

Transformations through Yoga

An Organic Inquiry into how yoga teachers own experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet students with such experiences

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Master Thesis in Counseling

Spring 2015

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Abstract

This thesis is an Inquiry into how yoga teachers own experience with non- ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet students that have had such experiences. Using a qualitative research design the thesis is based on the transpersonal research method Organic Inquiry. The material was collected through semi- structured interviews with three yoga teachers and then written into individual stories. One of the aims with Organic Inquiry is to inspire to a transformation in the researcher, the participants and perhaps even the reader. Response letters from the participants, external readers and the researcher's own story of transformation is therefor included in the thesis.

Three themes were found in the stories and they are called; loving guidance, healing experiences and sensing the room. They are all included in the core theme that is transformations through yoga as a process. All three participants tell stories of a transformation process that has taken place in them through their yoga practice. This transformation is a result of a healing process through an experience of non- ordinary state of consciousness. The transformation has been possible because of the safe space and loving guidance created by their teachers. This is the same environment they are now trying to create for their students. By being tuned in to their students, they express an intuitive knowledge of when to bring their experiences with non- ordinary states, and when the student is ready to hear about spirituality. The three themes and the core theme are discussed in the light of Joseph Campbell's description of the hero's journey. Research results suggest that is not the experience in itself that has defined how they meet their students in their experiences; rather it is their personal journey as a whole. Going through the three steps and experiencing the transformational powers that lies in a yoga journey is determining for how they meet their students on their experiences. The experiences with non- ordinary states described here, all served as a rite of passage, turning the student into the teacher.

Foreword

I want to use this space to express my gratitude to all the teachers I have had, and will have, on or off the mat.

This thesis has been conducted in the tradition of Organic Inquiry and therefore stands out with its emphasis on transformation in the researcher, the participants and possibly even the reader.

With the possibility for transformation in mind this way of reading a thesis requires a great deal from the reader. For those of you taking part in this journey with me, either by sharing your stories with me or by reading them with an open mind; I give you my deepest gratitude.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 My Story

One of my strongest childhood memories took place by my grandmother's cabin up in the Norwegian mountains. Even though 20 years has passed since that experience it is still very vivid in my memory. I was alone outside, sitting by the creek watching it stream down. Suddenly it felt as though I was seeing everything with a clearer sight. The creek and the trees and the sky, I noticed everything at once. Everything was there, so real, but it still felt as if I wasn't there. I had no words to describe what happened back then, since I was just a child. Even now, as an adult, no words seem to cover that experience. The word that comes to mind is clarity. I was totally present in the moment without any thoughts at all. Since I had no thoughts, I had no fear either. Everything stopped around me, there was no yesterday, no tomorrow, only that creek in that moment.

I don't think my experience lasted for very long, at least no one came looking for me or mentioned that I had been gone a long time. Like I mentioned, I had no words to describe my experience so I never talked to anyone about it. In a strange way I didn't feel the need either. It was my own experience and maybe I somehow knew that turning it into words would change it.

This incredibly strong experience gave me a calmness, I enjoyed being alone after that. Even though I knew something special had happened I still did not think it was anything dramatic about it. It felt very natural and peaceful. As a child I didn't think much about it either, I had no questions, and even more important I had no need to know more. What had happened had happened, it was there, and that was it. My descriptions of it now is a result of the adult me, and an attempt to construct meaning from what happened. The words I use to tell this story are affected not only by all the reading on the subject I have been doing the last few years, but also by the human language itself. I have tried to meditate to prepare for telling this story, but it doesn't really help because nothing can change the fact that the experience I want to write about is beyond words.

Those mountains and that creek would always be sacred to me after that, and every time I was there I felt a sense of ease. The place had a peacefulness I yet hadn't found anywhere else. We went up to the cabin many times every year and I have so many fond childhood memories from there, building tree houses with my dad, picking blueberries and playing by the creek

with my younger sister. I had a good feeling every time I was up there, but I never did have that experience again. Time passed by, I grew older and eventually my grandmother sold her cabin when I was about 9. She could no longer stay there alone, and the property was too much to take care of for her. I remember feeling very upset about it at the time, and for the years to come. It felt like leaving something I wasn't ready to leave, and at the same time it meant saying goodbye to that peacefulness I had discovered there.

