATTC cost).
- For my last few days at the ashram before I left Swami Sita wouldn't acknowledge my existence. She wouldn't look at me or say my name. She wouldn't talk to me

and she didn't say goodbye. I had "betrayed" her, and I was shunned. When I tried to talk with a senior staff about how hurt I was by all of this, she was cruel and cold to me. She told me I was abandoning Swami Sita after "Everything she had done for me." She said I was ungrateful and inconsiderate. She told me Swami Sita had feelings too, that she had liked me, and now I was leaving her, and she was hurt...so of course she was treating me like this/ shunning me. When it's convenient the narrative is that Swami Sita is some all-powerful, knowledgeable, spiritual guru, above laws and social dynamics. And at other times when you need to manipulate and coerce the staff to continue with self-abandonment and continued service at the ashram, the narrative is that Swami Sita is some sad, lonely, emotional woman who is always abandoned by her dearest students that she has poured herself into helping. One staff told me, "She works tirelessly to help people and then they just leave her." Thank god the guilt trip did not work on me. I left.

- During my time there I witnessed countless incidents of verbal and psychological abuse, coercion and manipulation...too many to write or I'll be writing for days.
- After some distance from Swami Sitaramananda and some clarity, I started to write a statement of the abuse I experienced and witnessed and was contemplating reporting to the EBM. Then Swami Sadasivananda left the organization for "personal reasons" and Swami Sitaramananda took his place on the EBM! I never made an official report because it felt futile to report abuse to the very person that abused me.

Swami Sadasivananda

(Formerly director of the NYC center, briefly an EBM when Mahadevananda left. Has left the organization for "personal reasons.")

- When I started at the SYVC NYC as a student, Swami Sadasivananda showed me special attention from the beginning. He always welcomed me and said he missed me, was happy to see me, would hug me, rub my back or my shoulders. He said I put light and color in a dark and dreary city, I put light and color in his dark and dreary days. At the time I thought it was sweet and inviting. I felt seen, loved and accepted in a spiritual community in a way I never had before. Now I see it differently. Years later I heard those same exact lines used on another woman he was engaging with/ perhaps sleeping with. It made me feel disgusted and disgusting. I replayed every interaction he and I had in a new light.
- I stayed at the center a few times as a karma yogi during vacations from work. Swami Sadasivananda would come to my room and bring me things, books, articles, little gifts like murtis, and incense. He would talk to me about the other staff and how nobody understood him. He said he couldn't talk with anyone else the way he talked to me.
- Once, when I was in the backyard harvesting plums, I overheard a terrible argument between Swami Sadasivananda and a staff, a young woman half Swami Sadasivananda's age. It was horrible. It sounded like an abusive quarrel between a married couple. I was scared and confused. I think they forgot I was there in the

backyard. The center was closed midday after lunch, and I think they thought they were alone.

I was taking a course with her at the time. So a few days after the argument in the kitchen I tried to talk with her about it after class. I wanted to make sure she was okay. It seemed to me that she was being abused and manipulated by Swami Sadasivananda. She told me I didn't know anything about the dynamic between guru and disciple. She told me that our perception of the world is a projection of the state of our mind, and she recounted an analogy she had used in class. "It's like a radio station, whatever station we are tuned to is the music we're going to here." She told me that if I thought the interaction was inappropriate and abusive it was just because of the nature of my mind, the predominant tamasic and rajasic qualities. I was just projecting my own messed up thinking onto the otherwise pure and spiritual dynamic.

- Another time while I was at the center doing dishes, one of Swami Sadasivananda's leeches had gotten out of the jar and into the dish water. (He had a jar of leeches in the kitchen that he used therapeutically because of some blood disorder or something.) It attached itself to me and when I removed it, I was bleeding. I was so freaked out I dropped a glass and broke it. I cleaned it up, found the leech and put it back in the jar and then I went to the upstairs bathroom to look for a band aid and heard what I thought were sex noises coming from the 5th floor (where Swami Sadasivananda's bedroom was). Again, it was the midday time when the center was closed, and I believe the staff and Swami Sadasivananda thought I had left already because I was going to let myself out as soon as I finished the dishes.

I was mortified and confused. A few days later, when I told a long-term karma yogi and teacher about what had happened she was not surprised in the least. She said that she had heard rumors that they were sleeping together and that she knew someone he had been sleeping with before. I got the impression that it was common knowledge and that everyone knew about it, including Srinivasan.

- When I arrived at the Center after the yoga farm, I spoke with Swami Sadasivananda about what I had experienced with Swami Sitaramanada. He became very angry and indignant and said she was a "psychotic, ego-maniac" and that I should have never left NY to do TTC with her. I should have done TTC with him. He then continued on a rant about how she was doing whatever she wanted, and the EBM couldn't control her. (She was not on the EBM at that time). He made many sexist, homophobic, and racist remarks, referring to her being Vietnamese and a woman and a lesbian.

I felt somewhat relieved that he hadn't tried to smooth over the abuse I had experienced with some "lesson" about the guru and disciple relationship. But his reaction left me feeling empty, sad, confused, angry, speechless. He never said, "I'm sorry you went through that." Or "That was inappropriate, report it to the EBM." He took it as an opportunity to go on a vitriolic rant about his obvious deep-seated disgust and disrespect for Swami Sitaramanada. He used my testimony as a way to manipulate me and remind me that I was in the right place now, back in NYC

with him and that I never should have left him. Again, the abuse was my fault. Because I had left NY and him to do TTC elsewhere.

- He poisoned me against another staff that was no longer in his favor. He ridiculed her every day. During staff meeting he would humiliate her in front of staff. He said she was arrogant and self-righteous. He said she was stupid and careless and didn't have attention to detail. He made fun of the way she sat, he made fun of the way she put her hair up. He said she was only looking for a husband, that she only did all of these yogic things so she could find a nice husband and that she never would because nobody would ever want her. He said she would never have any spiritual progress because of her ego and her resistance to him. He made fun of her for looking for a true guru and said she didn't know how to surrender to a guru even when he was right in front of her. He gossiped to fellow staff, karma yogis, and students about her. It was endless character assassination and shaming.
- Over the years Swami Sadasivananda made many inappropriate offensive comments about sex and sexuality, about women, and about different races and sexualities. It was so confusing. He was a monk, twice my age, initiating horrible, uncomfortable conversations as if we were buddies. It felt both inappropriate and yet intimate. Somehow both disgusting and special.

He would often act silly and goofy and childish at the same time as making some sort of advance or initiating inappropriate conversation. Looking back at it I think he was grooming me, testing the boundaries, and covering up the covert sexual subtext with childlike enthusiasm and goofiness just in case I wasn't going to go for it.

- At some point a woman started to come around the center for "private harmonium lessons" with Swami Sadasivananda. They would go upstairs for hours and we weren't to disturb them. Nobody knew who this woman was or how they had met. One time after satsang, he ran upstairs and changed into pants and sneakers and snuck out the upstairs door of the center. I was standing in front of the center talking with a friend who had come to satsang to visit me and check on me at the center. We saw him rush out the door like a teenager and hurry down the street to meet the woman. My friend and I laughed about it. I told her he was sleeping with that woman and sneaking around, sneaking out of "the house" like a little boy. We laughed at the absurdity.

He started sneaking out at night. I would hear him creeping down the stairs in the middle of the night and see him sneaking back in early in the morning before satsang. One time when I heard him sneaking out, I got out of my bed and walked down the stairs to see him getting into a cab in front of the center. While I was doing accounting, I started to notice taxi charges in the middle of the night.

I was repeatedly scolded and preached to by a man that was living a lie. I was being "taught" by a man that lied to me and the other staff daily.

- As I was debating reporting my experiences to the EBM, Swami Sadasivananda was promoted to be an EBM! He took Swami Mahadevananda's spot when Swami

Mahadevananda “retired.” Swami Mahevenanada was removed from the EBM and the organization because of sexual misconduct, possibly assault, possibly rape. As a community we were told he retired! And then another Swami with a similar record took his place!

Swami Swaroopananda and Swami Premaswaroopananda
(Currently running the Bahamas ashram as well as other centers. Swami Swaroopananda is an EBM.)

- I went to serve at the Bahamas ashram. For many reasons I did not stay that long. I inquired about getting a visa before going and I was told by a staff at the ashram to lie to immigration. I was told to dress up, wear make-up and jewelry, to look rich, and tell them I was vacationing and going on an extended retreat. Apparently my lie wasn't convincing enough and I was only given 30 days in the country, after which I had to go back to request an extension. I voiced my concern with a staff member about lying. She explained that it was okay because no government would ever understand the concept of karma yoga. As yogis, we were above the law. We answered to a different, higher law. She said that all of the staff and karma yogis lied for years and that nobody had visas and it was okay. I was still concerned. She told me I could take the Prenatal Yoga Course (for free) and then I wouldn't be lying. It was an expensive, extensive course that I had been wanting to take for years. I was psyched. I printed out my registration for the course and brought it to immigration to have my stay extended. It worked. Now I look back at this and realize I was bribed and manipulated to go against my gut and to break the law.
- Swami Swaroopananda would not look at me or talk to me the entire time I was staff at the Bahamas ashram. The hierarchical system at the ashram in the Bahamas is so strict and rigidly enforced that even when I was doing sound during satsangs, Swami Swaroopananda would not look at me or give me instructions directly. He would tell one of his senior staff/ disciples and then they would tell me. It became completely confusing and absurd. He could have just looked at me and motioned up or down for the volume but instead it was a complete circus.
- Swami Sadasivananda left the organization while I was at the ashram in the Bahamas. The day I found out I started uncontrollably crying during satsang. Relief. Anger. Sadness. Grief. An outpouring of mixed emotions. I quietly excused myself from satsang as not to disturb everyone else. I walked on the beach and cried and cried and cried and threw rocks into the ocean. Once I got it all out, I took a shower and went to bed. To me this was the most therapeutic way I could have handled it and a beginning of what would take years more to process.

The next day after staff meeting, I was scolded for skipping satsang the night before. I shared with the senior staff exactly what was going on and why I left the satsang. He had absolutely no compassion or understanding whatsoever. He said “satsang is exactly where you should be if you're overly emotional. The vibrations of satsang will uplift you and transform the emotion.” I was told not to allow myself to get pulled down by my emotional nature, to repeat my mantra, and do

sadhana. I was told not to skip satsang again for any reason or I would not be allowed to stay at the ashram.

- While staff at the ashram in the Bahamas I witnessed and experienced what I considered unethical, hypocritical practices and behavior. Swami Swaroopananda and Swami Premaswaroopananda lived in a luxurious private little house with their closest devotees serving them round the clock. They were like royalty, untouchable, inaccessible. They had private, special meals, and were together constantly. I often saw them in rocking chairs on their private porch like an old married couple or overheard them watching tv at night in their private house. They were shrouded in mystery and ceremony and were blindly worshiped and followed by their devotees, the senior staff. While I worked in the “guest relations department” the most common complaint/ questions/ concerns were what guests frequently described as the “Israeli army” running the ashram. Guests were concerned it was a cult and the head staff were brainwashed, used, and abused. They were often concerned that the head staff with the walky talkies were unhappy, sleep-deprived and sickly looking. One guest asked me if people were being held there against their will and forced to work. Guests had many questions about who they frequently called the King and Queen or who one guest referred to as the “Grand Poobah” and his “malnourished concubine.” They were referring to Swami Swaroopananda and Premaswaroopananda. We had a guest relations desk set up in the garden so people could come to us with these complaints, concerns, and comments and we could hopefully nip it in the bud before they left a negative Trip Advisor review. It was all about the reviews. Not about legitimately addressing concerns or responding to feedback. It was about changing the persons mind, using spiritual bypassing, condescending “explaining,” and various “yogic” lessons and tools to change the guests mind and experience.
- When our guest relations table wasn’t successful, and a negative review was written on Trip Advisor, it was our duty to “bury it” with at least 5 positive reviews each by the end of the day. The frantic urgency that we were made to feel over gathering these positive reviews was absolutely absurd and made days at the ashram and interactions with guests and students inauthentic and forced. We were constantly searching for the next positive review, shamelessly eliciting them from happy guests. When we weren’t able to get enough reviews from guests, we were told to write them ourselves, to reach out to friends and family to write them, and in some instances to make new Trip Advisor accounts with different e-mails and write another review ourselves. I was asked to create a simple how to guide to explain to someone step by step how to create an e-mail account, create a trip advisor account, and to leave positive reviews, ostensibly to make it easier and quicker for people to make as many e-mails as possible and leave as many positive reviews as they could, flooding the site with positive reviews and completely drowning out any negative ones. This was all explained and justified as part of the “Mission.” Hmm. The yogic mission? To falsify positive reviews so that the Bahamas ashram could be the Trip Advisor number one resort on paradise island year after year after year. It was suspect and unethical to me and e-mailed my supervising staff, Swami Swaroopananda, and Swami Premaswaroopananda to voice my concerns about the unethical collection of positive Trip Advisor reviews

to bury/ silence any negative review that popped up, quoting to them the guidelines straight from the trip advisor site:

TripAdvisor wishes to ensure that reviewers are not affiliated in any way with the establishment they are reviewing. By checking this box, you certify that you are not employed by the establishment, are not related to anyone employed there, and do not otherwise have a business or personal relationship with the owners or managers of this establishment or a competitor that might bias your review. In addition to being a violation of our terms of service and an unethical practice, committing fraud on reviews is also prohibited by the law and regulations in many jurisdictions [see (UCP 2005/29/EC) and (FTC 16CFR Part 255)]. Please see our Content Integrity Policy for more information.

I also read the Content Integrity Policy:

<http://help.tripadvisor.com/articles/200615037>

These in particular seem to be practices we are doing and what we intend to do with this e-mail template:

- Asking friends or relatives to write positive reviews.
- Submitting reviews on behalf of guests.
- Selectively soliciting reviews (by email, surveys or any other means) only from guests who have had a positive experience.

I just wanted to forward the information. It seems important that we maintain our good standing on TripAdvisor. While having many good reviews is part of that, ensuring that we are not doing anything they would consider fraudulent and maintaining the integrity of our reviews is also part of continuing to thrive on their site.

The next day Swami Premaswaroopananda came to me in the garden to condescendingly talk to me about how I didn't understand Swami Vishnudevananda's mission and that the "worldly" rules/ laws did not apply here. It was the first time I had ever even heard her speak and she spoke to explain to me that I was just a silly little girl that didn't understand the mission! She regaled me with stories of Swami Vishnudevananda's peace missions, his World Citizen passport, and the many ways he broke the law in name of a higher mission. I can't believe that nonsense continues to work on people. Swami Vishnudevananda breaking the law to fly a plane over the Berlin Wall as an activist for peace is a bit different than not abiding by the ethical and legal guidelines set by trip advisor with regards to reviews! It felt like Swami Premaswaroopananda came to speak to me to intimidate and silence me. She told me that if I was not on board with Swami Vishnudevananda's mission, if I was not tuned to the guru, and the teachings than perhaps the ashram and staff life were not for me. She was right. Shortly after that, I left the Bahamas ashram and staff life permanently.

Impact Statement

I have been a student within the Sivananda Yoga organization for the past 15 years. I have witnessed and experienced abuse on many levels. Verbal abuse, emotional/ psychological abuse, physical abuse, spiritual/ religious abuse, and sexual harassment/ misconduct.

If even one of these things had happened at a job, I would have filed complaints with HR, possibly filed a lawsuit, reported the company for an inhumane and unethical work environment, and if nothing changed, quit. I would have sought support and counseling, legal representation, etc. I would not have been silent and complicit.

But instead, I stayed within the organization, silent.

With the recent statement of Julie Salter and others who have come forward with their experiences, I feel like I am waking up out of hypnosis. I am now seeking counseling with a trauma specialist as well as support for individuals leaving cults.

The Sivananda Organization has a systemic culture of abuse. When I asked who the EBM is accountable to, Srinivasan answered with pride, "We hold each other accountable." The people I'm expected to report abuse/ misconduct/ issues to are the EBM. Many of the members are the abusers themselves.

It is a huge international organization that survives by volunteer labor, volunteer teachers, and students paying for the services, and yet has no accountability or oversight. There are no checks and balances. There is not protection for the volunteers "karma yogis," or the students.

The powerful are policing the powerful while the many are used, abused, and silenced.

I went to the ashram to deepen my relationship with myself and with God. I did. I had to. Developing a strong relationship with God was not nurtured by the ashram environment or the Swamis. I developed and deepened a strong relationship with myself and with God to survive the ashram and the Swamis. As staff, my sense of self was repeatedly smashed, at times my self-esteem was shattered. In my years after staff life I have slowly picked up the pieces, rebuilding myself, remembering who I am. Piecing apart what was useful and what was damaging; suffering from and slowly recovering from what I have been half-jokingly referring to for the past six years as Post-Ashram Stress Disorder.

However, years after leaving staff, I had remained a part of the organization. Over the past six years I have taught regularly at the SYV centers and ashrams. I've continued to go to the Sivananda Headquarters in Quebec each summer.

Somehow I rationalized and justified my continued affiliation with a few things: the teachings, the benefits the centers and ashrams brought to students, that I would never have to see Swami Sitaramananda, Swami Sadasivananda, or the Swaroopanandas again, and that I would never put myself in that position of abuse again because I would never be staff again. I told myself that if I remained connected but independent everything would be okay. I didn't want to let go of the community. I didn't want to face the truth. I was living in denial, compartmentalizing everything. When triggered in a satsang or interaction with a swami or staff I pushed it down and brushed it off by focusing on the new students who were benefiting from being introduced to yoga. I kept telling myself the good outweighed the bad. This continued affiliation and persistent psychological dissonance has impeded my recovery and kept me suffering, silent, and sick.

I am deeply grateful to Julie for her courageous and open statement. It shattered my denial. I am now able to face the truth of my reality and finally move towards deeper healing.

Survivor V

I was a student for about a year at the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre (ISYVC) in Los Angeles from 1983-1984. I was full time unpaid labor/staff (karma yogi) with ISYVC from the summer of 1984 through January 1, 1991.

While a student in Los Angeles Srinivasan, who is currently Executive Board Member-EBM, was my teacher and the director of the ISYVC. At that time, he was married with a child. I had shared with him that I was taking yoga because my job was very stressful. He offered to come to my apartment to teach me relaxing massage. Once there, it was clear he didn't know massage techniques and he made a pass at me. I told him "no" because he was married. He backed off.

He persisted and eventually I gave in to his requests and had sex with Srinivasan on two occasions. Once in a park nearby and once in a motel room. He insisted that I tell no-one. The power differential is worth noting and absolutely compromises consent. He was nine years older than I, married and a father. He was my teacher, the director of the centre and my 'landlord'. I, on the other hand, was a survivor of early child sexual abuse, was alone in a strange city, and had just left a highly abusive boyfriend. I was also dealing with the death of my father. I was deeply wounded and in an extremely vulnerable emotional place. Srinivasan abused his position of power and took advantage of my vulnerability.

I was in therapy and told my therapist about the sexual encounters with Srinivasan. She pointed out that these encounters were not healthy and warned that ISYVC was a cult and recommended I not join staff. She made it clear I wasn't healed enough to stop therapy. I didn't think it was a cult because Srinivasan had assured me it wasn't. I had no understanding of what a cult was so I believed him. I thought the organization was a safe spiritual sanctuary. I was being taught that all issues could be solved with intense sadhana (spiritual practices) rather than therapy, with the final goal being "enlightenment." Had I had all the information then that I know now (about Swami Vishnu-devananda's sexual abuses and ISYVC's systemic enabling, gas lighting and abuse cover-ups) I absolutely would not have joined staff and suffered intense physical, psychological, spiritual and financial abuse for over 6 years. I can't get those years of my life back. I was grossly and intentionally taken advantage of and deceived.

There were many rumors about Swami Vishnudevananda having sex with students. Swami Vishnu-devananda raped women and had a long history of sexually abusing women in secret. He also knew that many of the male swami's had "girlfriends." A friend, Sukadev, had shared with me that Swami Vishnudevananda had sex with both Swami Kartikeyananda (Julie Salter), and Durgananda (currently Swami Durgananda, Executive Board Member-EBM). He said that Durgananda herself had told him personally.

In 1984, I was on staff at the New York City center. The director was Swami Saradananda, the most verbally and emotionally abusive person I have ever worked with. She started off relatively benign but gradually escalated with intense verbal abuse in the form of name-calling and a barrage of put-downs. Her attacks were especially vicious when I was tired or feeling vulnerable, and there was never any praise, acknowledgment or gratitude for the free labor and organizational work I was providing.

I worked 6 – 7 days per week with every other weekend off to drive students to the Yoga Ranch. We were up for 6am daily meditation and worked until late at night. Meditation

was also held on Sunday and Wednesday evenings. I cleaned the studio, shopped for food, made meals, cleaned up after meals, taught many yoga classes and did anything else that needed to be done. Our only down time was meals and some Sundays, although we had to be back for evening meditation. There was no opportunity to establish meaningful friendships, and in fact, the atmosphere was too antagonistic for this. If other staff members were being berated by Swami Saradananda, you simply felt relieved that it wasn't you.

After a year, I was sent to co-direct the Los Angeles studio, where I took a Brahmacharya initiation. Next I was sent to re-establish a floundering Chicago center. I took Sannyas vows and then I was sent to the largest and busiest center, New York. In 1990, I was sent to Val Morin to become one of the original Executive Board Members (EBM) to take over running the ISYVC upon Swami Vishnu-devananda's death. We had a ceremony where Swami Vishnu-devananda took a dhoti he claimed was owned by his teacher, Swami Sivananda. It was cut into strips and tied around each of the newly installed EBM member's foreheads. He also gave us a mala with a photocopy of a yantra attached.