Many years later I found that peace again, by a more deliberate attempt, but it still took me by surprise. The place where I found it was very different to the creek where I first had discovered it. In fact, it wasn't a place at all, it was on a mat.

I took some meditation courses and yoga classes while I was in high school. I loved it, but it never became a daily thing for me, or a spiritual commitment. Never once did I expect wonders from my practice. For me meditation was still about stressing down and yoga was mostly a workout. Then one day I talked to a yoga teacher about how I found it hard to stick to my meditation practice at home. She suggested I should meditate after yoga, and she told me that was what the ancient yogis did. The asanas, she explained, was just a preparation to be able to meditate for a long time. I started taking her advice and she would also help me when I had any questions.

From that day, I experienced yoga and meditation in a whole new way. I started to incorporate a daily practice into my life with yoga first and then meditation after. For me that was the perfect balance. The asanas prepared not just my body, but also my mind for the stillness during meditation, and I began to see a glimpse of what meditation was.

Just as the experience by the creek as a child, my instant experience of peace during meditation came as a surprise. Again I got the feeling that I was completely present in the moment, and in my body. There was no fear, no anxiety, just clarity. Above all there were no thoughts, hopes or judgments. When I was in that experience I was not thinking about that experience, I was only experiencing it. Even though my eyes were closed, it was like I was seeing everything at once. I have never felt so present before, there were no boundaries between me and the world around me. Most striking was the experience that I had all the answers, or rather that all the answers were available to me. At the same time it didn't matter, partly because I had no questions, and partly because it just didn't matter. Everything was already there. I did experience a loss of self, in the sense that I no longer associated with an

I, but at the same time I was more present in myself than I have ever been, I have no idea how to explain that.

The only thing I can compare it to is when I wake up from a dream and realize that it was just a dream. I woke up from my daily life and I realized that it was just that, my daily life. I still wouldn't call it a life changing event because the experiences ceased and nothing had changed. It would take me many years of dedicated meditation practice before I was able to bring a bit of that peace and clarity with me from my mat, and into my daily life.

1.2 Introduction

In contrast to popular belief we are not less religious in Norway today than we were in earlier times. People are still spiritual and many are experiencing non-ordinary states of consciousness, some they would call spiritual. However, the arenas where spirituality is talked about have changed dramatically (Botvar, 2010; McGuire, 2002). One setting that I am particularly interested in is the yoga community. Here different people, with very different views on spirituality, meet to receive guidance in yoga and meditation from a teacher. This is happening every single day, all over the world. Yoga and meditation is an important part of modern day spirituality, and people are having profound spiritual experiences within the walls of the yoga studios (Caplan, Portillo and Seely, 2013). Some are experiencing what is called non-ordinary states of consciousness. These experiences are also being talked about in the setting of the yoga studios, often with the yoga teacher.

I have been practicing meditation and yoga for about ten years and have witnessed many situations where yoga teachers have talked to their students about their spiritual experiences. After I began studying counseling I have started to see similarities between these conversations and counseling conversations.

1.2.1 The research question

Conversations about spirituality fascinates me, and has made me want to know more about what is going on when non-ordinary states of consciousness is being talked about in the settings of yoga communities, especially between teacher and student. I am particularly interested in how this is being shaped by the yoga teacher's personal experience with such altered states. There is not only yoga that is going on inside the studios, but also spiritual practice, transformative learning and counseling. Hence my research question is:

How do yoga teachers own experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet clients that have had such experiences?

To find this out I have followed the methodology of Organic Inquiry and conducted in- depth interviews with three yoga teachers that have experienced non- ordinary states of consciousness. According to this method the interviews have then been written into stories that I have analyzed.

1.2.2 The structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six parts. In chapter two I will present some of the literature most relevant to this study. Chapter three is concerned with presenting the research method that has been used; Organic inquiry. In chapter four I present the three themes, and the core theme that I found during my analysis. The fifth chapter is a discussion about the main themes from the findings seen in light of some of the theory presented in chapter two, and also additional theory that emerged as relevant after I had analyzed the data. The last chapter offers some concluding comments and my own story of transformation through the thesis.

1.2.3 Glossary

Here I will give an overview of the central concepts mentioned in the stories, response letters and the thesis that will not be explained in the literature review.

Asana – Yoga posture

Ashtanga – A very physical demanding practice with prescribed postures linked to breath.

Kundalini – A form of yoga where the focus is on awakening kundalini energy through regular practice of meditation, pranayama, chanting mantra and yoga asana.

Mantra meditation –A sound or vibration used to enter a deep state of meditation

Savasana – A yoga posture where one lies on the back relaxing, often at the end of a class. Also called corpse pose.

Shala – The room where yoga is practiced

Teacher Training – A course to be certified as a yoga instructor, often lasting between 3-4 fweeks.

Vinyasa – A dynamic form of yoga where movement is linked with breath

Yoga Nidra -a sleep-like state which yogis report to experience during their meditations

Yogini – A female yoga practitioner

Chapter 2: Literature review

My aim with this literature review has been to examine and discuss some of the sources most relevant to the topic of non- ordinary states of consciousness within yoga. It explores some classic and current theories regarding consciousness, states of consciousness and includes the yogic concept of samadhi to give an understanding of non- ordinary states of consciousness within yoga. A section on personal and spiritual development is also included, because most theories on non- ordinary states of consciousness belong in a broader framework of a developmental theory.

Spirituality and spiritual emergencies will also be looked at, as this is closely linked to the understanding of non- ordinary states of consciousness, also within the yoga tradition. The section on spiritual emergency aims to show transpersonal psychology's emphasis on how the helper needs to have sufficient knowledge about spirituality, and experiences with non- ordinary states of consciousness in a meeting with someone facing these experiences. This can be seen in relation to how the yoga teachers draw on their own experiences when they meet students with similar experiences.

2.1 Consciousness

In order to understand non- ordinary states of consciousness one first has to know what consciousness is. What does it mean to have consciousness? And how do we define it? These questions have proven difficult to answer.

The word consciousness has meant different things throughout history, today it is often understood as the foundation of our experience, and it has proven hard to define. Allan Combs (2009) explains consciousness as the background, or the ground of all experience. Everything that we have the potential to experience is done so through our consciousness. I will make no attempt to define the concept of consciousness, but rather try to present some ideas about how it is described by some of the leading theoreticians in the field of consciousness studies today. When asked to define mind at a lecture he held, Charles Tart answered: *"I cannot define mind! I cannot define consciousness, and neither can anyone else. I must say that I find it kind of amusing that people try."* (Tart, 2001 p.151). Some attempts have been made though and Webster's defines consciousness as: *"awareness; the state or fact of being conscious in regard to something."* (Cortright, 1997 p. 53). Sri Aurobindo, an Indian yogi and scholar had this to say about consciousness: *"it is the energy, the motion, the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it."* (Sri Aurobindo, 1971 p.239).