By then, I had absorbed the indoctrination of the organization, totally isolated in the small bubble of ISYVC and highly disconnected from the outside world. I only read books by Swami Sivananda and a few other "spiritual" teachers. Working exhausting hours and getting insufficient sleep was considered a virtue. Needing self-care was considered "tamasic" (lazy, selfish and "unspiritual"). Enduring verbal and emotional abuse was supposedly a great spiritual practice to help rid oneself of ego.

In 1990, I was extremely exhausted and took my one and only true vacation (other than visiting family), to the Bahamas ashram. I stayed for a week in a little hut, sleeping most of the time and only leaving to go to meals. I was so depleted that, even though only a few steps to the bathroom, I would pee in a cup, crawl to the door to dump its contents and crawl back into bed. I now know that ISYVC encourages dissociation from your body through overwork, lack of sleep, verbal abuse and a philosophy that considers it a high spiritual practice NOT to listen to your body's signals, your emotions, or your discerning intellect.

I was beginning to question the teachings of ISYVC and the organization. I wondered how I could, as a swami, "renounce" something I had never actually experienced, namely love? I had had sex but that is a far cry from the deep intimacy of real love. I decided I needed to do something to reinvigorate myself spiritually. Swami Saradananda was taking a group of students on a pilgrimage through northern India, and it included a trip to Swami Sivananda's Divine Life Society ashram and time with Swami Vishnu-devananda at his cave in Gangotri. I hadn't worked under Swami Saradananda for many years, but she was speaking kindly and strongly encouraging me to go. Upon reflection, I was in no state to make a clear and healthy decision. I flew to London, physically, emotionally and spiritually depleted and the verbal abuse began immediately and didn't let up the entire two weeks in India. I didn't have the strength to stand up for myself, which only intensified her onslaught. I became sick with constant diarrhea and vomiting but Swami Saradananda accused me of "faking it". Finally, she took me to a hospital where I received help and treatment. She never apologized for her accusation. The gift in that horrific trip was that now I knew I would leave ISYVC. It was the straw that broke this camel's back.

It was assumed that when you were on staff, you did whatever financially benefitted the organization, from an "egoless" state, ie, without acknowledgment, recognition or

financial compensation. Heavily indoctrinated, I made some poor financial decisions. In 1986, I was photographed for the cover of the Sivananda Yoga Video (VHS). No acknowledgement of my name was printed, nor did I receive payment. In 1987, the US experienced a devastating financial crash. What little money I had saved prior to joining staff was reduced to about \$1000. I had taken renunciation vows at that time so I felt I was being disingenuous by having my own bank account. I donated the last of my money to help publish Swami Vishnu-devananda's book, "Hatha Yoga Pradipika".

The worst financial abuse, however, was 6 years of gruelling unpaid labor while creating enormous financial wealth for ISYVC. Every center I directed flourished and increased in student count and revenue. Sukadev was a brilliant mentor for running successful studios and I followed his guidance. Many students from these studios fed into yoga vacations, teacher training, residential rent, donations and others, joining the vast pool of unpaid labor, including outside teachers at the yoga centers/ashrams, and full and part-time unpaid staff. The financial gain of ISYVC from this was easily worth hundreds of thousands (even millions) of dollars. Yet when I decided it was no longer in my best interest to stay on staff, I was discarded and treated like trash.

There was no financial set up for those leaving, no matter how long they had served, their position or how much ISYVC had benefited. When you left, you were completely on your own. I left without a dime. On January 1, 1991, I called Val Morin to inform them and asked if I could say goodbye to Swami Vishnu-devananda for closure. I was roundly scolded for being so selfish "after all that Swamiji has done for you." My request was declined. Other than a call from Srinivasan, to request my silence about having used me for sex, no one ever called to see how I was doing or kept in touch.

I joined staff emotionally wounded but full of hope, youthful energy, and physical strength. I had a career making \$35,000+ per year, a high income for 1984. After 6 years, I was physically depleted, emotionally battered, mentally confused and financially devastated. The years from age 24 – 31 are when most people are building their careers, getting married, having children, investing in retirement, buying a house, maturing, and becoming savvy about life and love. It took me many years to establish successful relationships, a solid income and to heal deep wounding and self-hatred derived from these experiences. Furthermore, it took rivers of tears and thousands of dollars-worth of therapy to undo the damage of being in what I now unquestionably and unarguably know to be a corrupt and abusive cult.

Survivor VI: Amnon & Ilana Barzvi (Chandra & Chandrika)

We arrived at the Sivananda HQ in Val Morin in 1991. It was the culmination of a process that started with practicing yoga regularly for some years with S.V.D.'s book as a guide, and some more years under a Sivananda-trained teacher. We were on safe career courses but had a growing sense that there was more to life than that and felt ready for a deep dive into some serious spiritual work. We ended up living in this cult for about fourteen years and, to be sure, there were some good and joyful times. However, in this report we choose to focus on, and recount the abuses and betrayal which were the main thread of our experience.

Our first year was very enjoyable and transforming. We were subjected to the infamous "love bomb", met exciting and wonderful people, were young, care-free, and adapted well to the lifestyle and duties of the ashram. We got to know some of the staff members before they went on to become EBM. They were actually un-presuming, likable and interesting (Swaroop, Kailas, Srinivasan, Kanti, Sivadas and Prahlad). When our first daughter was a year old, we asked if we could come back to the organisation and the ashram as a family and were accepted. We knew that Srinivasan lived there with his wife and young girl and that there were several more devoted families living in close proximity and participating in one form or another in the ashram's life. Our inner-most belief was that ashram life would be a great spiritual environment for children to grow up in, and our hope was to play a part in the evolution of the family aspect of the community. We were willing to go through all the growing pains involved with this endeavour.

Upon arrival, we were assigned a single guest room, for the three of us, on the top floor of the "registration" building, next to the rest of the staff. The walls were paper-thin and when our infant daughter cried, we were expected to run with her to the bottom floor until she calmed down. We were expected to juggle the care of our daughter along with participating in the ashram's schedule, a full day of labour and, at times, even assist with the night shift of S.V.D.'s care. Our attempts to bring the families and children together with a winter playroom and other activities were hampered and torpedoed. Showing familial physical affection, such as hugs and hands holding, were explicitly discouraged (so as not to distract the swamis and brahmacharies with thoughts of happy families).

The summer of 1994 was completely crazy with the Ayyapa/Subramanya temple inauguration. Srinivasan lost control of the ashram leadership to the European directors and our work assignments were regularly changed at short notice. The three of us were sent to reside in a tent for nearly a month. By the end of the summer we were so exhausted and frustrated with Srinivasan's leadership and the dwindling prospects of a sane family experience, that we asked to transfer to the much smaller yoga ranch ashram in New York under a different director. Much to our dismay, that swami director had just quit with his pregnant brahmachari secretary and guess who decided to move and run that ashram... Srinivasan. Against our better judgment, we chose to stay optimistic and hoped for a better outcome at the Ranch, which, after all, was named "Yoga Ranch Colony", implying a place for families. We were crammed into a tiny trailer with another family for many months, until we strongly protested for a week and finally got to have the trailer to ourselves. Family numbers were increasing, but Srinivasan prevented a community from forming. There were no long-term plans for addressing family needs, such as proper housing or anything that would encourage families to move and establish themselves at the ashram. Srinivasan and his wife's attitude was symbolized by incidents such as him

yelling, “You are disturbing the snow!” when the children (including his own) built a snow slide on the main slope; preventing the establishment of a winter play room; or the tangible animosity for leaving behind a suitcase when returning from a home visit where my wife had just miscarried. Just as we started to feel more at home at the Ranch, we were suddenly uprooted and ordered to go and run the Chicago center. We had no prior experience at managing a center and it was challenging to raise a child in that small space. However, it was an apparent benefit to be away from Srinivasan and most of the org shenanigans, which allowed us to exercise some control over our family priorities.

Our girl was reaching schooling age and the org had no guidance in that regard. We discovered that the Waldorf education has the richest approach to a child’s development while nurturing spiritual awareness. Saraswati & Prahlad picked up on our experience and followed suite with their own children’s education.

After three years, we wanted to apply for permanent residency, but because Srinivasan delayed doing the necessary documentation, we had to leave Chicago to Canada and spend three months in Val Morin and then apply from Israel. Owing to health concerns, the application process took longer than expected, and Srinivasan became furious and ordered us to comply with all the procedures immediately and return to Chicago. When we replied that we could not give up our concerns but that the application was sure to be approved, he declared that there was no place for us to return to. We sent emails to the EBM explaining our predicament and conflict with Srinivasan and asked for their help. Not a single reply came back. We returned to Chicago on our own so our daughter could continue her education. It wasn’t easy. A few of our Chicago students helped us with temporary accommodation and some expenses. We mostly used some money saved up from our days in the kibbutz.

Three months later, out-of-the-blue, a call came from Srinivasan telling us that he may have misjudged the prospects of our visa application and asked us to resume our post at the Chicago center. He promised not to interfere with the way we organized our life at the center and never to ask us to relocate unless we were willing to. We accepted the terms and this arrangement held for the next four years.

During that time, we had two more children, and it became evident that the yoga center was too small to accommodate a family of five; and the situation was not conducive for the center’s routine. We felt that it was the right time to return to the ashram and begin to establish a healthy family environment there. Srinivasan agreed and encouraged us to do so. We had hoped to grow the ashram into a family friendly community and expected to have more influence, due to our seniority. When our new-born daughter was a month old, we made the move from Chicago to the NY Ranch.

We had come to an understanding with Srinivasan on how to regulate our lives, and this meant that Chandrika’s main responsibility was to care for the children. Chandra was expected to participate in one satsang per day, and finished work at 4:00 pm. Our oldest daughter went to school (45 minutes away). Soon, however, the demands for “karma yoga” time, from Chandrika, increased. Somehow nursing a baby, taking care of a home and the needs of three children and occasional help at the ashram’s kitchen were not considered sufficient. Soon after arriving she was expected to work more in the kitchen and vegetable garden while having the children with her.

By then we had functioned without proper sleep for over 2 years and understandably, were not at top-notch performance. Chandra’s work had many aspects: doing all the

accounting and budgeting, managing the development and implementation of registration and the mailing list software for the Ranch and NY center; teaching morning/evening asana classes and at the teacher's training courses; lawn mowing, lumber & maintenance work and leading some of the morning/evening satsangs. The 4:00 pm cut-off time couldn't be observed anymore, and family time became more limited.

Staff morale, at the Ranch, was low and many appeared unhappy. Several staff shared with us that there was an on-going issue with the acting director, who was sexually harassing some of the female staff. They begged for Srinivasan's intervention, but he did nothing (a couple of years later that person had to leave due to a more vocal complaint of the same nature). Srinivasan continued to run the Ranch with his trademark poor management style, while keeping all the strings in his hands. Everyone depended on him to make all the decisions.

He gradually became more abusive and often insulted me in public so unreasonably that other staff were bewildered. He became increasingly agitated with the budgeted expenses related to our daughter's Waldorf schooling despite this educational movement becoming accepted in the organisation, and it was where Prahlad and Saraswati were also sending their children. Srinivasan, himself, pulled his daughter from the public high school to be home-schooled, and then spent an un-budgeted \$5k a year for her college, euphemistically describing it as "the ashram's gift to my daughter".

As the year progressed, we were growing anxious and frustrated while fighting to keep a normal facade to shield our children. The final blow landed after returning from long over-due and self-financed major dental treatment. Srinivasan, with two of his henchmen present, called me to his home. He blurted some gobbledygook about not being happy with my accounting work and the mailing list software (while in truth they both were in a working state like never before), and that he had, essentially, decided to kick us out. When I confronted him with facts and made him see how he was responsible for most of the setbacks, mismanagement and the negative atmosphere, he lost his temper and said, "I don't trust you and can't work with you", and called me insubordinate (with no examples). I said, "So you're betraying us again", to which he answered, "Yes". At that point it was clear that there was nothing left for us there. We already knew from past experience that no help would come from the EBM.

The next day, Srinivasan approached me and lamented his failure to follow the, "Non-Violent Communication" principals (that he, supposedly, learned under the founder of that system).

In the following days we asked Srinivasan to pass to the EBM a request for some compensation, which was ignored. We also offered to return to direct the Chicago center, which was refused.

I'd like to make the point here that the board members are very crafty when they want to get rid of a long-term member. They do not say, "you are fired" or "you must leave". Instead, they remove you from your current position and offer a different one that they know you will not be able to accept.

We were acutely aware of the disinterest coming from our short and long-term colleagues in regard to our situation and realized how insubstantial the interpersonal connections

and friendships were. We still loved the place at some level and didn't want to create a big fuss or cause harm.

We served faithfully for years at the ashrams and centers of the org, at times performing unreasonably risky and dangerous tasks without question, with no remuneration, retirement savings or health care. Within a couple of weeks, we left the ashram quietly with practically nothing, as it was evident that it was the organization's will.

When the "Fight-or Flight" state subsided, the hurt, anger and anguish set in as the full impact of the betrayal dawned on us. It was like starting life from scratch as a family of five, with our best earning and professional development years behind us. We were exhausted, worried, in emotional and physical pain and turmoil and in complete financial insecurity. At the same time, we were committed to provide a safe, stable and positive home environment for our children.

Over the years we've found that the wounds and pain do not go away. We weren't able to fall asleep without being haunted for hours by troubling memories of that experience. Every attempt at any yoga practice would bring a torrent of unsettling memories and feelings with it. I'm not sure it will ever fully go away. Over time, the one thing that had helped us to sustain some level of grounding and sanity was the ability to point proudly to S.V.D. as our guru, and his pure and authentic teachings as our spiritual and moral foundation. When Julie Salter came forward with her shocking revelations, that too was taken away. We felt as if the ground has disappeared from under our feet. SVD was not enlightened, no different or more virtuous than his senior students; he was their teacher and they are his loyal and obedient students. They are the poisonous fruit of a poisonous tree, nothing more and nothing less.

Following Julie's post and the formation of the SATYA group, we've, all of a sudden, become aware that we were not alone! We were saddened to learned that much more horrific experiences have been had by others. But we're so thrilled to participate in something we never believed would be possible - to share some of our insights and experiences as in the following post (from Dec. 25, 2019):

Dear sisters and brothers on the path,

The Iron Law of Institutions is: the people who control institutions care first and foremost about their power within the institution rather than the power of the institution itself. Thus, they would rather the institution "fail" while they remain in power within the institution than for the institution to "succeed" if that requires them to lose power within the institution.

My journey as a full-time staff at the SYVC had formally begun in 1991 and ended by 2005. Together with my wife and three children we served at the Camp, Ranch and as the directors of the Chicago center. To be sure, the real journey had begun long before, while the growth and scars will remain with us forever after. I write in hope that sharing our unique perspective will contribute a little to the evolution of our movement.

As all-consuming feelings of righteous anger spurred by current events are finally forcing us to embrace the winds of change to do away with calcified and inadequate paradigms of power and transmission of knowledge, we have the choice to give birth to new systems better suited for current needs.

Respect and acknowledgment is duly given to all the good each and every one of us experienced while participating in any capacity within the SYVC.

One aspect of Swami Sivananda's greatness was founding the Divine Life Society in a format that was quite uncommon/completely new and radical for the time. In a similar manner, his disciples came to the west and created new vehicles to fulfil their mission. They were faced with the need to understand the new environment as best they could and founded organizations blending their comprehension of the local social and legal state with elements of the traditional Guru Kula system. The structure and dogmas of this organization were serving the purpose but also a far cry from being perfect or complete. They were subject to several changes over time (mostly to tighten SVD hold on power). Challenges to the system, big or small, were ruthlessly crushed, often resulting in the banishment of the "offending party" which, at times, was even extended to all who maintained relationships with them.

The flaws in the system are pretty evident by now. A lot could have been prevented by simple and timely acts. How difficult would it have been to establish a channel to communicate grievances and have them addressed in an impartial fashion? How hard would it have been to assign a point person who would follow-up with any leaving staff to find out what had happened? How challenging was it to realize that not every decision of SVD came from a place of pure divine revelation? Yes, I know everyone was afraid to get yelled at or worse... how healthy was that?

As we learn about these dark secrets, how can we even begin to process SVD & EBM "off the charts" hypocrisy as in the story of one of our members here (as she recounted under Julie's message) who was seduced by her superior swami, then publicly humiliated by SVD and kicked out (or given some impossible to accept option). The board members did not lift a finger to intervene, while, unsurprisingly, many of them were dipping their hand in the jar too - a senior board member was discharged the following year together with his personal assistant, a year later another senior board member quit to marry his assistant, since the early 90's the board was covering the transgressions of the main priest and on and on.

We must acknowledge that almost all who stayed long term (board & all others) have bought into and internalized the current structure to the point they're completely unable to even imagine anything different, while all independent minds were consistently weeded out. Therefore major shifts will unlikely come with their help.

Please remember that the board members, while inherently are good people, (and have done tremendous good by many), are quite adept in the use of manipulations to achieve their goals. They may not spare legal expense and use any trick in the book to deflect, stall and take the wind out of the sails of this initiative. Not sure what can be expected from people who are invested in the "Strict Father" framing, deeply believing in "tough love" (often without the love thing) and were mostly incapable of truly apologizing and making sincere amends for their errors?

As for going forward - I'm a firm believer in the idea that the best systems are evolved by input and participation of the whole community and that the wisdom emanating from the collective consciousness, though quite a messy process, at the end of the day surpasses all individual endeavours.

Wishing all peaceful & delightful time with your families and loved ones during this holiday season and beyond.

Amnon & Ilana Barzvi (Chandra & Chandrika)

Survivor VII

I come from a family where my parents always treated me with a lot of love and respect, were always by my side and supported me in all my decisions in Life. I grew up in a very healthy and balanced environment that gave me the strength to depend on myself, have self-confidence, a critical mind and the intuition to know when things were not in harmony with myself. Having said this, I was so shocked to find out how powerful a “cult dynamic” is, one that has really created emotional, physical, financial, psychological and sexual grooming and harm to me.

At the age of 28 years old, after finishing my studies and working on my career for several years, I decided to attain the TTC in the Sivananda organization. And that was my first contact with the Organization.

During TTC the swamis were really friendly, so kind, but I noticed many times that lines were being crossed. I remember going early in the morning to take a glass of tea and former Swami Krishnadevananda, was trying to hide a glass behind him in a very playful mood and was always looking at me in the eyes and smiling at me that felt really uncomfortable. I was getting a lot of attention. During meditation, there have been moments that he was looking at me in the eyes, smiling at me and again felt really uncomfortable and not right. I remember hiding in the yoga Sala to cry, as I had recently separated from my partner. Swami Krishnadevananda was appearing to say nice words to me. Again, it felt like I was getting more attention than the situation was permitting. I remember saying to myself: *“Is he flirting with me? How can a Swami be flirting with me? Swamis do not feel this way. He is just kind. He is not like other men”*.

After this incident, I remember asking Swami Durgananda about sexual abuse in the world of yoga, as previously I had a horrible experience with a yoga teacher outside the organization. She said to me: *“You do not worry about anything in this Organization. Here, you are safe”*. The same evening, she gave a lecture about sexual abuse, reminding us how safe this Organization is. I really felt “safe”. I remember feeling so stupid, even thinking that the attention I was receiving could be a flirting.

After finishing TTC, the world was so confusing to me, “my Swami”, former Swami Atmaramananda, was supportive and always there for me through emails and phone calls. I thought sometimes how strange this was, but there were Swami’s Durganandas’ words, that here you are in a safe place with our swamis. You can trust them.

I decided to attain the Pilgrimage in India. They asked me to pay in cash on arriving in the Ashram in India. They did not accept a payment in Europe through the bank. That meant that I had to carry with me approximately 1,500 euros equal to 12, 700 rupees. It was a very scary and dangerous experience being in India and carrying so much money with me.

During pilgrimage and once I had decided to become a staff, ex-Swami Atmaramanda was caring and close to me, always saying that from now on I was part of Sivananda family. That made me feel so special. During pilgrimage, the girls kept noticing that I was receiving a special treatment and attention from former swami Atmaramanda in comparison with the rest group, but I always thinking that he is only trying to teach me, and he will never harm me.

Since my TTC, one year approximately, I did not have my period. Once I read that you could lose your period through intense asanas practice. So, I asked Swami Atmaramananda about this. He said that he had never heard that before, but so what? *"Not having your period is better. No period, no pain, No period, better sadhana"*. I needed his advice. For many years, I ignored my parents, and the doctors about taking hormonal treatment, and that caused me a very serious health problem for several years. Not having a period for many years in my 30's, caused the prolactin hormone to create a benign tumor in my head, which, if it had been a little closer to the optic nerve, could have affected my vision as it was getting bigger. Having left my career to be a Staff, it had been difficult, as I did not have the money to do all the tests, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and cover the expenses of the doctors that were needed to control the tumor and the extreme fatigue and headaches that I was suffering from.

As I mentioned before, during the Pilgrimage I decided to become a staff. At that time, I spoke only English, but for some reason they decided to send me to Spain after being interviewed by swami Sivadasananda.

Being a staff in Madrid's Center where I could not speak Spanish, I could only "serve" (clean, cook, washing clothes, ironing, etc.) instead of teaching yoga classes and learn more about yoga as I thought I would. It felt really awkward, after having achieved so many things in my life to suddenly ending up only cleaning, cooking, ironing, sleeping on the floor on a very dirty, old, and thin mattress. All these activities are really important in one's life and it was something that I was doing throughout my whole life.

I was supposed to receive 20 euros every week, which I had to ask for and was also made to feel really bad about asking. During my stay at the center, there was one staff with serious mental problems with no treatment. It was really dangerous, as she left the fire on, burnt the food, doing ritual on her own during the night and leaving the candles burn all night. I was so scared about the safety of our lives in the center. Swamis said to me that Swami Sivananda had said that the centers were the perfect places for those people.

My mother came to the center to visit me for two weeks after I really begged and assured them that she is practicing Sivananda Yoga. Swami Sivadasananda noticed that I was sleeping in the same room with her. He advised me never again to sleep in the same room because my Mother had a power mantra, "to take me away from the center". He also suggested to me to repeat always Om Namō Narayanaya when with her, so I would not be affected by her energy and not allow her to affect my sadhana in any way. I remember walking with her one day in the park. She mentioned that she saw I was really exhausted, and that they were not treating me the way they should. I became so angry with her and told her that swami Sivadasananda was right. I said I did not care for her feelings, that she should take care of her own feelings and I do not have to do anything with her feelings. I left her on her own crying and went back to the center feeling so frozen and confused inside.

I was also told by ex-swami Gopalananda, while I was in the Center, that I should not interact with the students because they were rajasic, they had worldly energy that could take me away from my sadhana. I should not be so open and friendly with them. I really felt like they were trying to isolate me from the world.

I used to tie my hair up as we were not allowed to pay attention to our appearance. One day I had a terrible headache and I decided to leave my hair down. When the swami

Gopalananda saw me, he looked at me as if I had done something terrible. He said: *“What is wrong with you and your hair?”*

When on reception sometimes, I used to give receipts when people were paying or booking classes. I was asked and forced, not to give a receipt unless I was asked to by the student. This fact made me go against my values and also put me in danger in the event of an inspection.

One day I was cleaning the fridge, as I was responsible for the kitchen and the food, as well as many other things. I threw a piece of lettuce in the garbage as it had been there for four weeks and I thought it was not good for our health to eat it. Swami Gopalananda got so angry, yelling, ‘who did this’? I ran to the bathroom so scared, embarrassed, humiliated and afraid.

I was constantly tired as I had to wake up at 6:30 in the morning and many days finished all the work at 11.00 at night. I had started to feel exhausted. I remember taking 30’ to rest and even felt embarrassed for that.

During my staying in the Center, I fell in love, something that felt really natural to me. I asked to speak with ex-swami Gopalananda. His face was like I had committed a crime and his advice was to fall in love with Krishna. That was the point, after 8 months, where I left the Center. When I left, I was told that I would not be allowed to come back to any center or Ashram for the next four to six months so as to teach me a lesson as I had not kept my promise to stay as a Staff for a year. I felt really dirty and that I had committed something terrible.

There was always a voice telling me that there was something wrong. Everything made sense to me when I read Julie’s testimony and I started reading about Cult Dynamics, Grooming, Spiritual Bypass, Gaslighting, emotional manipulation, psychological dependence and so on.

I am grateful to life and my parents who gave me all the tools to be strong in life, and I have the power to walk away from “sick” environments. I came out from the center traumatized. I had serious health problems as I was not taking my treatment, was completely confused and guilty from being in love with my husband, and angry with anyone creating noises that prevented me from not being able to “meditate in peace”. I felt guilty for going out with my friends, guilty for enjoying laughing, guilty for going to the cinema, to the beach, for drinking a glass of wine, guilty for taking care of myself as a woman, guilty when I were not doing my sadhana and the list goes on and on.

I was lucky enough to get married to my husband and be supported financially to deal with my health issues, which all started from not having my period and not taking treatment. He supported me financially, too, when unable to find a new job for many years and also lucky enough to have his support to search and find iRest (Integrative Restoration), which has helped me to deal with all my traumas and my integration back into society.

I am currently in the process of becoming an iRest Certified teacher, and still trying after so many years (11 years) to be financially independent, something that I have not yet achieved. I truly believe that a major factor has been the traumas caused from being part of Sivananda Organization.

Survivor VIII: Lydia Tapping (Chandika)

I was involved with the London Centre, first as a student of yoga from around 1993 (when I was 25), through to Teacher Training in Neyyar Dam, south India and later as a 'staff' (unpaid volunteer) member. First at the New York (Sept to December 1997) and then the Montreal Centres and Val Morin Ashram through all of 1998 (when I was 31) during the time Julie was in break down just before she left the organisation.

I did not experience any physical sexual abuse but there was certainly grooming of sorts and brainwashing which I should say I also saw men undergo.

I worked at the Sivananda centres in London, New York and Montreal from September 1997 to the end of 1998 (having spent three or four years before that as a "student", taking classes, attending meditation and volunteer cooking, at the London centre during which time I was gradually brainwashed. Eventually I gave up my job and joining the "staff" - unpaid volunteers - in September 1997 having undertaken the SYVC one month teacher training course in south India in January 1997.

The stories of Swami Vishnudevanada's sexual activities with female staff and students were already know about then, as "staff" (including as I recall the priest at the Val Morin temple) at the New York centres and Val Morin ashram in Quebec, Canada told me about it.

Prior to joining staff, I was a "student" for three or four years at the London centre and became very involved with it, spending evenings cooking for staff and attending weekend meditations and chanting (satsang) on Friday and Sunday evening. I was part of a group of young, educated mainly women who were cajoled and courted by a 'monk', a young (38 year old) Serbian man known then as Swami Sadasivananda, who had fled to the UK to escape his national service in Serbia. His fiancée, Saraswati as she was known, had come with him and was devastated when he took up celibacy vows (sanyasi) and decided to become staff and take refuge in the London centre, which ensured his visa for some 10 years (later he went to the New York Centre). Saraswati later married Reddy (Prahlad). They had one child and lived in the Quebec ashram when I was there. Their relationship has since been described to me as "unhealthy".

I never experienced sexual abuse. Nevertheless, the abuse was also emotional and psychological, given that sex was an obsession and that I was a virgin at the time, even after joining the "staff". Swami Sadasivananda continually preached brahmacharya (celibacy, though the true meaning of this is actually restraint, not just sexual) to us young woman in the prime of our lives and our fertile years, some of whom were already confused by previous outside sexual abuse or broken families, leaving us further confused and angry. He also exhorted us to take the Sivananda Teacher Training Course (TTC), around £1000 plus flights at the time, and consider the centre as our "home". At least two women there during that time had a break-down.

Meanwhile Swami Saradananda, the Acharya (head Swami) at the London centre, extolled the wickedness of westernisation and corporations whilst spending £30,000 a year (the annual salary I gave up to join their staff) leading trips of devotees on "yatras" (pilgrimages) to India and accepting large donations from businessmen to fix the centre roof.

In 1996 I put in an offer to buy a house in London but did not complete the purchase. Some of the preaching on non-ownership and detachment (actually “non-attachment” in the yoga teachings) impacted my decision to do this. It should be noted that the London staff lived in a house in a nice part of London, where properties of those sorts are now worth £1million plus. Instead, I went to India to do my Teacher Training Course. Later that summer (1997), I told Swami Sadasivananda that I wanted to give up my job and join the staff. He went pale when I said this and said it was not his decision (remember, all the time I had been there he had told us the centre was ‘at home’ and at one point said he ‘didn’t want me to do the London marathon’, which I ran in 1996, as in his opinion I needed more yoga) and said that I needed to discuss this with Swami Saradananda. I was annoyed at this as I realised that all his extolling had been words. He was effectively playing a game with us that he didn’t expect us to believe, whilst promoting his image as a spiritual leader to us followers (mainly young women). So I went ahead and asked Swami Saradananda who had never taken any interest in me before. Nor had I encouraged it as she was anyway often travelling, and I saw how she treated her staff: explosive shouting matches of anger and autocratic rules. I once saw her tell a student to wait out on the pavement (sidewalk) at night in the dark because that person had dared to use a block or strap as they do in the Iyengar tradition.

During the months after that, I changed my mind on joining staff and made no arrangement to leave my good job, as a legal librarian in a top London law firm, as I had cold feet. One factor in changing my mind was that Swami Saradananda asked me if I would go to New York centre as staff. Since I’d been deported from the US once before as I’d accidentally bought a one-way ticket to a summer camp, I told her that I didn’t want to go without a visa since I was aware that all staff were posted to countries to work illegally i.e. on tourist visas.

In spite of, in fact I’d say possibly due to (given her autocratic nature) my reluctance (and my compliant nature), Swami Saradananda proceeded to hound me (this was characteristic of her) on giving in my notice. She finally called me at work shouting at me saying “have you given in your notice”. I was so scared I was shaking. And so I gave in my notice and gave up my professional job to join the staff” in September 1997. As soon as I joined the staff, Swami Saradananda asked me to donate money (effectively all my savings as I had told her I had £2000 savings, to the organisation as “most people did” since that’s what Swami Vishnu used to request. I declined to do so. A few weeks later I was sent to New York on a three-month tourist visa.

The organisation used tourist visa status to send staff all over the world, particularly, to Canada, over many years.

When I arrived in New York, I found there I was almost the only staff member and had to do months of backlog of accounts (I thought I’d gone to teach yoga) and got shouted at again by the wife of Sri Nivasan, who ran the New York centre and the Catskills ashram in upstate New York. I understand that Sri Nivasan, an unemotional man at best, is now trying to defend against Julie Salter’s claim by engaging a highly litigious New York lawyer. This does not appear to me an organisation engaged in Sadvichara – right enquiry into truth or compassion.

During the three months I spent at the New York centre, I had my purse stolen by an intruder (probably a student or visitor as there was not security or ability to lock rooms in the centre) and the NYPD came and threatened me with illegal working and deportation. No one on the existing staff helped me. In fact, Swami Padmasananda told me not to be so upset about it in spite of the fact that \$2000 had been spent on the card and of course I was earning no money.

After my three-month tourist visa expired, I returned to London for Christmas after which I was told I was being sent to the Montreal centre, again on a tourist visa of a year's duration. Hence, I was there for all of 1998. Again, there were just two of us, me and a young Frenchman, Swami Gopalananda, doing 17-hour days. People would come and go to the centre, including one young man who was unemployed and spent every day at the centres as Swami Gopala treated him as a protegee, left the kitchen like a bombsite at weekends which I was supposed to clean up. On another occasion, a man who came to the centre infrequently asked for refuge and then very aggressively verbally abused me after I addressed him during the morning satsang and asked him to do some work (karma yoga) at the centre in return for his board.

I was very shaken as it was on the edge of physical abuse, but when I reported this to Swami Kartikeyananda (Julie Salter), and Shambhavi (Sally) one of the women at the Val Morin ashram, they did little to help apart from suggesting that the man in question go to the camp to stay instead. At that time Sally was married to Chandra in whom I also saw classic signs of brainwashing, such as parroting the same dogma of detachment. Also, later a look went over his face that I always remember when, back in London after we had both left the organisation, I told him I was buying an apartment. It was a look of betrayal that I later understood in myself, that we were supposed to eschew all materiality or sex in order to be real yogis, and then someone breaks that code.

The hard work of the Montreal centre was at least mitigated by being able to go to the Val Morin ashram at weekends where both Julie and Reddy, and his wife, Saraswati (London Swami Sadasivananda's former fiancée), along with Shambhavi (Sally) and her husband, Chandra, were based. The couples were 'at war' and the whole ashram barely functioned. Indeed it was a very sad place, as when I got there I learned through whispers, the same whispers that told me that Swami Vishnudevananda had not been celibate and had engaged in sex with some of his female 'devotees' (students and staff), that Julie Salter (she was known as Swami Kartikeyananda) was so traumatised by her time with Vishnudevananda, to whom she had been a devoted secretary / right hand woman, that she was housebound with depression. Later that year, 1998, she left the ashram. Meanwhile, all the other staff (of which there were only maybe three or four) also fought with each other, and there were no guests or activity in this wonderful place.

Later in the year, Swami Gopalananda, a young Frenchman with whom I ran the Montreal centre, said he wanted to be relocated to the ashram (it was just the two of us in the centre) because he said I was apparently 'tempting' him to break his celibacy - brahmacharya- vows (sanyasi), and he had become attracted to me though I had had no indication of this.

Swami Saradananda, who controlled Julie Salter, telephoned me from London centre (though at no other time in the year when I was there did she ever make any contact with me or provide any support) and again shouted at me. She accused me of tempting Swami Gopalananda with my appearance, in spite of the fact that I spent every day exhausted in

a baggy T-shirt, white pants and had had no haircut for a year. She then also reported me to Swami Durgananda, head of the German centre, who on arrival in Val Morin for the summer teacher training, came to 'inspect' me. The year before, when I had first joined the London staff, I mentioned to someone in the reception of the London centre, that I had grown up in the independence war in Rhodesia in the 1970s (in fact my father was killed in that war). Swami Saradananda, who was in the reception at that time, mocked me telling me "there was no war there". She also mocked me after having asked me to sweep and mop the floor of the tea room when I completed the job with the Hoover, saying I didn't know how to clean a floor (I spent my school years working as a cleaner to earn high school pocket money). This was how she regularly treated staff and students while all her meals were cooked for her (as volunteers did every day for all the staff in the London centres, and other centres I believe), and had all her washing done. This imperious attitude was common amongst the swamis and senior staff - Guru-worship, mimicked from Swami Vishnudevanda. There were stories of Swami Swaroopananda who ran the lucrative Bahamas ashram, buying \$100 orange (the colour of sanyasi ie eschewing the material world) silk shirts.

Sometime during my year in Canada, notwithstanding I had had no sexual experience, had never had a boyfriend and was a young woman, I decided I wanted to take vows on celibacy. I am eternally grateful to Julie, who, despite her mental and physical state, stopped me. I left after my Canadian tourist visa ran out at the end of that year when also my mother had come to Canada all the way from Zimbabwe, where she lived, to beseech me to leave.

After I returned to London, I would go to the London centre every evening for some months. I spent hours on the phone trying to track parcels that they had asked me to bring as my luggage allowance from Canada, and again received no support. It was as though I was nothing to them (their little family). I didn't go back any more after that. No former staff member even receives lifetime free yoga classes (given I gave up an £28,000 salary in 1997 and worked 17-hour days for 17 months, that it the minimum I would expect). We just disappear to be replaced by new batches of young people, mainly women, as I saw on the last and only time, I visited the London centre.

It's a long time since I left the organisation, but the psychological and emotional brainwashing has taken many, many years from which to decompress.

I am 52 now. I was 28/29 then, but first exposed to them at 24/25. My mother noted that the London centre, the male monk, Sadasivananda in particular, seemed to pick lone, young women whose families often lived abroad (mine lived in Africa) to groom.

I have never married nor had children and feel as though my fertile years were stolen from me. I heard that Sadasivananda left the organisation a few years ago for a woman. He of course can still have children. He tried to friend me on Facebook but I declined.

And it ruined my career. I've reprised it somewhat but have been in and out of jobs, alongside a peripatetic existence teaching yoga, in the years since.

I have never been able to return to the London centre even though I now live a few roads away (having tried a few times) as I break into tears at memories of what I consider my stolen youth, and seeing the behaviour of other young brainwashed women (and a few men) who still work for free 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. Something the SYVC calls "karma yoga".

I am willing for my testimony to join those of others as part of this enquiry into truth (satya) and am glad to hear that other women have come forward with testimonies in support of Julie.

Lydia Tapping, October 2020

Survivor IX

In 2002, I quit my job and signed up for the February 2002 Sivananda Yoga teacher training at the Bahamas ashram. I loved everything about the ashram. Because of my physical training, I had a background in ballet, the asanas came easily, and I appreciated the disciplined environment. In 2006, I went to India with the European swamis for the Advanced YTT. I noticed the abuse by Swami Durgananda towards the younger swamis but I brushed it off. I was enthralled by her charisma.

2002-2006: I call this the honeymoon phase

2007-2010: I call this the exhilarating period

2011-2014: I call this period, confusion from lying to myself

2015-2019: I call this period: fast track disillusionment and apathy

2002-2006: I loved everything about the ashram, the YTT was great. My balletic background and the fact I had been happiest in a disciplined environment made the ashram way of life appeal to me in its entirety. Because of my physical training the asanas came easily and gave me great pride and pleasure. What I appreciated the most about yoga was the fact that it wasn't just about the body but that it was mostly a spiritual practice. If you were a "real" yogi like us at Sivananda. During this period, I went to the ashram as a guest. I paid my own way and regretted that I could not spend more time there. I opened a Sivananda centre where I lived and was always eager to learn and teach/preach about the benefits of the practice and the pristine qualities of the gurus.

In 2007, I got more deeply involved with the ashram and acted as an interpreter for the YTT (2006) in the Bahamas. I taught guest classes and other week-long courses. The organization had invited me, paid for my airfare, and I felt a sense of belonging all the while teaching abundantly, free of charge. By 2008, I was exhausted from teaching up to 20 Sivananda classes every week and making no money at my yoga centre. I had no support of any kind from the organization, although I was sending many tourists to their ashram.

In 2011, I taught the asana portion of the May 2011 YTT, and by 2015, a total of 9 YTT and one Advanced YTT. I was constantly demeaned by the main teacher in charge, a renunciate known as Sita Chaitanya (she's a swami now). My life revolved around ashram activities. In 2014, I flew from NY's Yoga Journal conference to the Bahamas ashram to teach the May YTT. One day Rukmini Chaitanya called me in, and informed me that there had been complaints about me to the board of directors from a volunteer she did not know. She displayed great unkindness towards me, challenging me and humiliating me without allowing me to explain myself. I felt used and abused. She treated these quite trivial complaints [I had worn a pink T-shirt with Swami V's image on it, instead of the yellow T-shirt] as if I had been guilty of a great crime. I realized that these people did not care about my efforts, my feelings or the time spent promoting them and working for nothing. I had sent at least 30 students and people to the Sivananda ashrams for YTT and many more for yoga vacations. I left her office heartbroken. I wanted to leave but remained to finish teaching one of the groups.

Narayani, one of the only friends I made at the ashram, was responsible for much of the clerical work around YTTs, and one day I saw a post on her corkboard, which said, '\$750

off on Advanced YTT for students from Israel'. This left me confused, in an ashram located in the Bahamas with barely any Bahamian teachers. This favouritism made me distrust the organization even more. (In 2019, Narayani unfriended me when I mentioned I was standing with survivors. I don't know if it's her own doing or if she was told she should do this by the authorities).

In January 2016, I returned to teach the TTC. As the main asana teacher, I was supported by two assistants. One of them was a young woman who had complained about me. I felt as though this had been done on purpose knowing the relationship was tense between us. I felt they wanted to get rid of me, but they knew how much people appreciated me as a teacher and the clientele I brought in.

Finally, in the same month, Rukmini's assistant very harshly indicated that they didn't need me anymore for YTT. No one had spoken to me about it, and I never asked, I felt my time was done. I was determined to just come for short stays and not let their attitude get to me.

The culture of the organisation is one of silencing, and preying on vulnerabilities. As trauma survivors, with low self-esteem, guilt, a saviour complex, worthlessness, etc, they knew exactly how to manipulate us with spiritual bypassing. I came to see eventually, that we were psychologically unwell and many of us marginalized "good students", with low self-esteem, and were easily manipulated. As time went on I saw many as weak and mentally sick, myself included. I thought we were people who had not succeeded in "real world" life, and we ended up at the ashram wasting time and not getting paid to do it.

The two main characters in my downfall were Swami Hridyananda (female) and Rukmini (female). Behind them Swami Swaroopananda and Brahmananda supervised everything, and these two were just doing their dirty work. The female Chaitanyas received bad treatment in plain view. The male swamis and male Chaitanyas made no attempt to hide their despicable behaviour. Swami Swaroopananda was rude to some of the female Chaitanyas, especially Janeshwari, no matter what she did. It was unbearable to watch. Swami Brahmananda, always smiling, but also operating under the ancient notion that women have to be subordinate to men.

The Caribbean ashram has operated for almost 50 years yet had few teachers from the region. The one black male student I had who started to teach at the ashram was gone by the following season and when I asked why, I was told some people complained about him. There are so many bad asana teachers at the ashram, guests complain all the time. They could have had one good Bahamian teacher.

When I first heard the lecture about karma, I was fascinated. It made sense. I adhered to the entire doctrine of karma for a time. The Karma philosophy satisfied me. I thought that I must have done something nasty in a past incarnation to have become a victim in this life. It all made sense and supported my healing. It was a story I told myself to appease my hurting body, mind and soul. But then I realized it was placing a burden of guilt and shame on my mind unnecessarily. With those negative emotions I was never going to heal. This realization came to fruition very recently as a liberation.

When I read Julie's testimony in 2019, I was in shock for her. The positive for me though was it showed me how hypocritical this organization is and how I was finished with giving my energy. I was cowardly and didn't have the guts to quit on my own, but the lies from the organization snapped me out of this illusion of fake spirituality. In December 2019 I

informed them I was never returning. I am very grateful to Julie and the others who came forward, for freeing me.

At this point I am content with everything going on in my life. I wish for Julie and all the other victims to get closure. I am so grateful not to have this spiritual story controlling my mind anymore. I have time and space in my mind to do other things that I'm interested in and I focus on that. Just living a balanced life, and importantly having an inner life without the crutch of man-made dogma or beliefs. I feel freer than ever before.

Speaking to you, Josna, has been a most grounding event since Julie's testimony and before. It allowed me to express every detail of all that stuff that had been weighing on my mind for so long. What a great relief you provided. I am still, to this day, reaping the benefit of our conversation and it just keeps giving. Thank you!

Survivor X

It was purely by happenstance of the internet that I found the organization while leaving a tough work position. It had been a post which required 90 plus hours of labor a week in a high demand, low reward environment. At the end of our work season I collected my salary and went online looking for a retreat. Googling yoga on the beach, Sivananda Bahamas was the top result. What seemed a bit of kismet at the time is now recognized as their intentionally fostered web presence, SEO and marketing at work. The work study program enticed me, sold with images of happy volunteers on the beach doing yoga in paradise. After some thought, I had made a three-month commitment. I was at the retreat from the end of September 2013 through March 2014. I was then at Sivananda headquarters at Val Moran from November to December 2015, for a 30-day TTC program.

When I arrived at the Bahamian ashram, I was assigned a Karma Yoga position in the reception office. It was a very busy environment. Constant calls, digital communications and guests on site and interdepartmental relations needing attending. The communications infrastructure was poor, adding an extra layer of stress. My day began immediately after the morning Satsang and required a working breakfast. The time difference between time zones however, meant that mornings started with a volume of calls from clients who had been waiting, as well as assisting vendors and construction crews, which were on site my entire stay. Work then continued until the evening yoga session, at which attendance was mandatory and lasted two hours. Immediately after, was the evening meal and then the mandatory Satsang. Only once during my time did I actually have the free time to enjoy their world class beach. The environment was high demand and low sleep.

Satsang ran late and it was then to bed, as we were woken very early each morning. To further add to the workload, Swami Brahmananda assigned me the task of taking attendance for the Karma Yogis during both daily Satsang. This meant that I was unable to relax or decompress as I was asked to monitor staff. Often Swami or other permanent staff asked me to monitor staff members. This meant that other karma yogis viewed me as Swami's cop or a snitch. During staff meetings Swami B would ask for the attendance sheets from me. Those marked absent would be asked about the issue in front of everyone. Several times staff member disputed my observation and Swami B would take their side. Staff pulled me aside marking the manner in which I was disrespected through this daily show. It was humiliating and gave me a low level of esteem, being constantly dismissed. Paired with the lackey status I had been given, there were negative social repercussions for me, and it was isolating. The heavy workload and alienation from other staff led to a very lonely and exhausted state.

This schedule meant that I had no free time. While other karma yogis were enjoying the beaches and having some free time, I only made it into the water once during the many months I was onsite. In emails with Ishwari, the Israeli head of our department, and personal conversations with Swami Brahmananda, I asked for a shift which would allow a bit of free time. I described the stress I was under as the job entailed high expectations. I requested time off several times in communications, only to be enrolled in their Positive Thinking course. My course participation was monitored by Ishwari and one other renunciate. It was insulting, to say the least, that I was now required to take their foundational indoctrination course hoping to change my thinking simply for requesting basic workplace considerations. In almost six months there were no days off given, with

constant early morning attendance required. Despite my requests, my schedule remained the same my entire stay. In fact, Ishwari and Swami B offered me the role of office manager and asked that I carry even more responsibility, finding me valuable. It would have allowed them to fire, a local Bahamian woman currently salaried in that position. I refused.

The support I received in my position was inconsistent. Training was given in a baptism by fire manner, and as new Karma yogis arrived, I was instructed to teach them and correct them. Several times I appealed to Narayani for support, because of the high demand and the fact that I had no personal or rest time. Nothing changed. On the few occasions when I was crying because of overwhelming stress levels, she would not comfort. When I asked her about this, her response was that, things go away with time and she was just going to let things wash away. I was hurt that there was no support or empathy, just an attitude that things will pass if we ignore them. There was a passive nature to the psychology taught which was often realized in dismissive actions.

We were told that Karma Yoga was selfless service without reward. The work, if rendered in the correct mindset having been properly purified, would liberate a soul. This was exploited to ask for free labor the quality of which was then heavily critiqued. The dialogue of impurity promoting an image to individuals filled with their inherent flaws suggesting that karma yogis would never be clean enough to liberate themselves in this life was pushed constantly. Put your head down, work, pray and hope you can be something someday was the message. "Be Good, Do Good, Meditate, Purify...", "Bear insult, bear injury, highest sadhana." Was chanted and written throughout the materials of the organization a sort of motto. When flu spread around the ashram, many staff got sick, some given quarantine and rest. When I got sick on top of exhaustion it hit me hard. When I asked Narayani if I could take rest, she replied that I would have to pay to see a doctor and get verification that I was indeed ill, or fly back home. It hurt me deeply that after months of free hard work I was not allowed an afternoon of rest when ill, whilst others were given time to heal.

The assaults began when the new karma yogi was assigned to the office. I was told to help train him. He began saying things like "Bitch", "Fuck Off", and the most common phrase, "Shut the fuck up". When the office manager popped in during one of the abusive shifts, I pointed it out to her. She looked at him and he said loudly, "She needs to learn to shut the fuck up!". Narayani, the manager told me to just ignore him and left. I was then supposed to work for many hours alone with this individual in a small space with him having seen my concerns dismissed. I felt extremely vulnerable and isolated. She was my manager and if she would not protect then who would. He continued to say abusive and vulgar things to me during shifts. He would sometimes stand up or walk towards me while being angry. I was supposed to be completely silent and not provoke him. It was terrifying, wondering what would make him fly off the handle. It would be me who was blamed, I knew. Narayani, the office manager needed to fly to Florida to renew her visa and I soon realized I was left entirely alone. He flew off the handle the first evening during closing. I was supposed to count the money and close the office, but his verbal aggression and physical posturing left me so scared that I locked myself in the back office, for which I knew I had a key but not him. The accountant came by to see me. She was angry with me for not having finished some work. Rather than help me when I explained the situation, she left angry. It was such a lonely feeling now that two women, who were wearing yellow, had sent me the message that I was on my own. Sadly, they were also two of my allies in the

organization, so now I could clearly see how things were. The hierarchy also placed men above women. This became extra clear during the process which followed. A process in which he was interviewed and not I. I was publicly demoted and faced some social shaming. I was treated as hysterical and asked to leave. Swami Brahmanada sat me down and said, "This time you have gone too far. It is time to go home". That was the organization's method of handling my abuse complaint. To this day, that male karma yogi enjoys serving within the organization. It was myself the reporter, who was the problem to be removed.

When I was in that back room, I felt a deep isolation. To be standing in an office located in the middle of a five-acre property with hundreds of people around you and no one coming to your aid, is a cold shell of space to stand. A space within, one which can chill a person's nervous system. At the ashram I found myself hoping to learn root practices of ancient heart-based techniques designed to elevate, but instead realizing I was actually in a patriarchal hierarchy, which would neither value nor hear women. I knew this action would be detrimental to me, but I simply didn't feel safe around this angry man who spewed abusive and demeaning language daily, flew many times into anger and then gaslit me in his approach with managing staff. I knew I would be blamed for the harm I suffered. To this day, the organization has continued in that vein. Their response to the investigation has been to wage PR offensives and spread rumors discrediting those who have come forward. Rather than validate and listen, the response has been abusive and re-traumatizing for those who have engaged. The organization's new policies are reflections of that same approach. They leave punitive loopholes in their policy, which state that should a report be deemed "frivolous", the individual bringing a harm forward could be punished. Most likely that means, like myself, humiliated in public demotion and being asked to leave. In speaking, my intentions are to share that the current leadership will not be able to change their response, their discriminatory and unsafe practices are institution wide and persist deeply within the community to this day. There are more like me and I hope they will know that they are not alone, it was to no fault of their own that these things occurred. This organization has caused deep harm to many using a sick psychology, which assigns blame on the survivors and holds no accountability for the abusers.

Having been in a very visible role of responsibility it was immediately noticed when I was demoted to the kitchen. People were literally pointing at me and laughing as if it was some kind of joke to be demoted in this way. It was complete humiliation. Some staff wouldn't look me in the eye. I even had to serve the man who had abused and scared me. It could not have been a more public demotion. I had begged to stay, and had been given the kitchen post. It was unbearable. I changed my flight tickets, costing me an extra \$400 and additional costs for hotel accommodation. These expenses did not include the other thousands spent on travel and insurance to be present and working for the organization.

Further reflections:

Since our last session, Josna, I have been reflecting on this whole experience and I have come to realize that the worst thing about the Sivananda experience for me was the psychological abuse. The psychological abuse occurs in the name of spirituality.

I was made to work for free, long hours without even time off to rest when I was unwell in the name of future liberation.

The manner in which I was asked to visit a doctor at my expense in order to certify and prove to the leadership of the ashram that I was indeed sick and needing rest was shocking in its callous nature. No recognition of my contributions to merit concern enough for a few hours rest. Through this so-called selfless service of karma yoga, i.e., free labor, people's boundaries are eroded. The appalling behavior of those in charge, the way in which they shout and humiliate people who might be struggling, is considered to be good for our spiritual growth. They do not show care or compassion, and in this way, they teach people not to value and maintain themselves. This is how the verbal, psychological and physical abuse perpetrated by those in charge is normalized, and people's self-respect eroded. As boundaries erode, more egregious behavior is allowed and often those being berated also lose a sense of where true respect should lie. This is deeply damaging and requires much work after individuals have left and realize the detriment of the psychology being peddled. The trespasses against individuals, practiced in the name of spiritual elevation, are in fact abuses. Many times I had the dogma explained to me that only the guru can know why he is abusing you, and it is for your best benefit and done out of a deep love we cannot understand. This is nonsense and rhetoric, which serves to give abuses an environment which enables trespasses against humans at deeply damaging levels. In this way, people are groomed for narcissistic abuse, through boundary violations that are sanctified in a so-called spiritual community.

I have also come to realize that the dynamics of abuse were gendered. Certainly, as a woman, I was treated differently to the man who was abusive towards me. The mediation comprised of the person in charge talking to the perpetrator, the man who verbally abused me, on several occasions and who physically threatened me by coming close up to me and shouting close to my face, and on one occasion, cornering me in a small office room. They did not talk to me or hear my side of the story, they simply told me to calm down and take some magnesium, and then they demoted me. Such was the gendered dynamics of abuse.

It was not only at the Bahamas ashram that such oppressive dynamics of abuse were in place, at Val Moran too this culture prevailed. There, too, the philosophy that we were taught was that you have to work hard and purify yourself, through service, karma yoga (free labor). The same devaluations and cold critiques were also present breaking people down. If you struggled, you were seen as weak and, in this way, people come to believe that they were less valuable and somehow deficient. It did a lot of damage. That is why I left, and I am glad that I did.

An incident which troubled me greatly was the time when a young man, a karma yogi, disappeared. Management did not seem to care to do anything about this matter. It was only when another karma yogi shouted and demanded that something had to be done that the management eventually, and reluctantly allowed community acknowledgment and action. Many of us were distraught and the management did not offer any kind of support or debrief. As far as they were concerned, it was business as usual. A young man had disappeared, the sea and aerial search did not manage to locate him. And yet the director could not express anything to the staff and ashram community, it was simply not mentioned and left to dissipate. There was no value expressed for the missing volunteer nor grief shown via the leadership. The message received as a volunteer staff was deeply disrupting. I am glad I am no longer associated with an inhumane organization which pedals spirituality to garner free labor. They run profitable resort and retreat destinations funded off the backs of people's vulnerabilities and exploited labor while

protecting only their inner circle. The denial and abuses the board has shown the survivors has only solidified that this is an unsafe organization for females, and it has no desire to change.

Survivor XI

This is a summary of abuses I have experienced personally and seen and heard about: Neglect of duty of care, knowingly exposing people to harm and potential harm.

In 2004 a temporary summer Latvian Karma Yogi received an extremely serious dog bite while under the care of the French Ashram. Swami Kailas refused to make a formal complaint about the dog's owner, despite the Police asking her to do so. She refused to send anyone to the hospital in spite of being asked to do so by the Fire Brigade in attendance at the scene. I was present to witness both refusals. I understood her first concern was to disengage the Ashram's responsibility, displaying total unconcern for the life and well-being of the girl.

September 2011, TTC London. A temporary US Karma Yogi had a serious accident in the kitchen which involved the end of her forefinger being seriously damaged in a blender. Seeing what looked like an injury requiring surgical intervention, and also working in the kitchen, I asked her why she wasn't getting better care than just a plaster. She replied that Swami Kailas had refused to pay for her medical care, saying the injury was her own fault. But Swami Kailas had also insisted the girl continue to work in the kitchen (with her bleeding, suppurating, open wound) if she wanted to stay at the London Centre. Having nowhere else to go until her flight home she complied, risking infection and permanent damage to her finger.

Suppression of whistle blowers Ignoring sexual impropriety and complaints of sexual impropriety by Swamis. Exposing students to continued sexual predation by those in authority.

Shortly after I made the noisy and vigorous complaint about the shameful refusal of duty of care at the time of the dog bite incident, I was barred from teaching in the Paris Centre.

In 2011, I complained about the sexual impropriety of a senior Swami at the Ashram towards myself and other younger more vulnerable students. Swami Kailas played out a little charade in her office of pretending to take it seriously, but I was basically lied to and dismissed, *'Oh this never happened before, measures have been taken, this is nothing further to do with you'*. I had direct reports of other people making complaints about this Swami's predation, those complaints were dismissed as 'trouble making'. No measures were taken, the Swami continued at the Ashram for another 7 years and students continued to be exposed to him.

Exploitation and abuse of power. Over work and sometimes insufficient rest and sleeping conditions. Too much responsibility. Needing to sleep seen as proof of laziness, lack of spiritual evolution and negativity.

In 2011, in Orleans with no training, no experience and no support, I was put in sole charge of the professional Ashram kitchen, supplying 300 vegetarian and vegan meals a day, for a month, with responsibility for hygiene rules, stock, menus, overseeing clean up and preparation and managing a constantly changing, transitory chaotic staff of temporary Karma Yogis, most with no experience whatsoever. I was given a leaking tent to sleep in despite doing 12-hour days. I asked for proper help or at least regular helpers. It was refused. I was being set up to fail, to be criticized and put down. Needing to sleep was seen as a proof of laziness, a lack of spiritual evolution. To this day I still hear about

how I failed by not being nice enough to the Karma Yogis. After I left, they engaged a professional cook.

Yoga's mission was used to justify excessive and unethical methods - Charging guests for a four bed room and putting down four more mattresses in the room. *'So many people are coming to Yoga for guidance, we have to accommodate them.'*

Charging teacher trainees in tents extra for the loan of a blanket. Bullying, abusive criticism and humiliation was justified with Gaslighting, *'You need to work on your ego'* or *'Refusing to submit your ego to my will, is Tamasic'*. Complaints and reports by other Karma Yogis and staff of 12 or 15 even 16 hour working days.

To me it seemed that the whole business model was predicated on breaking French employment laws.

The impact on me has been outrage, disgust, fear, scorn and amusement, at such hypocrisy and moral vacuity. I made sure everyone I spoke to knew of the abuses I had witnessed. I told everyone I ever worked with or hung out with what I had seen and heard, and to me that felt useful and needed. People should know such things before they commit their lives to Karma Yoga or hand over proceeds from the sale of their property, or other such life changing decisions.

What I think now: The reaction by the organization to the Julie Salter revelations is, to me, the most shocking thing about the whole story. Organisations are made up of people and people inevitably make mistakes, bad choices, wrong decisions, miscalculations etc. In 40 or so years of its history Sivananda has made its fair share of mistakes. Mistakes can be repaired, owned up to, corrected, mended, forgiven, and moved on from.

But it's not a mistake when you lie and manipulate to cover up malpractice in order that you may continue unhampered to commit abuses. That is corruption. If your business model is based on law-breaking and you have too much to lose, your organisation is predatory and dangerous.

Considering itself subject to no regulation other than its own financial imperatives and its delusional self-aggrandizement makes an organisation potentially criminal. Such an organisation should be held to account. It's our duty of care to other potential victims to make sure that it is stopped. Laws and regulations exist in France to prevent it. I hear the Paris Centre is closing. This, if true, is a good thing.

Yoga and the teachings are brought into disrepute, not by the weaknesses of individual swamis, nor by whistle blowers, not by the press, not by the French authorities trying to hold Sivananda to account, but by the decision of the EMB to lie, fabricate and mislead in an attempt to ensure the survival of a culture of impunity and abuse .

As my great friend S., feminist and Yogi, says, *'Making people practice Yoga at the feet of a rapist is perversion and misogyny at its finest'*.

Survivor XII

I practice Sivananda Yoga and have been part of their ashrams for many years. I must say I have gained a lot through Yoga and the Sivananda community.

I was a witness to psychological abuse, and was subjected to it myself in one of the ashrams in India. The first thing I experienced was Swami P's callousness when I arrived. She told me that if I could not reach the ashram by 5.30 pm, I could stay in a nearby hotel. I arrived at 6.20 pm because the roads were bad and my bus from Haridwar arrived late. I apologized but she did not utter a word, just gestured me to go. I was also taken aback by the tone of what was written on the notice board as it was not polite and assumed that karma yogis were there to laze around and have a good time. All the notices around the ashram had a similar tone.

Students were not treated well. Two were thrown out of the ashram without refund of money.

Their crime was that they asked her perfectly reasonable questions during a lecture. To accuse them of being rebels and creating negativity among other students was an exaggeration and abuse of power. Asking them to vacate overnight with no opportunity to say good-bye to others created a negative feeling in the entire ashram. One student left after this; others felt they had paid too much to leave.

We karma yogis were also treated in a demeaning manner. One was asked to vacate overnight, and no reasons were given and we were forbidden to talk about her. When two karma yogis failed to turn up to a meeting, as they were not aware it was on, they were shouted at. One was told to leave immediately but the other was allowed to stay, perhaps because she was a non-Indian. It was very clear to us that they were just being bullied and intimidated for something very trivial. Eventually they asked for forgiveness, even though not at fault, so they could stay as karma yogis. The foreigner reasoned that she could not change her tickets to go home and would rather say sorry. She saw it as humbling her ego and thought that Swami P was testing her. I was not convinced. No one should ask for forgiveness for a mistake they have not committed, and besides, publicly shouting was beneath the stature of a Swami and head of the ashram.

The next week I had my own experience. After the morning walk, not knowing when the staff meeting was scheduled, we would come directly into the staff room. After the staff meeting, I was called by the teacher and told that my trousers were not clean, and this was not an example to set in front of the students. My white trousers were not that dirty, but being told off made me feel ashamed and I became paranoid about Swami P shaming me in front of everyone.

The next week, she did the same to one of the TTC students (trousers not clean) and asked a fellow karma yogi to let the student know. Swami P never did these dirty jobs herself, she pitted the Karma Yogis against one another.

Another time I was asked get a student from the dorm to do her share of karma yoga. When I found out she was running a high fever, I told Swami P and offered to do her share of karma yoga. Swami P insisted that I bring the TTC student and ask her to finish the karma yoga. I did so and ensured she mopped the floor while I supervised, and Swami P supervised me. I felt horrible. This was not compassion. This was bullying and absolute power play.

She insisted that students were not to meet a (male) Swami who was coming to teach a Bhagavat Gita class in the veranda outside his room. As Karma yogis, we were supposed to keep a watch on this. Students continued to meet the Swami, none of them were following the rules. Swami P would not let Swami H know that he should not meet the students, that job was given to Karma Yogis. One day two karma Yogis were 'caught' talking to Swami H. The next day we were all shouted at, and what she said came as a shock to us. I clearly remember her saying, 'Even if he is a Swami, do you girls understand, he is a man? He can do anything. You girls don't blame me if something happens to you if he takes you to his room.' It was as though the karma yogis were morally corrupt and were flirting with the Swami. This was shaming and victim blaming, and if she did not trust someone associated with the Sivananda ashram for two decades, why get him for the class at all?

I had signed up as a Karma Yogi for four months, but I could no longer stand this harassment, and the narrow minded and claustrophobic place. I spent a few more weeks as a karma yogi at the ashram and everyday felt like walking on eggshells not knowing what Swami P would accuse you of next.

When I show the pictures of the ashram to my friends, they say how lucky I was to have been there. Only I know what an abusive, traumatic and horrifying experience it was. Many others share my feelings. I had made up my mind to write this, attach the pictures and send it across to Prahlada, who I found out was her boss. I was naïve and did not know that the rot runs deeper.

Thank god I did not write to him.

Survivor XIII

I first knew Sivananda in 2005 in Montreal where I was a student. I occasionally went to meditation and to the activities, but I did not like yoga. Then up to 2013, I used to go to the Montreal and Paris centre, but only to participate in Satsang and some other activities. I was a karma yogi between 2013-2015, in the Paris and Orleans Ashrams, and I also gave yoga classes there. Then in the fall of 2013, I became a karma yogi in both the Paris centre and the Orleans ashram. In July 2014 I did my TTC in India, and immediately after this I went to the Orleans Ashram where I was staff for a few months.

I woke at 5 am and began work at 8, going until 8 PM and sometimes until 10 PM. I worked all day with no rest for 10 days running. I came in between two TTCs [one was ending and a new one was starting]. I had to wash the rooms and toilets, iron the sheets, cut vegetables. I could not do yoga classes because I was exhausted. I saw that many karma yogis were in the same state of exhaustion. I did not have to pay to be a karma yogi. However, some karma yogis had to pay 350/450 per month to work the same hours as me.

Swami Kailasananda had a way of constantly questioning what I did in my teaching, even though I was obeying what other Swamis had told me. I found this humiliating and I felt bullied. I was also aware of inappropriate sexual relationships, in a place where everyone was asked to practice celibacy. My friends told me that a person [who was in a relationship with one of the swamis] was trying to kiss them and came into their rooms to give them hugs.

In 2018, everyone was asked to participate in the building of an Indian Temple (800 000 euros), and I gave 120 euros. In exchange, I received a mala, but it broke and when I asked for it to be replaced, the receptionist said yes, but Swami Kailasananda refused. She said I had to learn to give without receiving. I felt that this was ungenerous of her, and felt humiliated by her refusal.

On December 10th, I read Julie Slater's comments on one of my friend's Facebook pages. Before going back to the country where I lived, I was called by Swami Nityananda and ordered not to comment on VD on Facebook because she said it was all lies. This was clearly an attempt to silence me.

The impact of these revelations has been great on me. I was, and I am still devastated. I just could not believe it. I did not doubt for a second, but some of my world collapsed. I was born in Asia, but arrived in France when I was a child. I had a life full of challenges. Sivananda and yoga was a place where I thought I was safe.

I have cried a lot and I am still devastated. I still take classes [zoom] because I have come so far and the only yoga I like is Sivananda. I find it complete and really relaxing.

I have seen many people humiliated in the organization, and I feel that Swami Kailasananda although quite cold at first can exert a deadly fascination. She plays with you, but once she does not need you anymore, or has "had enough", she ignores you. She has left many people distressed.

I saw many people over the years literally fall into depression because she started to ignore them.

Survivor XIV

I have decided to let my voice be heard.

I arrived at the ashram for the first time in the early 2000's. I came with my own childhood pain and wounding from experiences within organized religion. I was conscious that I was seeking healing but had no clue as to the enormity of the iceberg of trauma I would eventually find hidden within the depths of my subconscious mind.

Over a couple of decades, once or twice per year, I attended Satsang, classes, workshops and long trainings at many locations within the organization.

I want to mention how easy it ALWAYS was to ground myself in every space. I had the sense that I knew what to expect. The schedule, the meals, the daily gatherings of like-minded individuals for Satsang and Kirtan, the asana class always with peaceful familiarity. The 'working' together with one another in karma yoga in this co-creation that keeps the appearance of the community nice and functioning. The moments of self-care and relaxation. This was a comfortable container of activity with well-established boundaries that I could read about in print, hear about in descriptions from others, learn about in Satsang and trust to be in place always. There was very little uncertainty. My mind was able to relax in a container with this level of certainty.

The practice of brahmacharya was interesting to me. I had never before heard it suggested that one should sublimate sexual energy. I had no idea what that meant. I did learn over time that being in a container where people were intending this practice, meant that incidences of emotional co-dependency and objectification were lessened in my experience.

At some point, I received a spiritual name. My name is one of the incarnations of Durga, the divine aspect of the feminine that removes one's lower nature, functions to help us learn who we are not. I didn't understand the relevance then, but I have recognized this quality in me – to really dig in – to get to the very heart of subconscious conditioning and figure out who I am not.

After many visits to the organization, I was approached by someone in orange robes for a relationship and sex. I was not close to this person, but I knew enough to know that he was a Priest rather than a Swami. I was taken aback and unsure how to respond. I was used to this level of objectification in the world, but my years at the ashram had created a foundational level of safety here – safety in my mind that equated to being free from experiences of having my body objectified.

And yet, here it was, happening.

I spoke with someone in authority who assured me that priests are not held to the same standard of Brahmacharya/celibacy, and that I was not to worry. My mind felt disillusioned and confused by the entire situation. It was many years before I returned to that particular location within the organization, though I continued to visit others.

Over time, with my experience at several locations, I started to recognize a certain sensation of stillness that existed within the energy of each property. It was palpable. No matter which location – there was a reverence my body recognized and responded favorably to. There was a level of safety and security that allowed my body to deeply relax. I felt as if I was FINALLY able to take a deep breath, after decades of holding onto so much

angst within my worldly existence. This recognition occurred after my experience with the priest.

In 2019, many things changed for me. Emergence of a repressed memory of very early childhood trauma marked the beginning of my year.

The realization hit me that if my body could store such detailed memory within the depths of my subconscious, what trauma could others be holding within them unknowingly?

I returned to Sivananda, and noticed something happening that had disturbed me before. In the past, since I didn't recognize why I felt disturbed, I had dismissed it. I noticed the relationship between teacher (in orange) and student (in yellow). Tradition within the Sivananda lineage is that prior to renouncing worldly life and taking vows of Sanyasi, one spends many years wearing yellow, calling themselves by a name ending in Chaitanya and in service to their Teacher/Guru/Swami.

In Sanskrit, the word Chaitanya means 'consciousness' or 'spirit' or 'intelligence' or 'sensation.' It is the pure consciousness or the cosmic intelligence, the consciousness that knows itself and also knows others. Yet, despite this description that suggests some sort of innate inner wisdom – someone who has accepted themselves as a Chaitanya is expected to follow to the letter the direction of their teacher. Not doing this or having a dissenting opinion is viewed as a 'rearing of the ugly head of ego' and is highly discouraged. On one end of the spectrum, this looks like long hours and exhaustion in karma yogis who believe they must do as they are told. At the other end, we find testimony of sexual abuse survivors such as Julie.

Marking the end of 2019, was Julie Salter's December post on Facebook. As I read her words and the testimony of others in the thread, I recognized that the #MeToo movement was exposing yet another layer of betrayal that I believe to be an inherent part of any hierarchical system. Their revelations hit me like a ton of bricks. I believe the truth of the testimony of Julie and the other survivors without a shadow of doubt in my mind.

Societal conditioning and upbringing generally groom us to rely on the direction and wisdom of others rather than seeking internally for answers. We are also taught that it is the highest badge of honor to give up oneself in servitude. Selfishness, self-absorption and narcissist behaviors are egoic traits to be avoided at all cost. To say "no" to a parent, teacher, boss or wise-elder is right up there with the ultimate sin. How many of us were instructed to kiss or hug that relative we felt repulsed by whether we liked it or not?

When were we ever taught to learn boundaries for our bodies?

When already traumatized individuals are groomed to serve a guru; when the act of questioning what they have been told to do is discouraged and proclaimed as an egoic action to be avoided; when one is never pointed in the direction of one's own inner wisdom; when one has formulated the conclusion that doing what one is told is the price to be paid (in any hierarchical relationship – whether this be guru/student or boss/employee etc) – how could that person ever feel empowered to say "no" to a request for sexual favors?

Once entrapped in the secrecy of this confusing act of betrayal by one's guru – I can only imagine the conflict, followed by years of processing and healing that would need to occur in order to find the courage to come forward.

Armed with this knowledge, I knew I had a choice to make. I could lie down in a lump of despair as a victim to my life and the world of duality, or I could take a more empowered position.

My belief is that it is possible for the Sivananda teachings to be imparted without the traditional guru/student hierarchy. It is also my belief that when teachers point students toward their inner guru that this is where the magic happens. People become empowered rather than disempowered. I feel that those changes would impart the yogic teachings in a way that would be even more powerful toward the ultimate goal of achieving Samadhi. I think that these changes would create a much safer container for the self-inquiry, healing and growth of all those who partake.

Survivor XV

My personal story is perhaps not exactly in the centre of the investigation, since it does not involve a staff member of ISYVC but took place in the ashram of Neuville-aux-Bois, France, during my TTC in July 2017.

I was sharing my room with a man named R. We had a good relationship, he was 40-45 years old, French, and the father of 2 children. After the first three weeks of the TTC, at the end of the afternoon he came back to the room after a day out (Friday, our "free" time day). I could see he was drunk, which was quite unexpected in that context.

I was writing letters. I asked him if he was OK, if he needed help. He began telling me that he hated being with me, because I was not like him. "You are not a real man, you behave like a woman, you are gay, I can't stand it". It reminded me of being bullied at school, but at first, I could not believe that it was happening here, in an ashram, during a TTC, after three weeks of living together peacefully. So, I pretended not to hear or understand. But then he took hold of me, and began to be violent in his words, and I was afraid he would beat me. I had to flee and hide myself in the little forest of the ashram, but he was too drunk to follow me, so I guess he just went to bed and slept. I stayed in the forest for hours. I missed the meal and the Satsang, but I could not go back to my room because I was scared to find him there and to sleep in a bed next to him.

It felt unreal. I could not believe I was being harassed again for being gay, even if I had never talked with him about my sexual orientation. I also felt stupid because he was drunk, so maybe it was not so serious, and he would not remember the following day. The TTC was almost over and I didn't want to make trouble in the ashram. I knew of rulings about harassment in the ashram, but I thought it was for more serious cases, such as protecting people from rape and abuse, and especially women. So, I just spoke about it with another participant of the TTC but could not address the subject with someone in a position of responsibility. I didn't want to make trouble, and we are told to bear insult and injury, that as yogis we are supposed to be "above" that, and, after all, he had not beaten me up, just insulted and threatened, and I was able to flee. So, I kind of made excuses for him and finished the TTC, keeping everything inside me.

I don't know if it's relevant for your (very important and valuable) investigation. I don't want to waste your time. I wish maybe we were less "brainwashed", and I could find immediate support from the staff/team and dare to speak to them. Most of the fellow participants to the TTC were like me, thinking we should bear inside everything, so it was not possible to really share it. I felt ashamed, and wanted to forgive him and forget what happened. Writing this email, I feel my body shaking again. I was bullied all through my teenage years, so it triggered it. If I had not that kind of past, maybe I would have just left him drunk and ignored his insults and threats.

Survivor XVI

I was ISYVC staff member 5+yrs between 1989-1994. I was 23 when I joined staff following Teachers Training. While on staff I experienced emotional and psychological abuse, some sexual harassment, overwork, medical neglect, and my time on staff had long-lasting financial repercussions in my life after leaving the organization. I also observed a lot of manipulation, deceit and secrecy, from leadership and senior staff of the organization.

During my Teacher's Training Course, I slipped on a damaged wooden step, fell and hit my head. It was pretty clear that I had a concussion. My head was spinning, and I was really tired for many days. There was no medical follow-up, no doctor, although I was looked after by the staff at the time. I was determined to carry on with the TTC. I could not do much of the classes, and during the lectures needed to lean against the wall, struggling. The swami who was the main teacher, made fun of me in front of the entire group, saying that hitting your head was a message that your ego was getting too big. It was awful, demeaning, hurtful and embarrassing.

I had other injuries during my time on staff, cutting my hand, and spraining my ankle, which all happened as a result of accidents. I was taken to get medical attention when injured, but there was no set system for handling medical situations in the ashram, and there was no sense of it being ok to be "off duty" if you were sick or injured. You were expected to do your best to be available to work. Although not verbalized, it was understood that the yoga and the "yogic life" were our healthcare, and we were supposed to be able to be strong and healthy through those practices.

Moving or transferring staff to another ashram or centre anytime, at a moment's notice was presented as a karma yoga practice and also devotion. If you were truly a detached yogi, you would be ready to serve anywhere anytime. I knew that often these transfers though had less to do with the work of organization and more with preventing romantic involvements or staff getting fed up and leaving the organization abruptly.

When I was a resident at the NYC centre (1987-88), another resident (who was much older than me) hit on me repeatedly despite me being clear I was not interested in being sexual with him. I felt like there was no recourse for me, like speaking with centre director about it, no one ever discussed these types of situations. It was assumed everyone was practicing celibacy in the centre.

When I was staff at the Bahamas ashram, there were two other male staff members there with me. It was during off-season, so we were the only 3 staff running the place for about 3 months. These two guys continually made derogatory sexual remarks to me and I never felt safe around them. They never touched me inappropriately. These two staff members also made sexual remarks about women who came for yoga classes from nearby resorts (behind their back but within my earshot). I found this to be very uncomfortable and upsetting, and now I understand that it was a form of sexual harassment.

There were a LOT of secret sexual relationships involving monastics, too many to list. At the same time, there was always a lot of pressure for the staff to take celibacy vows; it was considered a really important part of the spiritual path and being a swami was kind of a status symbol within the organization.

The senior swami who ran the Yoga Ranch and NY and Chicago Centers was sexually involved with his assistant (who was a novice/brahmachari, also an avowed celibate) for several years. They often spent time in the swami's private residence (trailer) just the two of them. It felt awkward and inappropriate, but no one ever said anything or questioned it. This swami, a senior disciple of Swami Vishnu, was a big authority, and had a very unpredictable, explosive temper, and generally the staff were afraid of making him upset. The two of them revealed they were a couple and left the organization when she got pregnant.

I left the organization shortly after this swami left. While he was a scary abusive authority figure, he was at the same time, a very important influential powerful teacher and sort of a father figure to me. His departure felt like a big betrayal at the time, the idea that he was secretly in a sexual relationship despite having taken celibacy vows and having taught about the importance of celibacy. I was disillusioned. It was many years later before I understood much more about how abusive he was and how oppressive it was to live in the culture of secrecy and deceit.

I never spent enough time with Swami Vishnudevananda to experience his temper. I met him briefly towards the end of his life. I had heard about the temper from others and it was always explained as a way to help us evolve. That if Swamiji was yelling at you, he was giving you an important teaching. I just accepted this as true at the time, but of course thinking about it now, I realize that his anger and abuse was passed on to his senior disciples and they imitated him with their own subordinates, perpetuating a culture of abuse and fear. Swami Vishnu was more of a symbol to me, but a very important one at the time. I came to yoga during a very confusing time in my life, through reading his book and I felt very connected and devoted to him. After he passed away and I left the organization, I gradually moved on to another spiritual path and I have not considered him my teacher for many years.

Learning about Julie's assault and abuse brought back a lot of anger and resentment towards the organization, which I have not really processed much over the years. It made me question many situations I experienced and observed while on staff that I did not realize were inappropriate. It re-awakened the anger towards the senior swami who was my main teacher/director for all the psychological abuse I endured while working with him. I felt even more resentment when he said nothing publicly when Julie's testimony came out – he was a big part of the organization and closely connected to Swami Vishnu when this was happening to Julie. I am guessing that he had some idea about what was going on.

I learned a lot while at Sivananda Yoga. It helped me develop a discipline of physical movement practice and acquire many other useful skills. But it was also a time of extreme physical and emotional stress, overwork and isolation. It has also had a very negative influence on my financial future, as I left the organization after five years with no money, no credit history and no job.

I see SY now as an abusive cult. I think it should shut down and use its assets to pay reparations to the abuse survivors.

Survivor XVII

Hello, dear friends,

I need to share my experiences, and my observations of other's experiences, as guest and Karma Yogi at the S Ashram in the Bahamas.

Fortunately, no sexual abuse occurred. However, unrelenting psychological, emotional abuse and harassment from one of my supervisors took its toll on me, and many others who worked under this person's demanding supervision. Several people witnessed her public, verbal abuse of me on various occasions, and were appalled and deeply concerned. Some even boldly confronted her on her harsh words and manner, but she had no concern about verbally harassing me openly. This was normal, constructive, and expected in her eyes, and she defended herself accordingly. The shock and concern of these witnesses', affirm that my experiences were not in my imagination, which was a huge relief. This somehow helped me stay strong, and not succumb to her allegations, which accused me of being neglectful, an insufficient worker, and person in general.

It is challenging when one is incessantly harassed in such a way, with no genuine support offered, other than the Ashram dogma, of a positive breaking down of the Ego. This backdrop was, of course, open season for those such as my supervisor. I began to understand what it is to work and live under the supervision of a Narcissist. The experience was so debilitating to my energy that I became physically sick. After recovering from the physical sickness, I then felt the aftermath of severe emotional trauma, including severe anxiety, paranoia, and symptoms of depression. I was not the only one falling prey to a Narcissist at the Ashram, many others suffered deeply.

I have heard that the Ashram valued supervisors with a history of successful supervisory experience over their ability to manage with compassion, inner balance, and integrity. My supervisor was a corporate American supervisor retiree, so she was greatly valued by the Ashram. They seemed to want to hold onto her at all cost, regardless of complaints to the administration, about her inability to manage with compassion, which might affect her efficiency. The business venture priority seemed to take precedence over spiritual, loving awareness.

This was a rude awakening for me. I witnessed and heard of countless instances of distraught karma yogis, disrespected, mistreated, and verbally, emotionally abused under the guise of perhaps, "all for the highest good of the ashram". The karma yogis themselves, were totally in alignment with Ashram values and the karma yoga program. As a guest and Karma Yogi, I supported many karma yogis who were in great emotional distress as a result of psychological mistreatment from many quite troubled and verbally abusive supervisors. I am a spiritual healer, and this was my own personal karma yoga, as I encountered so many people victimized by emotionally unstable karma yoga supervisors. I could do nothing other than support them.

My awareness of the mistreatment of numerous karma yogis, including my own, extended from my stays as a guest, from around 2015, up through my own karma yoga experience in 2018, and up to winter, 2019.

It often felt like the supervisors were passing down the stress from the upper bureaucracy of the Ashram, which was mostly motivated by the desire for monetary gain. From what I could see, rather than a spiritual experience, it more often felt like a boot

camp, where the karma yogis were serving a capitalist venture, free labour. The organization itself, was proudly referred to as a "Swami Factory" by a senior staff member, which truthfully made me cringe inside. Spirituality reduced to a commodity did not resonate with my journey, and further inspired my falling away from alignment with Ashram values. Often, as a karma yogi, it felt like they maintained a narrow interpretation of "tradition" which overrode compassion, spiritual expansion and truth, and that also felt uncomfortable.

I will conclude with a proposal I submitted after my traumatic experience, to the directing swami overseeing karma yoga concerns, and to which I, predictably, received no response. I feel it shows the extent of my concern about karma yogis falling prey to narcissistic supervisors, themselves deeply wounded and needing serious emotional support. There is so much more, yet I am growing tired of returning to that energy, so I hope what is being shared proves valuable.

Thank you so much for opening this space for such sorely needed awakening and healing.

My journey has been nothing compared to the suffering of Julie, and the others who for years fell victims to sexual and mental abuse, because of their unquestioning devotion.

My heart truly goes out to them.

Namaste

Love, gratitude, and blessings.

Survivor XVIII

I have been a long-term student, karma yogi, teacher and eventually staff in one of the European centers.

It needed counseling, and the physical distance from the center and the people there to understand that I experienced a form of spiritual abuse.

I see spiritual abuse as form of spiritual manipulation – sometimes very subtle undermining the spiritual freedom of the individual - yet done in a way that the individual might think it was their own choice. And this is what makes it so difficult to recognize. Even the special reputation or the special charisma of a teacher can be used for spiritual manipulation. This is what we are seeing with the two Gurus Sw. Sivananda and VD? They were uplifted into the ‘sky’ with all the stories that are told over and over again; with the way they are presented in books; with their pictures all over the yoga centers and ashrams and above the altar. We have been told that everything they did had a higher purpose. Even when you might interpret their behavior as aggressive it was obviously good for something such as shaking the ego and helping the individual with their spiritual development.

Manipulation by ideal:

These stories and models confirm the ideal. Virtues that are set so high make it difficult, even impossible to reach them. As a consequence, might create the sense of unworthiness.

Manipulation by devaluation:

If you were tired/ exhausted, you were told “You still need so much sleep, because your mind is not yet focused enough.”

If you asked for privacy, time for reflection, you were told, “that is the ego”.

If you needed to keep in touch with family and friends, then you were “still too attached to the world”.

If you needed independence and self-determination you were told, “still requires more intense purification process via karma yoga service.”

This devaluation of wishes, needs and successes is hurtful and violates our personal needs and our personal boundaries. Another method of manipulation used is comparing people with each other in respect of their spiritual progress. I have experienced and have also had it confirmed by others over and over again, how this is used in a very targeted manner: “Look, person xy is humbler, more disciplined ...”. Withdrawal from the community is equated with betrayal and a relapse into the worldly.

Manipulation by dependency: External dependencies (financial)

Staff worked beyond their limits without getting paid and for some time (some longer than others) even without any health insurance.

Power differences were clearly marked, hierarchies reflected everywhere - EBM, Swamis, staff, teachers, Karma Yogis, and students – the differences were always maintained . Those who did not fit were spiritually neglected, those who participated in everything

were extremely encouraged: Able to give workshops, teach meditation courses, sing more often in Satsang.

There was no space to raise questions or demonstrate any form of criticism. This is not said out loud, yet there is a clear fear of the potential consequences. Consequences such as: disapproval, expulsion, being neglected, or that tasks or rights will be taken away.

Being there – as Karma Yogi, staff or swami – meant you gave up your independence, and for each and every decision you had to ask for approval or guidance. Even the swamis who ran the center had to follow this strict hierarchy and align with the top/ Sw. Durgananada. Sadhana Praxis are reported to her on a daily basis. The daily karma yoga tasks of the staff and swamis are reported to her.

Swamis are sending their spiritual diary to her. Spiritual guidance was given by her. So, there is a huge dependency on one particular person.

For those who suffered from the situation, there was always an explanation. That it was a cleansing process; the ego suffers. We were told to bear insult, bear injury, this was the highest sadhana.

Illness was seen as a cleansing process and Japa as a method to calm the suffering ego.

To this day it still impacts my life, I am learning again to put clear boundaries and to feel worthy as the person I am.

Thank you for listening and all the efforts that you and Carol have put into this.

Survivor XIX: Anne Andal

From Trauma to Resilience and Healing: Anne Andal's testimony.

I would like to express my deepest heartfelt gratitude to:

- Julie, Pamela, Lucille and all the survivors who found the courage to come forward and share their stories of abuse and trauma. You gave me the courage to come in the open for the articles published by le Devoir, go through the depth of my trauma healing journey and participate to the Satya reports.
- To the admins of the Satya project, Angela, Antonia and Jens and each of you who joined this community. You offered me a safe place to share the grief and hope we all have been experiencing for the past months.
- To my dear karma yogis companions, the local Bahamian staff, teachers, students, speakers, singers, musicians, all of you who were part of the path I walked towards reclaiming my physical and mental health during the five winters of practices, studies and service I spent at the Yoga Retreat.
- To Carol and Josna the amazing investigating team we are blessed with. Josna, your way of welcoming my story, your encouraging and loving feed-back, your request to write my own statement have been a pivotal piece of this resolution.
- To my dearest TTC teacher and friend S. who has offered me on-going support in this process of deep healing.

When the lightning of Truth struck me ! - December 12th 2019.

"Andal, you seem to be triggered in your trauma". Yes, Swamiji , but I can 't talk about it now. I will when I come back before Satsang." I had just read Julie's post, my body was in total shock, fever and shivers started to rise with intensity. I had time to read Pamela and Lucille corroboration and see the tsunami of posts coming in. As a feminist pioneer, co-founder of rape crisis centers in Québec in the seventies and after dedicating my career to Women's safety in cities, I knew they were saying The Truth. When I came back, the news was already spreading. SH said to me "you don't know these women". She denied the truth, confirmed that Julie had talked to the EBM members some years ago to obtain reparation. She told me to take my mala, repeat my mantra and stop reading the posts. I thought "Yeah, sure". I cleaned her dishes, took out her garbage and left. This was the last act of service I gave to this organisation after five years of sincere dedication. As I got really sick, I spent the next six days in quarantine, in a state of profound disgust and terror, preparing carefully my escape , with the help of my dear TTC teacher and friend Sylvie who had send me Julie's post and who stayed my main support since then, as she was herself going through the devastating shock of this revelation.

When the veil of illusions was ripped apart

Two days later, on December 14th, I was asked to attend the staff meeting where the director of the ashram and a senior staff addressed the situation. I had my note book and started to write. After 15 minutes of glorifying the achievements of their guru, SB said that what Julie wrote was "absolutely impossible". At that specific moment, I felt like a thick veil was suddenly removed before my eyes. They added that this was the first time they heard about this and had no idea why "this woman" was doing this. As SH had told

me they knew, I thought “wow, there are lying flat in our face and then “oh, shit, this is a cult!”. I was devastated to realize that the very people who taught me the yogic values of non-harming, non-lying, non-cheating, non-grasping, were using their position of moral authority to mislead the karma yogis in the room, mostly women who thought they were serving an organisation truly reflecting these high yogic values. The ripping of the veil of illusions at that moment started a process of realization and understanding of why I had put aside so many inappropriate things I had witnessed at the ashram through the years in the name of devotion and selfless service. But it also deeply triggered what I was later to understand as being my childhood complex trauma coming up to the surface. I understood why my whole body/mind went into shock realizing that what I thought was my new real family, a safe place to be, was a well- designed made up story and that the so called Guru on the big frames was anything but a Saint. What I did not understand right away, was why my childhood trauma was so much triggered when SB denied the truth during the staff meeting and why I felt such a deep sense of betrayal at that specific moment. It was only the day after the publication of the second article in le Devoir that everything became clear and that my process of grief and healing from early trauma could finally unfold.

I was 10 years old when I started to be subjected to sexual inappropriate behaviour from my brother. I was 12 years old when I was able to oppose his demands. Physical and psychological abuse then started to take place. I had had no protection from my parents to stop the abuses and my only confident was a girl I met in the girl guides. After visiting me one day, she met my brother and started to date him. She told me I was a liar, that I invented these stories. She later became my sister-and law, the mother of my nieces and nephew. So my whole “family life” got built on this denial and betrayal. The way I later found to process all of this was to get involved in the women’s anti-rape movement and contribute to set up services for other survivors of abuse.

When all the dots got connected..... Trauma by lies, betrayal and denial

When I came back from the ashram, getting involved in the SATYA project, I had the urge to do something concrete to prevent other abuses within the ISYC, especially as the headquarters is located in Val-Morin, Québec. When I heard that a journalist from le Devoir was on the case, I met her, shared all I knew and finally accepted that she would put my name, even if all other women who had shared their stories asked to remain anonymous. I had fears of being armed by the ISYC if I lifted my helmet, but I decided to do it, like Arjuna on the battlefield, inspired by the courage of Julie, Pamela, Lucille and all others who had come forward. The day after the second paper in the Devoir was published, I saw a texto coming in from my ex-sister-in-law (who never writes me). My whole body went into stress/anxious mode, she wrote “ oh, I see that you are trying to rebuild a reputation for yourself” as if my open testimony was just to give myself publicity as a yoga teacher. I blocked her immediately as I felt the same kind of poison trying to infiltrate my being as when SB denied the truth revealed by Julie. And then, click! All the pieces came together. A core piece of my complex childhood trauma is the trauma by denial of my lived experience and betrayal from somebody in which I had put my trust and confidence in. As I had put again my trust in the ISYC organisation, the trauma by betrayal, lies and denial was relaunched, for a purpose I was going to understand later.

And then, healing unfolded.....

As COVID struck the world, I was blessed to find a place in nature where I could go to the roots of my trauma and use all the tools I had learn to practice and teach, mainly iRest yoga Nidra and other trauma sensitive somatic practices. The necessary solitude, the beauty of nature in all its forms, precious friendships, enabled me to find the strength and the courage to welcome the release of encapsulated energies. Sobbing my way through grieving the abandonment, the abuses, the lack of protection, the broken trust and the broken dreams of family bonds, I literally witnessed the extraction of traumatic stuck energies from my body. And it is still unfolding to this day. When Josna invited me to write my own testimony for the Satya Investigation, I realized that this was my #Me too moment. That of course, at some point, members of my blood family would read this. That of course, they will say this is all lies, that I invented this story and that none of this really happened. Just like the hand full of members of the EBM that are still hiding themselves behind lies, denial and betrayal. I fully accept this as if the sharing of my own process of resilience and healing can help other survivors in their own process, it is all that I care for.

OM TAT SAT, it is what it is, the Truth, only the Truth. I still hope that justice will prevail and that we will together prevent other abuses to be committed within the ISYC organisation. This is my prayer. With all my love and gratitude.

My deep gratitude to Swami Sivananda Sarasvati, for his many blessings, some in disguise. I am truly sorry that his name is associated with all of this. Om Shanti

Survivor XX

Monday, June 29th, I felt as if the floor had dropped out from under me. It was on a former Sivananda colleague's Facebook page where I first happened upon the article by Stéphane GALLOIS in a trusted French newspaper, published three days earlier on June 26th. It had great impact for me as it was run in the very same local French newspaper that I had learned to read with, in school.

I then found and read Project Satya's first report online, and a couple of weeks later, the floor has not gained any stability, but now I must try to focus my recollections into something more concrete, things I unknowingly shirked at the time. Reading my dear colleague's story in the newspaper was shocking for me. Now I understood why she had disappeared, and no one would talk about what happened. We were the same age, and more importantly, I realise that I was one of the people who enabled her silencers, from that summer of 2005 forward!

Depression and suicide attempts had also been friends of mine, shortly after my separation (1996) and divorce (2002), without my family nearby. I have been involved with 12-step recovery programs since childhood, and I was trying to find a way of living where I felt supported. My involvement with the Sivananda organisation as a student began in the summer of 1997 in Paris and continued in after my TTC in Austria for many years in London, Paris, Orleans and Geneva.

Translation was tiring work, with little time for personal practice. Exhausted, I kept volunteering. I never questioned how the work we did was done without insurance, health care, or "benevole" contracts. I had much to learn still, I wanted to do what I thought other teachers did; barter my time for concrete certifications, not endless internships. I carried on working completely blindfolded and gagged - I do remember other staff warning me that I could be sent away "too", if I asked too many questions about the very secretive "why". I felt like a very small spoke in a very large wheel, replaceable at the drop of a hat. It could also explain my intuition, and hesitation, never taking any other steps to becoming full-time staff. I was conscious of people above me who kept appearing and then dropping like so many flies while I was stuck in limbo.

My parents had started taking yoga classes at the community college in my hometown, and I realised I could barely keep up with their restorative yoga class, because I had done so little practicing. Now, I cannot imagine continuing to volunteer, my trust has been broken. It is a terrible betrayal. I believe the survivors, and the pit in my stomach deepens when I try to imagine what I would have done in their shoes.

Lastly, even though I do not remember if I am still registered with the Yoga Alliance, I am appalled that it took me 6 months to discover articles from last winter about allegations against the Yoga School that certified me. I am deeply saddened to learn of my why my dear friend had gone, disappeared. Now I understand why the truth was hidden by this organisation, and why we did not learn about the misconduct.

Little did I know the reason she left was still seated on the ISYVC executive board, until just recently. 15 years later, the fact that I had to 1) dig around the Internet, 2) join a survivors' group, 3) wade through months of well-being articles just to find a link to any direct communication from the EBM, is inadmissible.

The non-descript direct link on the organisation's OM page should be more clear, available in every language, with access to translated articles and documents that inform and guarantee proactive support of survivors of misconduct. If an institution cannot be 100% behind every one of their members, how will we ever trust them again?

Josna, I cannot thank you enough for finding the essence in my long story. This experience has provided me with closure. I still have friends inside, and truly hope that our collective actions can make a difference moving forward for them as well as their students, like some of the other schools who have also taken steps towards healing.

Survivor XXI

For twenty years I was a teacher with the Sivananda organization, and during that time I participated in yoga classes and courses and yoga vacation. I also did a Teacher Training Course (TTC) course at Neyyar Dam.

I think it is essential that a public apology is made, and that reparation is offered to all victims. Those Executive Board Members who knew of the sexual abuse allegations against Swami Vishnu in 2006, should be removed from office, as well as those who are current board members. Any iconography of Swami Vishnu or mention of his name in Sivananda chants and books should be removed, as so far this has not been the case at the Ashram I attend. A permanent separate Advisory Board or Governing Board, composed of individuals external to the organization, needs to be established, and they should be responsible for overseeing the investigation, the actions, decisions and the composition of the Executive Board. There should also be an independent investigation into the culture of the Sivananda organization, with particular attention to the dynamics and abuse of power. Local, facilitated hearings with Centres and Ashrams should be established around the country, so that they can oversee the reconciliation process. Therapists should be made available at Ashrams and Centres, to aid the healing process within the community. I think that it is necessary to formalise Karma Yoga procedures and contracts, to either pay teachers, if students are being charged, or have donation-based classes.

I have heard from Karma yogis who have experienced being put in danger from inappropriate yoga asana teaching techniques and who have suffered from exhaustion and being overworked. I have personally witnessed abusive behaviour by Mahadevananda, Saradananda, Sadasivananda, sexual inappropriateness by Padmananda, and verbal abuse by Prahlad as well as verbal abuse and shaming by Narayan.

I have not been shocked at the news of Swami Vishnu's sexual misconduct, but I am very disappointed. There is a culture of exploitation that needs to stop. I feel that karmic retribution is in order. The organization needs to clean up big time, and the practice of free labour under the guise of Karma yoga needs to stop as it is against the labour laws. The entire system could be donation based. If students are being charged for classes, then teachers must be paid. Sivananda cannot have it both ways. They are not above the law, and as a business they should pay for services. What they are doing shamefully, in the name of Yoga and Karma, is exploiting people's labour and living a lavish lifestyle behind closed doors.

If serious action is not taken, I shall stop attending classes, satsangs and all other events at the organisation, in fact I will cancel plans to spend time in Sivananda ashrams. I will teach classes at those locations which are unaffiliated with the Sivananda organisations. I will remove all Swami Vishnu iconography from my practice and cease yogic practices learned from that organisation. I will discourage others from supporting the organisation. Finally, I would get the press involved, get lawyers to look into the conduct of the organisation. They have flagrantly deflected all responsibility but should not be allowed to get away with this.

Survivor XXII

I'm 40+ years old and from Europe. The last five years I've been living and practicing in India. I've been attending Sivananda ashrams for about 10 years as a yoga vacationer, and I completed my TTC with Sivananda a few years ago. I have a deep love for Sivananda, it's practice, the people, and the life-saving support it has provided to me. To see it go through such a process and respond the way it has, has been heart-breaking, and highly disturbing, as my main 'home' or go-to place of refuge has been taken away.

I need to share an experience with you, concerning two people I knew well, even though I previously made a commitment to them, never to share it. I feel though the truth must be revealed at all costs I will call them S and Z for their anonymity. Please take my context into account: there are many reasons why I love Sivananda and its people, to share this story is difficult.

In 2014, I was staying in Sivananda Neyyar Dam, and made good friends with S, a Canadian girl in her late 20's. She was staying in Sivananda as a YV. Her mother had recently passed away from early onset dementia, and S had discovered that she too had the defect which caused early onset dementia. She had come to decide if she wanted to live the next 10 years (roughly the time she would be dementia free), how she would live it, and whether to have children. She was therefore very vulnerable.

At the ashram was a member of staff, a 70-year-old man from Delhi called 'Babaji', considered an experienced master. He had in incredible practice and a magnetic personality. One day S asked me abruptly to leave the ashram with her. I agreed as my time was up. She explained that whilst practicing extra pranayama with Babaji at 4am, he had been encouraging inappropriate hugs and kisses, which she had been trying to manage. From what she told me, he had then forced himself on her, groped her genitals, and tried to have sex. She managed to get away from that, and promptly left the ashram. My understanding was that it was attempted rape.

She asked me not to tell anyone. However, I persuaded her to let me speak to the director, Nataraj. I explained the situation to him, and he stated very clearly he would deal with it. I believed him.

A year later I return to the ashram again for my yearly YV stint. I was shocked to find Babaji still there, as a member of staff. Despite my shock, I believed it was okay if he had been given a second chance and was being managed. I decided to trust.

I made a new friend Z, and to my surprise, after we left, she described exactly the same process that had happened to S with Babaji. I cannot remember the exact details, but her vulnerable state and sexual victimisation was nearly identical. I persuaded her to let me return and speak to the director again. I had a meeting with Nataraj, and he stated that Babaji had been instructed not to touch any guests during asana adjustment, and never to be alone with female guests. I threatened to go public if this was not stopped. Babaji was asked to leave, and I believe he did.

My concern is that the sexual abuse of these two YV's was not isolated. The perpetrator had been there at least a year, and I would expect other women to have gone through it. All the women just wanted to get away. I was very shocked that despite the serious allegations, this individual was allowed to stay relatively unchecked and continue this

behaviour. It is not just the allegations, but the culture that allows it, by turning a blind eye.

This is one subjective account, so I don't believe it should be used as an objective description of the culture in Sivananda Neyyar Dam. I am, however, hoping that there are other accounts, that will create a clearer picture of cultures of behaviour that need to be addressed.

When I was confronted with this situation, I was angry. Very angry that such an individual could be in a trusted position and able to do such things. To return a year later and find the same individual in the same role, committing the same sexual abuse, made me very angry at the organisation, too.

The impact on the girls was that they became more closed and buried the trauma. As they were already traumatised from events in their life, I felt this was appalling. The organisation had not only failed them, but had added to the trauma. I was left distrustful and angry. I'm still feeling sad and disappointed that such trusted individuals and organisations are set up with no accountability.

I acted on this in the best way I could and put pressure on the ashram director to make the change required. I also spent a significant amount of time reflecting on my own anger. Ultimately, it has made me distrust the organisation and distance myself from any authority within.

Survivor XXIII

In terms of the impact, because I never thought anything like this would happen to me, everything was so confusing. I have a great appreciation and love for yoga, because it has helped me to love myself more, to relax, and calm the mind down in the atmosphere of silence that occurs in meditation. This has allowed me to concentrate on growing myself inside. All this abuse is wrong. It is not right and I feel a great disappointment. I loved the Satsangs, and I was very happy with them, but now I realize that everything was a placebo. Nothing was real, they made us see the unreal as real. I am so angry, disillusioned and sad, that I have even abandoned the yoga classes. I am worried about people, especially women who may currently be victims of abuse in the organization, but grateful for Julie's testimony, which allowed us to open our eyes. I am grateful for the universe that prevented these experiences, that generated so much confusion in me, from escalating into physical aggression.

Postscript and reflections on narratives with allegations of sexual, psychological, spiritual, emotional, and physical abuses

by Dr Josna Pankhania

The allegations of the survivors in this report have all, without exception, painted a very clear picture of abuse. Even if not directly on the receiving end, they were able to document their observations of abuse to others. Reasons for joining the Sivananda Organisation vary but have a common theme of looking for something that was lacking in their daily lives. Some were from unstable families; some had been abused as children and they came to the organisation to find a safe haven and healing from their trauma. Whatever their reasons, the majority were vulnerable and far away from their usual support networks. On first encounter, some mentioned their experience of being overwhelmed by 'love bombing,' but in many of the accounts, the over-riding feature is a lack of love. They were verbally abused in public, humiliated, and shamed, and there was no recourse. Their superiors made them believe it was for their own good and essential for their spiritual development and growth. Leadership groomed them to surrender their ego and taught unconditional devotion to the teacher, guru, and by extension, the organisation. The superiors utilised the organisational ideology to progressively break down their defences and negate their identity, a situation reflected in the initiation names they were given. They were to surrender utterly to the organisation, which meant sacrificing family, friends, home, careers, relationships and sexuality, all of which were considered to take too much attention and energy away from the organisation. One survivor mentions his struggle to create a family-oriented community but facing objections and obstacles at every turn. There was no allowance made for the caring of children; everything had to accede to the needs of the organisation. He and his wife were made to do relentless hours of work, and when they tried to alleviate their situation, they were moved off to another location. Their sense of betrayal, like so many, was profound.

Most of the survivors come with gruelling descriptions of the daily schedule of yoga practice and work. The day began early, before dawn, and finished at bedtime with Satsang and a spiritual lecture. Common to most of the accounts was sleep deprivation, as superiors could make demands at any time and asking for more time to sleep was seen as laziness and a lack of spirituality. This was enforced as karma yoga, considered selfless service and devotional practice to the guru, and was presented as a means of spiritual evolution and supposed to be liberating. They did the cooking, cleaning, gardening, building work, maintenance, reception, administration, bookkeeping and anything else required. There were long hours, with few breaks, and if anyone complained, they were either made to do more or moved away. Even if sick, they were expected to work, and there was no medical intervention or car. One woman described a karma yogi who had to work in the kitchen with a bleeding wound to her hand. Another reported that even when he had pneumonia, he did not receive adequate support or care. One woman was attacked to the point of death but was pressured not to report the offender because it would put the organisation in a poor light. She kept her silence for 30 years, until this investigation, and described it as 'carrying a rock in her heart.' It was more important to uphold the

image of the organisation, than the well-being of the individual. The lack of care and the neglect of their medical needs have left some of these survivors with life-long physical illnesses as well as mental torment requiring many hours of therapy. If there were policies and protocols for addressing work health and safety concerns, they certainly were not put into practice.

One survivor describes how shocked they were at the teachers' total lack of concern when one of the students went missing. There was no attempt to locate him, and no sense of sorrow expressed. His disappearance was imply ignored. No matter how much a person had done for the organisation, sometimes over many years, it was not acknowledged and there was no appreciation shown. Once their usefulness was exhausted, they were told to leave, often without money, with just the clothes on their back. The theme of being thrown off or leaving with nothing, for whatever reason, is a recurrent one in these narratives.

If anyone questioned the way things were done, they were silenced, often removed at a moment's notice from the organisation. The justification given for this was a need for total adherence to the word of the guru. Superiors commonly insisted it was the survivor who lacked in spirituality or had an ego problem, the failure was theirs, not that of the teacher or the system. Celibacy, the practice of Brahmacharya, was supposed to be part of the culture. But many survivors describe the corruption of the teaching and the abuse and oppression they suffered at the hands of gurus and others, and there was no one above the guru to whom they could appeal. As with health and safety issues, there were no protocols in place for sexual harassment and abuse.

This report documents the narratives of only some of the survivors of ISYVC. Many more have chosen not to be included, and perhaps many more are not aware that an investigation was taking place. The EBM are choosing to turn their backs on the immense suffering of many, many people simply to maintain an unsullied image of their founding guru.

Personal Narratives
(institutional betrayal)

The following are the personal narratives written by the survivors in their own words. They describe the impact of institutional betrayal and of learning about (sexual) abuse allegations.

Some of the narratives are several pages long, and each narrative will start on a new page. At the end of this section follows a postscript with my reflections. The order of the narratives is non-indicative and not chronological. Some survivors wished to include their name, whilst all other narratives have been anonymised.

Please note that each survivor chose to include what they found most important or healing to write about. These narratives did not form the basis of the legal investigation run by Carol Merchasin but were part of a separate process. To learn more about the process through which the personal narratives emerged, please revisit the methodology section.

Survivor I

I have followed Sivananda Yoga for more than seven years and have been doing yoga half my life, from a young age. I practiced different styles of yoga, but I felt drawn to this particular style. It was very systematic and approachable, although not easy. Sivananda Yoga was challenging, more than the other styles.

Initially, I began in my home country through independent teachers, who were trained or inspired by the Sivananda style. When I was in India many years ago, I visited the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Meenakshi Ashram. This was my first contact with this organisation. I then started to listen to videos and lectures, satsangs and other stuff I could find online. The teachers, especially the EBM, became my inspiration and I felt very much at home. The teachings often expressed something that I had felt was true for me, but that I was unable to express before. It was close to my heart, so I opened myself up to it as much as I could.

The magic of my encounter with this particular Yoga did not seem to fade. I could say many things about the magical experiences that I had, the feeling of awakenings, great sensations and so on, but this is a testimony of mourning, not of great joy. It is me mourning the loss of friends who were like family, a connection to what I thought was true and most of all 'good', something that represented the goodness of the world. This text is meant to express another sort of awakening: one that is painful and carries a sense of deep disillusionment.

When I say the magic has never faded, I mean until December 2019. It was two days after Julie made her initial post on Facebook that I was alerted to it through a very close friend of mine. When I read it, I didn't know what to think. I had to call my friend back immediately and we talked for hours throughout the whole night. It was a strange sensation and I was torn between not wanting to believe and wanting to cry. I was shocked.

The woman who had made the post, Julie Salter, was known as Swami Vishnu's personal assistant, and therefore not a 'nobody' to the organization or new to me. Many people who never met her or Swami Vishnu personally might have heard her then monastic name, Swami Kartikeyananda, before. I've heard many times the many stories about her and I knew how important she was as a caregiver to the 'guru' Swami Vishnudevananda. Hence, when I read her post, I knew that it was true. It came as a shock, because this was an allegation made by someone who had no motive to lie. She left the organisation decades ago.

Soon after, I saw two other women coming forward with allegations, further confirming the terrible sensation that lay in the realisation that this guru was in fact an abuser. More allegations came forward, more people saying that Prahlada, and others, had also sexually assaulted them.

My initial feeling upon reading the post was a sense of grief. A sense of grief that the ideal guru that I had believed in did not exist, and that a lot of the 'Goodness' that I had believed in and attributed to the guru, was in fact a lie. Often in my life, when good things happened, I would do what I was taught to do: see the Guru's Grace in it. So, to me, a great deal of good things came through my practice, and the gurus, so I told myself.

The situation I was in was dramatic. Where would the good come from in the future? Or, if the guru never produced any good, what kind of lie have I kept reproducing? And was there ever any good, or did I just make it up? The deception I felt soon led to total confusion. You cannot simply stop feeling devotion or gratefulness, even if you just learned about the most terrible thing. I also felt dumb. I never met this Swami Vishnu guy, and yet I felt like I had such a great relationship with him. And now there comes someone who knew him very, very well, and tells me, "He abused me". Who am I to say "I don't believe that, he was a fine man" ? I did not know him. I felt silly and naïve, and it felt like the worst relationship break up I had ever had. I took down the pictures of Swami Vishnu the day I came home, with no emotion at all. The strange mix of anger, confusion and pain had only created a vacuum in which nothing was felt, and everything was felt at the same time.

However, I was able to reconcile this new information by thinking and believing that "we were all in the same boat". By that, I mean me, all my friends from the community, all staff, AND ALSO the EBM were in the same boat, learning today that the person we looked up to, that we drew our inspiration from, was in fact not who we thought he was. In that moment I wanted to convince myself, that as a community we could get through this together. I felt pain for the ones who were abused, but as a community, we can go through it.

This was my initial reaction: "I am glad that I am not alone in this. The grief will be shared by many, the good that has been created will continue".

In the very same way, I was convinced that the community and the organization would address the matters with the sensitivity that is required by the severity of what had happened; that these matters would be taken seriously and the survivors would be heard. Soon I realized that nothing of that sort was ever going to happen. The community split into those believing and those disbelieving. Into those loyal to guru (and to the standpoint of the organisation's management), and those who believed the survivors. I was appalled.

But for me, the question of which side I was on did not come up so quickly. Why so much division? Today, months later, I know that the EBM had known about this for years, and that the organisation has a severe history of abuse. I understand why all this happened the way it happened, and why the cover-ups.

But back then in December and January, the most important thing for me was to speak: to be with my community, to share information, to brainstorm what we could do. But too many people did not want to do that. They wanted to hear nothing about the abuse.

Soon we realized that this communication was being suppressed by the organization, and those who were not able to bear the news for what they believed in could've been destroyed. Many Facebook groups, controlled by the organization or devotees, were actively blocking any communication about the revelations of abuse. Comments on centers' Facebook pages were deleted. I began to realize that there were only a few places on the Internet where people were actively talking about what happened, how it made them feel, and so on, one of them being Project SATYA, which was founded as the "Sivananda Yoga Community".

Ultimately, what made me become a fierce believer of the survivors is this suppression of free speech. I just wanted to come together as a community and talk about the fact that many were harmed and abused, and that this was terrible, because they are our sisters

and brothers. But few people wanted to speak about it. As time progressed, it became clear that it wasn't an issue of a far-away past with a man who died almost 30 years ago, but that to this day, the organisation had continued to silence survivors and to protect abusers.

I have lost all belief and trust in the organisation, its management, and much of the method it taught. Many of my friends turned enemies, because they saw me supporting the survivors. It is heartbreaking to lose them, and to see how they are losing themselves, choosing a life that it spoon-fed to them, rather than using their brains. I am afraid that some of them might be next in line to be abused or to become abusers.

When I came to this particular Yoga, I was mesmerized by the beauty of it, the family and community, and the many people that I met. I also liked the feeling of creating Goodness, the positive health aspect of Yoga and so on. Today, I have lost touch with these aspects. I am struggling to find new sources of belief and faith, goodness and self-care in times when the world literally seems to be breaking apart, and there is little stability and guidance from the institutions we once felt able to rely on, be it Sivananda Yoga, governments, and so on.

The Sivananda organization teaches that the world isn't real and is, in fact, a hostile place. If you think about it there's a lot of truth in the latter, we see so much suffering, so many bad things in the world. Believing in something good, in something that can help you out, or a community of people that comes together and believes in goodness, was a life saver at times. But the truth is, the organisation and the big lie has created more suffering. Every single statement of the EBM is creating so much pain and deception. As for the people who feel they benefitted from yoga, if they are not able to see with their own eyes what's going on here, how can they ever truly speak about awakening?

The Sivananda organisation continues to use their people... some for the workforce they bring, some for their money, some for their looks, and others for their naive devotion. It is horrendous. It is set up with deception, attracting well-meaning and good people, who then become dependent.

I send love to every single one struggling, and I hope the ones who are responsible for the suffering of so many people will be held accountable in the appropriate ways. They may believe in karma, but I believe in the power of community activism and the law.

Survivor II: Johannes von Kurz (Ramdas)

Satya Testimony by Ramdas / Johannes v Kurz, 7/8/2020

I have been with The International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta organisation for close to 30 years, as a student, teacher and karma yogi. I was very happy there, I learned so much and it changed my life for the better.

Of course, there were things I saw that were not good, people in charge using their power in negative ways, shouting at people and shaming them. Many yoginis in particular were exploited by having to work endless hours, with very little sleep, and with no day off during the week. They were encouraged not to go and see their family during their holiday, not to go to see a specialist doctor in Paris for a day, etc. There was a lot of mental abuse. How often did I tell the staff that it is part of their spiritual advancement to protect themselves by learning to say, "no", to the superiors?

When Sw Durgananda came to Rudraprayagh for a visit, I saw the pure fear of the staff and swamis who had to prepare her room, in order to make sure that there was not one piece of dust. First, I thought, maybe they are transferring the idea of service to a guru to her, but I realised this was completely wrong. Service to a guru should have nothing to do with fear. Fear is the absence of trust and love, absence which I have unfortunately seen too often these past years in the organisation, which is more concerned with turning out ever more TTCs and making money, than with the spiritual teaching and being an example. This service should never be demanded by a living being who is just like one of us, even if she is at the top of the hierarchy. The worst in this respect is the foot puya given to her in South India, where many swamis were flown in especially at high expense.

Since hearing the first testimony in December 2019, I felt completely shattered in my value and belief system, as well as in my psychological balance. I had seen Julie in her burnout when she taught us the Bagavad Gita in Neyyar Dam ashram during my TTC in 1993, so I knew this was not a case of her wanting to look important or gain financial reward. I saw this as a big problem, and as far as I was concerned, I did not doubt for a second that the rapes really happened.

I was hoping that the organisation would reform itself. It has so much to offer to the world. For so many years, I experienced so much that was good in this organisation.

In France, in January 2020, many of us were overwhelmed and completely shattered. So, a group of us chose to fight for reform. I said to the people in charge at the Paris Centre that even if you do not believe the testimony, as yogis you should make a strong declaration of compassion to Julie. They did not respond well, so some of us dropped out. We wrote a strong letter to the Board in Europe, but we never got a reply.

Yoga's foundation is supposed to be yamas and niyamas, we should be expressing compassion, working towards justice, but what we have been confronted by are hard, frozen faces, steeped in ego and lies.

I don't like my or others' beliefs to be played around with. This is a major betrayal which I will never forget. For all these years they knew, and they deliberately lied to us about the sainthood of a rotten man, a rapist, just in order to keep the money and power machine running. This was a harsh wake-up call: I now need no more gurus; the truth and spiritual power is all inside us.

Yet, I struggle a lot each day. At present it is hard for me to carry on with my practice, because each time I sit down to do it, my mind asks if it is good to do it, when these liars and abusers who taught us for so many years were not protected from evil by such practice. I ask myself, why are you doing this? Is it good? But I still try to do my practice though my enthusiasm has gone. I am sad and angry at the swamis. I used to love my sadhana with all my heart, but now the love of it is almost gone. I do not do much, not like almost every day as I used to do before. Now I do a little to just keep it up, and I pray to get over this trauma. I know that it will get better, but it is not easy. I have lost the spark and it affects me deep inside. The benefits of a dedicated practice are so great. I also loved to teach. Now I tend to avoid it, because for now, I have like an inner, mental blockage.

I am still a man of peace and universal love, a fully dedicated yogi, continuing to live my life in a yogic way, but the abuse was just so abject that it will take quite some time for the wounds to heal. The only solace I can find sometimes when I think about these horrors is that there is the law of karma... I still pray that somehow the organisation can completely change against all odds, with for example the current corrupted directors being replaced by long-term yogis, democratically elected. But when I see that the lies and cover-ups continue, that their own investigation was halted, etc, I fear that the organisation will just disappear. The most important thing is that the harm and abuse will stop, that the light of love will be allowed to govern again.

Survivor III

I've been practicing yoga in the Sivananda tradition for about four or five years. First at the Paris centre, very sporadically, attending a workshop once in a while. It's only been more recently, taking the time for myself to deepen practices like mindfulness, shiatsu, knowledge of plants or dancing, that I also dove more deeply into yoga. At some point, the fact that my one-year-long-ex-girlfriend chose to deepen her spiritual practice and become a full-time karma yogi at the Neuville-aux-Bois' ashram (near Orléans), while we were breaking up, motivated me to deepen the yoga practice even further. Starting from the 2019 summer, I practiced at the Paris centre more intensively, about four or five times per week, also taking Sanskrit classes, ayurvedic cooking workshops, etc. And as a natural following, I did my TTC in Neuville-aux-Bois from 18th November to 17th December 2019.

Everything went great, except the long conferences, where I used to sleep in the background or chat with a few friends. Already at that time, I didn't feel very comfortable with what I saw as a deep ideological imprint, from my philosophical background's point of view. One the first days, I had asked a few critical questions to Florence Aillot/swami Kailasananda, but her answers didn't feel convincing and genuine. Since it was faster for me to read than to listen, I felt that skipping the talks was a good way to preserve my mind and gain an extra-hour of sleep. All in all though, we had a nice group, with a lot of joy and jokes shared!

During the TTC I felt the pressure to conform. For example, regarding the clothes. We were supposed to wear the white pants very often (even if the weather was cold), but several times I wore my navy, warmer pants instead. I got remarks that it was bad. During certain classes, a former swami who was doing the teaching couldn't tolerate that everybody was not doing exactly the same thing at the same time. At those times I felt the patriarchal tradition and rigidity. I also realized a bit later that all these "little" things were in fact ways to reinforce the power dynamics between swamis and students. Even the positions of the seats in the meditation hall (staff and swamis at the front, with different colors etc.). Michel Foucault, the French philosopher, has spent his life extensively studying these kinds of power dynamics.

Even if I didn't always feel comfortable with everything though, my general feeling was positive, because of the regular yogic practices, which gave me good energy, as well as the friendships in our group.

Of course, everything changed once I learned about Julie Salter's post, on 15th December, two days before our graduation. When I got the news, my first reaction was to share it on the WhatsApp group of our promotion. A few said they were not surprised, because they didn't feel inspired by Kuttan Nair/Vishnudevananda as a master, nor at ease with the look in his eyes and his smile (on the pictures everywhere). Some others were more cautious, saying it was necessary to wait and see. A few (maybe the most attached to the patriarchal ways) were already in denial, but the majority didn't want to invest in such a discussion, a kind of passive denial. My second reaction was to ask my ex-girlfriend if she knew about it (she was karma yogi at that time in the ashram). I learned she had known about it for three days already. I was shocked. Why this further silence, after so many years of silence? Why this twisted loyalty towards the organization vs. a survivor who's suffered from it? Is history doomed to repeat itself indefinitely? And why this lack of respect and infantilizing attitude towards the students, as if they didn't deserve to know? I felt disappointed in my ex-girlfriend. I felt that because of her position, she was

becoming an accomplice of a failing structure. I also didn't understand how she could "heal" in such an organization, since it was her primary goal being there as a karma yogi. I felt quite disoriented. I understood that the official plan was not to talk about the subject with us during the TTC, to "preserve" us before our final exam, but because some of us asked about it, and they knew we all knew, we had the chance to have a brief talk about it, right before the graduation ceremony. Florence Aillot repeated several times that the alleged facts dated back 30 years, trying to minimize the impact regarding the founding "master" we had had to revere every single day, many times a day, during this month. I asked three questions, including one about her personal responsibility as a swami, wondering how she could not know about it (even as rumors), but her answer was evasive. Other students felt it was not the right time to ask such questions, and felt bad for the swami, so I had to stop. At the end of the discussion she told me in private that the organization was going to hire a lawyer to do an independent investigation. I felt it was a good step, but the organization hasn't been able to keep its own word regarding this particular point.

I joined the Satya ("Sivananda community" at that time) Facebook group and started to share on it. Someone noticed it and thought I and a future friend would benefit from talking to each other. So that's how I was included in this friend's sharing circle at that time, via e-mail with about 40 Sivananda people, and twice at his home with four or five Sivananda people. That's where I learned further of the stories the French Sivananda family knew, and which was the reason why I asked to join one of the Paris Sivananda teachers' official gatherings on 26th January. Paradoxically, I was the most recent teacher, but probably the one who asked the most challenging questions to Swami Kailasananda and Swami Sivadasananda. I also took notes and posted them on the FB group. The more stories I learned (including Mahadevananda and Prahlad), the more I could observe the failure in the official response. My involvement went deeper from that official gathering day: I shared photos of the Paris and Neuville centre when the big pictures were removed, I asked the different centres in the world about their situation with the pictures, and learned afterwards that Sivadasananda asked all centres not to answer me because I was "opiniated" about the pictures – I think he didn't want a disturbing element like me to talk to other people in the organization, hence the control. I continued to share a lot on the FB group, write Facebook reviews and comments to inform people about the situation. On 10th May I wrote to the CAVIMAC (the social security and retirement organization which is mandatory for religious organizations) plus the work inspection in Neuville-aux-Bois with other ex-members to get the ashram controlled about labour laws. At the time of writing, the investigation is still ongoing and the case is being taken very seriously. I have talked with journalists and put people in contact when needed, I have also talked with some ex-members about the possibility of adding their testimonies to the Satya investigation. There have been articles in Ouest-France, Le Figaro, and recently (end of September) another article in La République du centre, which is the local newspaper in the region of Orléans and Neuville-aux-Bois.

At present and after the holidays I've been busy with a lot of other things but I'm really proud of all the work done by the incredible team of the Satya Facebook group. First of all, you, Josna and Carol, because it makes such a difference to get a professional account of the events for the general public, so that people can know and be more conscious about the past abuse, and can get more educated about the dynamics of abuse in general. It is a work of public utility and, in my eyes, a work that comes from the heart, a work filled with authentic love. I stress that because there have been so many times, especially from

people inside the organization, the accusation that our collective work has been motivated by anger. I really don't think so. I see instead a possibility for deep healing, I see the search for truth, I see real love.

Survivor IV: Mark I. (Shankara)

Name: Mark-I/Shankara.

Association: Karma yogi (Putney, London), TTC (Woodburn 'Ranch,' New York)

When: 1992-1994

Description of duties: TTC Student (New York)

Karma Yogi (London), teaching, maintenance, driving.

The impact of reading Julie's testimony was massive. My sadhana trailed off, and I spent hours and hours searching the internet for more information and talking with ISYVC 'gurubais'. I was, and still am, sickened by these allegations. It has been hard to separate what I had learnt and still practice, from a central figure, who is now mired in controversy, and from an organisation that seems to want 'business as usual.' Despite the ISYVC being a celibate ashram, I saw couples get together in both London and New York, whilst the intimate relationship in New York of a senior swami and a brahmachari was obvious to me. In my opinion, however, none of these relationships were abusive.

The difference really, is the covert nature of what Sw. Vishnu and others have done. To say, 'I care for this person and we are a couple, which means I can no longer be a swami, and may have to leave the organisation', is a world away from doing stuff behind closed doors, and then lecturing to us all about satya, ahimsa and brahmachari.

I am still processing all this. I continue to practise as I have proved the efficacy of the disciplines in my own life. I remain though, quite deeply affected.

Survivor V: Badri

From October 1982, I was a student at the Sivananda Yoga Centre Australia and then from February 1983, I became resident and began teaching yoga classes soon after. This was voluntary work of course. It became my way of life and along with several other people, I provided financial support for the upkeep of the yoga centre. I had been offered the opportunity to become a formal ISYVC staff member in 1983 but declined.

I heard about the sexual abuse allegations from a yoga teacher we know here in Queensland. She informed us (soon after December 13) after she heard it from a yoga associate overseas. It made me think deeply about yoga in the West and about how SVD really fooled a lot of people. It has shown me how yoga organisations tend to become cults in the West, when their leaders have not developed the necessary purity of mind for seeing to the well-being of aspirants. It has made me look back over the years and reflect on how things have unfolded.

Survivor VI

I've been very close to the ISYC from 2004 to 2017, then dropped my affiliation for various reasons (some also due to organisational politics). I still remained in touch with the Acharyas and regularly visited the Bahamas ashram. I've never been abused or taken advantage of, as I'm quite a strong person and have always been independent from the organisation. This said, even if I had reduced my commitment/ties from 2017, I was still deeply distraught by what emerged in 2019 following Julie's post. Besides the pain for the survivors, I felt deeply betrayed and lied to by people I trusted as my teachers, and I have not overcome this yet. Actually, I'm not sure I'll ever teach yoga again. I guess it will take me a while to metabolise all this.

Survivor VII

I was a former student with Sivananda Yoga. I did 200H and 300H teacher training courses under the Sivananda legacy, and also teach in a private practice.

I heard about the VD case through SATYA. I was taken by surprised to witness how the organisation was handling the situation. As a sexual violence survivor, and practitioner of trauma-informed somatic healing practices (including yoga), it was somehow devastating, and induced some grieving into my relationship with yoga and this legacy. It's also disappointing to see how peers (both students and teachers) undermine these allegations and therefore the urgency, the importance, and the relevance of our work, our practice, our principles as yoga practitioners.

After becoming aware of these revelations, I've been forwarding all the information SATYA releases to my colleagues, peers and yoga friends. It's been hard to see how this has been handled. But it's been rewarding to see how many people care and are willing to organize for truth seeking and for changing our culture for the better.

In order to process the information, I have concentrated on my practice, compassion, and self-compassion. I have tried to learn by contrast, by acknowledging that safety for practitioners and survivors is a priority for me.

I'm a sociologist and somatic healing practitioner from Puerto Rico. I'm very interested in research, in creating and promoting safe spaces for survivors of violence. It's part of my dharmas.

Survivor VIII: Kim

This testimonial is an avenue for me to have a voice to share my spiritual and emotional suffering related to Sivananda Board of Directors, as well as to support others who have been harmed. I am so angry at the lack of action and their turning a blind eye to the abuse within the Sivananda centers and ashrams. I completely support and encourage further investigation of allegations of sexual, emotional, spiritual and executive power abuses within the organization. I feel it is the organization's responsibility to publicly address these issues if they want to restore their trust and integrity with the community at large; and if they care at all to practice the spiritual principles they expect from others and the teachings of Swami Sivananda and stop the wheel of negative karma and samsara for all.

I wish to share the disillusionment, sense of deception and pain I have experienced since hearing Julie's disclosure, followed by many others' inappropriate and harmful behaviours of the once trusted leaders and teachers of the Sivananda organization.

My first visit to Val Morin was around 30 years ago; I was completely new to the world of yoga and quite quickly became attracted to the spiritual teachings and practices that began a 30-year devotion to the teachings and Sivananda lineage. Since then I have travelled to ashrams and centres in India and the Bahamas, New York and Toronto. I attended classes and retreats with Prahlada and the other teachers from the Toronto centre. Rather than taking vacations to sit on the beach or taste fine wine and food, I would spend my modest pay cheque on travelling, and immersing myself in the practices of the lineage, often doing karma yoga. Over the years, I referred friends and family to the centers, and also sent my son to work as Karma yogi to the Bahamas Yoga Retreat.

I originally became inspired by Swami Vishnu's vision and charisma, the way he spread the word of peace on his plane. He resonated with my love for the Beatles and the Pink Panther, which may sound silly, but to me it represented some synchronistic message that I was on the right path. I read everything I could about Swami V and wished I was younger and could have experienced his teachings in person. When I was initiated, he would stay in a mobile home in New York. I felt so honoured. When in Val Morin, I would walk to his home and sit for hours in meditation and contemplation. It sickens me now to think that the accusations of abuse and misconduct were also entangled unconsciously in my devotion and spiritual practice. My heart was broken when I heard of Julie's experience with him. To think what she and other Karma Yogis endured in the name of blind devotion, the broken trust and abuse of vulnerable well-intentioned students was a travesty and must not go unattended! My heart was broken, and my faith shaken.

Eleven years ago, my 25-year-old son was struggling in his life and he asked me if he could go and do Karma Yoga. He had seen at firsthand my love and devotion to the practice and Sivananda organization, and I was thrilled for his interest and his commitment to deepen his spiritual life. I was happy to help him secure a spot at Sivananda Bahamas for the winter, and with great excitement I sent him on his way with his yoga mat. Knowing what I know now, I would never have supported this. I feel so deceived by the organization. To think there have been disclosures and abuses that had happened throughout the years that were being hidden and not addressed, and here I was thinking this was a place of spiritual and personal integrity. He never disclosed any form of sexual abuse, but he called me to say he was exhausted. He shared with me that he was expected to work 7 days a week and be at classes as well. It was obvious he was exhausted sometimes. I would quote something I was told from the ashram and tell him, "It's good to keep the body and

mind busy, it will keep at bay the samskaric thoughts and actions". Now I believe the ashram could have been taking advantage of his desire to please and fit in, and they were uncaring of his actual physical wellbeing. He came home 30 lbs. lighter, I barely recognized him at the airport, and it was obvious his body was being pushed to its limits, as was his mind.

Then I heard the news of Prahlada's abuse of a very young girl and his admission of abuse, and the arrow of pain struck me again. I could not believe this man, whom I respected as a teacher and mentor had misused his privileged and power at the ashram, and as a result left lifelong scars on this sweet young woman. I had spent several hours listening to his lectures and practicing asana with him and admired his devotion and wisdom. Recently, I have wondered if the lewd behaviours of his teacher/father figure Swami V. had allowed Prahlada's values to be mis formed. I couldn't help but think Prahlada must have known of the dark underbelly of the ashrams as he was so connected and integrated into the Sivananda communities. Could his integrity be tainted by his predecessors and this tainted his relationships with his students? Just as generation's trauma, generational abuse often has deep roots of secrets and deception and can be passed along throughout the family for years to follow. I wish I did not even have to think of this, but how can I not, knowing only what I now believe to be just the tip of the iceberg, of many lies and inappropriate behaviours of the teachers and swamis in the organization?

I have heard of Swamis and Chaitanya's dating and living together, being financially supported by the organization as well as living lives that are not at all virtuous, the sexual misconduct and exploitation of students and karma yogis. I have friends who have been directly harmed through the organization and I also have friends who have totally dismissed all the wrong doings, and this has caused great divide, the exact opposite of what a spiritual community is created to do.

I have given up my spiritual name and will no longer support anything related to the Sivananda organization. I have had to apologize to friends I have sent and I have spoken to my son. Some of my relationships have since been severed due to the disagreements and difference of opinions around the accusations of misdeeds with in the community. I have had to walk away from something I felt was very near and dear to my heart and it has been painful and hard to reconcile. Leaving a spiritual family was like leaving home for me, but worse, as the ability to go back is not possible for me. How could such things have happened and been hidden within a spiritual community and be allowed to continue? How could others still be profiting by the harm they do? And what do they think Swami Sivananda would say if he were alive, or do they even care?

I am sad for the community that has been harmed and broken. I am sad for those who have been directly harmed. I feel sad for those who have harmed others and are unwilling to take responsibility...as we know karma grows and only more pain and suffering will come of this, whether in this life time or another.

I beg the Board of Directors to begin the healing process, to admit their mistakes and begin reconciliation. In these times more than ever we need to take care of one another, we need safe places to practice our faith and be supported by other compassionate and spiritually ethical beings. We need to stop the cycle of abuse and lies and begin to heal.

**Postscript and reflections on the narratives on
institutional betrayal**

by Dr Josna Pankhania

A strong theme throughout the narratives is the sense of profound betrayal by the organisation. As one survivor notes, organisations are made up of people, and people make mistakes, which some may forgive. However, if the organisation tries to suppress the truth, or silence survivors, as the International Sivananda organisation is alleged to have done, then that is corruption. Many people who did not experience abuse or exploitation firsthand have been shocked by the EBM's response. They feel that everything they have studied and believed in is now founded on a lie and are left with the feeling that the institution was purely a money-making venture. As one survivor puts it, they exploited people for their money, as a free workforce, for their looks or their unquestioning devotion, and left them with nothing but scars. If these testimonies are true, which by sheer volume they appear to be, the immense harm perpetrated by this organisation, from the founding guru down, has affected hundreds of people. Many of those involved now see the organisation as a cult, and some survivors describe how they eventually lost the will to leave because they were so exhausted and sleep deprived.

The Nature of Apology

[W]hile apology and forgiveness are vital for dealing with a violent past, when uncritically undertaken these actions do not transform discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies that justified the wrongdoing in the first place.⁵⁷

The focus of an apology should include a total transformation, that is, an overhaul of those very conditions that allowed the wrong to have happened in the first place. There must be an undertaking to change the logic, the narratives, the ideologies that give rise to atrocity. Without this, without the desire to seek truth, justice and accountability, the cycle of violence and wrongdoing continues, and the apology is meaningless. Taking this into account, what Joram Tarusarina⁵⁸ refers to as 'transformative apology', should be forward-looking as well as backward-looking, and must recognise those basic conditions that gave rise to the wrongdoing with the intention of ensuring there is no possibility of a repetition of those behaviours. It is important to note that transformation is not just about reform or rehabilitation but goes beyond these considerations to recognise that beneath the atrocity lie the narratives and discourses that enable and justify it. There is no guarantee that reforming a system removes these basic conditions.

A transformative apology should focus on the perpetrator as well as the individual who has been harmed, by ensuring that, as well as the rehabilitation aspect, the epistemic dimension has also been addressed. An apology must not include any justification for the offence. Matters as serious as sexual assault and abuse can never be justified. An important aspect of this process is that there must be a desire for truth and knowledge, and an acknowledgement of past atrocities, rather than denial or attempts to justify them. Referring to abuses in language that attempts to diminish the abuses' impact, or by remaining silent, is to avoid transformation. Silence adds an additional layer of harm to the victim, as it is still a deliberate form of communication⁵⁹, which can be interpreted as arrogance, or on-going loyalty to the abuser, and therefore resistance to genuine transformation.

When offering an apology, the individuals who have been wronged participate as both victims and as recipients of the apology. They must be allowed to tell their stories, and to show their anger and resentment, as in doing so, they demonstrate their own values, which must be taken into account in a transformative apology. Apologies validate past experiences, and through them the victim's dignity and self-esteem are recovered. What is at stake in the process, is not just personal change, but change within the socio-political environment whereby light has been cast upon the conditions causing

⁵⁷ Tarusarina, J. (2019). "The Anatomy of Apology and Forgiveness: Towards transformative apology and forgiveness". *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 2019, 13, 206–224.

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

the wrongdoing. These toxic and hostile conditions allowing such wrongs are addressed by transformative apology, and a repeat of them avoided.

It must be noted that transformative apology is a process, and must involve reflection, interrogation as to what went wrong, and a commitment to the future via reform. Victims' voices form the centre of this process, but there can be no pressure on the victim to overcome their resentment and be forgiving⁶⁰. This would be to ignore the depth of the hurt suffered, and the need for fundamental change. The apology, therefore, must be accompanied by a clear plan to amend, to change the destructive environment into a positive one of reconciliation and healing.

Blurring the history of abuse unleashes further harm on the survivors. Furthermore, it damages not only the integrity of the organisation, but it harms the followers. To ask people to unconditionally and unquestioningly worship a guru who has perpetrated violence, is to create cognitive dissonance in those followers, and results in psychological harm. This behaviour opens the floodgates for other abuses, whether physical, emotional or financial and indeed sexual. Far from being liberating, stripping people systematically of their support structures, their identity, and their psyche, is a pathway to slavery and servitude. The personal stories of the survivors attest that what was actually created was a labour force that propped up a corrupt organisation lacking in ethics and moral compass.

The Royal Commission examined the cases of abuse within Satyananda Yoga, and came to the conclusion that the devotion to the guru required in the practice of Satyananda Yoga led to 'complete and unquestioning trust'⁶¹ on the part of their disciples, putting these gurus in a position of dominant power and abusive control.

This report has examined the EBM's power and control and their continued expressions of disregard for the needs of those harmed. Furthermore, the report highlighted the EBM's own involvement and contribution to a culture of abuse.

The challenge to the Sivananda organisation is to find a way forward that is truly ethical, moral and trustworthy. A way forward that does not involve following blindly the mission of a man who, according to reports, did not practice *satya* (truthfulness) and *ahimsa* (non-violence).

To date, the EBM have not stated that they believe the survivors' accounts of abuse in the International Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres over which they preside, nor have they attempted to take appropriate action.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: Case Study 21: Satyananda Yoga Ashram. Retrieved from: <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/case-studies/case-study-21-satyananda-yoga-ashram>

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Self-Care Resources

This list of resources was taken from a collection of self-care resources compiled by Yoni Shakti the Movement to Eradicate Abuse of Women in Yoga and to reclaim Yoga as a Tool for Healing and Justice and with contributions from Dr Josna Pankhania. Relevant parts are published here with kind permission of Yoni Shakti the Movement.

Resources for Survivors of Abuse in Yoga, and for campaigners to share with survivors. Version 1 / July 2020

Welcome!

This document is compiled from the contributions of our group members and advisors, to provide a reliable resource for everyone who needs it. This is the first version of this document and it will be updated as further resources are recommended by our members.

You may be a survivor of abuse in yoga who is looking for support or a safe space to disclose.

You may be a campaigner who has met survivors of abuse in yoga, perhaps because you are sharing campaign information, or are meeting survivors because of the work you are doing to reveal injustice and abuse in yoga, and you are looking for a helpful resource e to give those seeking to disclose or looking for support?

You may be a teacher/trainer/ or studio owner who wishes to support survivors of abuse in yoga, or to provide resources for your students/teachers/ trainees?

Whoever you are, if you are looking for resources to support yourself or anybody else who is a survivor of abuse in yoga, then this is for you.

1: Self-Care and Self-Nurture guidelines

Three simple suggestions to help yourself (and others) whilst you find help:

These are general guidelines to support survivors and campaigners to care for ourselves with kindness whilst we do this work. One of the key experiences reported by many survivors and campaigners in our group is that of overwhelm. Many times the work of revealing abuse in order to work towards its eradication produces a real sense of overload, exhaustion, distress and desperation that can be very hard to withstand. These experiences can manifest as fatigue, grief, anger, fear and many other emotions all at once.

It is beyond the scope of this resources document to provide a complete guide to managing these powerful experiences, which is why it provides lots of recommendations for referrals of places to get more help. The intention here in this

section is simply to provide three basic suggestions of how to take care of yourself whilst you look for outside help.

Our first suggestion is simply to be kind to yourself, and take nourishment and rest, the second suggestion is to practice Grounding, Centring and Orienting, and the third suggestion is to step into connection online or in person with trusted individuals and groups.

Here below are more details about what these suggestions might involve. These suggestions are listed beneath one after the other, in no particular order. All are important, and sometimes it takes a connection with another person to encourage us to be kind to ourselves, or maybe we need to practice grounding, centring and orienting before we are able to reach out for help or to recognise the need to be kind to ourselves. So please don't see these as one step that leads to another, but rather a trio of suggestions that might happen in any order, or even all co-exist.

Simply to be kind to yourself, and take nourishment and rest

- This can be as simple as STOPPING right now– to exhale. Press your feet into the floor.
- Feel your hands and face.
- Drink water, have a warm tea or soup.
- Step outside if you can – if it's possible, walk or stand barefoot on the earth.
- Eat some food you love.
- Take time to be in outside, wherever you are - even looking up at the sky, that is nature! Be close to trees and plants and animals if you can.
- Take a warm shower or have a bath. Maybe put salt in the bath, or use Epsom salts or whatever oils you find calming.
- Massage and oil your feet.
- Get enough sleep, and rest when you feel tired.
- If you enjoy yoga nidra, lay down and practice this too – make rest a priority and do some resting every day. Don't wait to get tired before you rest – make it part of every day.
- If you can please do these things every day.
- Take care of yourself. You are precious and deserve time to rest and be.

Practice Grounding, Centering and Orienting

If you are standing- feel the earth beneath your feet (be barefoot if you can, or feel the soles of your feet through your shoes/socks the soles of your feet). If you can reach out with your hands – press them against a wall, or a tree and feel you centre.

If you are seated, then use your hands to press into the ground beneath, and feel your centre. Feel your legs and the base of our spine on the surface beneath and press down into the earth beneath that surface even if it is a long way beneath, it is there.

Look around you – open your eyes and see if you can notice the corners of the room or the places outside that draw your attention – like trees. Notice what you see – look straight ahead, look to the sides, and know where you are. You are here and now.

Rub the palms of your hands together and pull your fingers. Pinch your ears and tug them all the way around their edges. Rub your cheeks and pinch them. Screw up your face and then stick out your tongue feel you face with your hands. Feel your scalp with your hands, wriggle your toes and fingers. Feel where your edges are – feel where your centre is.

Notice your breath coming and going. Hear the sounds close to you. Yawn and sigh and feel your centre, and notice what is happening around you, in the room, or in your immediate space.

Choose to step into connection online or in person with trusted individuals and groups

Please know that you are not alone. There are many survivors and supporters seeking to eradicate abuse, and many campaigners, supporters and survivors who are reclaiming yoga as tool for healing and justice.

Together we are working for truth and change, and knowing this can be helpful and supportive. You are not alone. Simply connecting with others who share your own experiences or intentions can be helpful.

Seeing evidence of others' efforts to eradicate abuse and reclaim yoga for healing and justice can be reassuring and positive.

This is part of the function of the Yoni Shakti the Movement Facebook group which includes examples of many different organisations and individuals who are working in their own way to address these issues. It is from amongst the members of this group and the friends and colleagues connected to these members that we have been able to compile this resource. Simply reading this resource, which has been compiled with love and care for you by trusted people is a form of connection. You are not alone... Read on to learn about the may sources of support which is available.

2: Recommended organisations providing information and support for survivors

Rape Crisis Network (Europe)

www.rcne.com

RCNE is the network of European rape crisis centres. Aiming to make sure that anyone who experiences sexual violence can get the help they need. Also active in influencing policy, standards and legislation through European governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). All member centres share a 'survivor-centred' and antidiscriminatory approach.

Solace Women's Aid (UK)

<https://www.solacewomensaid.org/>

'Violence against women and girls stops here': London-based organisation offering national support through a freephone number, with support and advice, rape crisis refuges, therapeutic support and training.

The Survivors Trust (UK)

Helpline: 0808 801 0818

thesurvivorstrust.org

The Survivors' Trust is an umbrella organisation for specialist rape and sexual abuse services and sign post survivors to our member agencies throughout the UK. The following resource on our website can be used to find local specialist support in your local

Area: <https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/find-support>. The Survivors' trust and its members are committed to the fair treatment of people regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age or physical/learning disability. [Find support](#)

RAINN (USA)

<https://www.rainn.org/>

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the largest anti-sexual violence organisation in the US. RAINN offers a National Sexual Assault Hotline for survivors and their loved ones, in association with local sexual assault service providers and also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

Canadian Women's Health Network CWHN

www.cwhn.ca

Provides services to women who have been victimized through sexual violence, including a 24-hr crisis line, one to one counselling (guaranteed confidentiality), information and referrals, advocacy, accompaniment for medical, police and court procedures, Sexual Assault Survivors Support (SASS) group several times per year, volunteer training, public education to increase awareness, assistance...

Imkaan (UK)

<https://www.imkaan.org.uk/get-help>

Imkaan is a survivor support organisation rooted in Black feminist thinking advocating the power of collective action. It provides support for survivors of sexual and domestic violence and referral to BAME specific support.

Cult Information Centre (UK and international)

<https://cultinformation.org.uk/index.html>

CIC is a charity providing advice and information for victims of cults, their families and friends, researchers and the media. Established in the United Kingdom to focus critical concern on the harmful methods of cults worldwide.

Women Against Rape (UK)

womenagainstrape.net

This is the joint website of [Women Against Rape](#) and [Black Women's Rape Action Project](#). Both organisations are based on self-help and provide support, legal information and advocacy. Campaigning for justice and protection for all women and girls, including asylum seekers, who have suffered sexual, domestic and/or racist violence.

Rape Crisis (England and Wales)

Helpline: 0808 802 9999

rapecrisis.org.uk

National organisation offering support and counselling for those affected by rape and sexual abuse.

Victim Support

Supportline: [0333 300 6389](tel:03333006389)

[Rape and sexual assault](#)

Confidential, free services available to anyone who's been raped or sexually assaulted, now or in the past. Offering help, regardless of whether you have told the police or anyone else about the attack. Volunteers can visit you at home (if you want us to, and if doing so will not put you at further risk) or somewhere else if you prefer. If you don't want to see anyone face-to-face, you can also on the phone, either at local offices or at the national Victim Supportline.

Women's Aid Federation (UK)

National Domestic Violence Helpline (24hrs): 0808 2000 247

womensaid.org.uk

Women's Aid is the national domestic violence charity that helps up to 250,000 women and children every year. We work to end violence against women and children, and support over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the country. Offering phone support, email support, survivors' forum, training and information.

National Health Service (UK)

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/help-after-rape-and-sexual-assault/>

Find an NHS Sexual Abuse Referral Centre (SARC) near you (UK)

<https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-services/Rape%20and%20sexual%20assault%20referral%20centres/LocationSearch/364>

SARCs are specialist medical and forensic services for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted. They aim to be one-stop service, providing the following under one roof: medical care and forensic examination following assault/rape and, in some locations, sexual health services.

3: Further Reading

All articles written and/or shared by members of the YSTM Facebook group

<https://yogainternational.com/article/view/how-to-respond-to-sexual-abuse-within-a-yoga-or-spiritual-community>

Karen Rain here sets out the key guidelines to follow for helpful responses.

<https://humanparts.medium.com/i-dont-need-i-believe-you-i-need-i-ll-stand-up-for-youc6f9a2cc8d35>

Karen Rain outlines the heart of what's needed from a survivor's perspective.

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10926771.2020.1774695?fbclid=IwAR22Kx_VtxjW05jOuarwz2fVgdxdl3l0M-9Csgz1W1HeCU_SfLGnfhfbAml&

Crucial exposition of DARVO (Deny, Attack, reverse Victim and Offender) response that is a common response of perpetrators (and enablers) in order to discredit a survivor who speaks up. Awareness of DARVO reduces its effectiveness.

Freyd, J.J. (1997). Violations of Power, Adaptive Blindness and Betrayal Trauma Theory. *Feminism and Psychology*. Vol 7. 22-32.

Other resources

An extensive reading list on cults and their influence.

<http://cultresearch.org/recommended-reading/>

Matthew Remski's work is recommended

- His book: *Practice and all is Coming: Abuse, Cult Dynamics and Healing in Yoga and Beyond* and online articles:
- <https://embodiedwisdom.pub/paaic-resources/>
- Matthew Remski's invaluable round up of abuses revealed in yoga in 2019 <http://matthewremski.com/wordpress/category/cult-dynamics/>

ALSO

Site recommended by Christie Roe, full of thoughtful reflection and practical guidelines, for example:

<https://transformharm.org>

<https://transformharm.org/9-ways-to-be-accountable-when-youve-been-abusive/>

Support Contacts in India

The following contacts for India were provided by Dr Elizabeth Thomas, Associate Professor & Coordinator, Department of Psychology. CHRIST University Bangalore India

Rahi Foundation

<https://rahifoundation.org/>

Enfold Proactive Health Trust

<http://enfoldindia.org/>

Arpan

<https://www.arpan.org.in/>

Childline India Foundation

<https://www.childlineindia.org/>

Parivarthan Counselling Training and Research Centre

<https://parivarthan.org/>

Project SATYA

Sivananda
Accountability
Truth Seeking
Yogic Action

Carol Merchasin, Esq. is a former partner at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, the eighth largest law firm in the US with years of experience in conducting investigations into workplace misconduct. Carol has conducted a number of complex investigations into allegations of sexual abuse in religious organizations, including Shambhala International in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Dr. Josna Pankhania is a counsellor and psychotherapist accredited with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Josna currently works as a senior caseworker for an Australian state-wide counselling service that supports women and children experiencing violence and abuse. As a member of the Satyananda Yoga community, Josna has been working towards healing, truth and justice in this community since, in 2014, the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse exposed cases of child sexual abuse within this yoga movement.