2.2 States of consciousness

A non-ordinary state is the same as an altered state of consciousness, meaning different from our ordinary experience. Since the topic here is experiences with non-ordinary states it is important to know something about what a state really is, and what we mean when we talk about a non-ordinary state. While it is hard to say something about what consciousness itself is, it is easier to say something about the different states of consciousness. Waking, dreaming and non-dream sleep are widely recognized as the ordinary or normal states of consciousness (Wilber, 2000). These states have their own interesting physiological functioning, but will not be of further interest here, since the topic here is the non-ordinary or altered states. It is also worth mentioning that what we normally refer to as our awakened state is open for debate. To take one example G.I Gurdjieff (Gurdjieff, 1993; Needleman and Baker, 1998), one of the pioneers in translating eastern ideas into western form strongly disagreed with the definition of ordinary consciousness as an awakened state. To him it is quite the opposite, we are not awake at all in our normal everyday consciousness, but we have a potential to waking up. “*Man is asleep*” he said, and maintained that most of our lives are spent with a distorted perception of what is really going on. This causes us to get into a lot of trouble and suffering when really the problems we see are all illusions brought on by this sleep state we call being awake (Tart, 2001; Needleman and Baker, 1998). Getting out of our normal consciousness can therefore be a way of waking up. This is in line with many of the world’s eastern religious traditions where spiritual practice is designed to create calming of the mind and an awakened consciousness (Cortright, 1997). To a certain extent this resonates with the tradition of yoga where the practice of the eight limbs will create an awakened awareness, and what the practitioner is waking up from, is this consciousness we call the everyday awakened state. The difference is that in yoga, the body, and especially bodily awareness is considered crucial in order to reach a higher level of consciousness (Iyengar, 1979). It is not so much about leaving the body, but rather transcending the experience of it.

The three letter word aum is very significant in yoga today, most yoga classes begins with the whole class chanting aum together. In his book *Light on Yoga*, Iyengar (1979) describes various meanings that have been attributed to this word; one of them is about states of consciousness, and therefore interesting here: The letter A symbolizes the waking state, the U symbolizes dreamless sleep state and the M symbolizes dream sleep. These are the same three states described in modern day consciousness research. Iyengar writes how these three make up the fourth state that transcends all others; turiya avastha, this is the state of samadhi.

In much of today's consciousness research non-ordinary state of consciousness is every other state except dream sleep, dreamless sleep and our normal waking state. It includes near death experiences, meditative states, drug induced states and many more (Combs, 2009). The definition of some states varies within different fields, day dreaming, peak performance states are both considered normal states by some, and altered by others (Payne, 2012). Some argue for a more mechanical understanding of the concept altered states. Revonsuo, Kallio and Sikka (2009) argue that the proper way to view an altered state is as an alteration in the informational relationship between consciousness and the world. They define an altered state as "*a state in which the neurocognitive background mechanisms of consciousness have an increased tendency to produce misrepresentations such as hallucinations, delusion, and memory distortions*" (Revonsuo, Kallio and Sikka, 2009 p.187). They maintain that this definition is important in order to research these experiences properly. In this Organic Inquiry where the focus is on people's experiences such definitions are less relevant and non-ordinary states of consciousness will be understood similar to the way Farthing defines it (1992):

An altered state of consciousness may be defined as a temporary change in the overall pattern of subjective experience, such that the individual believes that his or her mental functioning is distinctly different from certain general norms for his or her normal waking state of consciousness. (p. 205)

A peak experience is a temporarily altered state, In Wilber's words; "*In a peak experience (a temporary altered state), a person can briefly experience, while awake, any of the natural states of psychic, subtle, casual, or nondual awareness, and these often result in direct spiritual experiences.*" (Wilber, 2000 p.14). Maslow (1964) also sees peak experiences in connection to spirituality, he consider them episodes of unitive consciousness where the usual limitations of space and time appear to be transcended and which can induce a spectrum of emotions, from peace to joy. The peak experiences have the potential for transformation for the person experiencing them in a way that will lead to better functioning in the world. At the same time some people might not have any effect of these experiences at all, so it is only a potential.

When we enter one state of consciousness, we tend to enter it completely. We are either in the meditative state, or we are not. We are either dreaming or not dreaming. Charles Tart has developed a systems theory to explain why this is. There are a number of different

psychological functioning that come together and make up a certain state, and these functions seem to be supporting each other in maintaining the state. Some states are harder to get out of than others (Combs, 2000). Our normal waking consciousness is one example of a state that is hard to get out of. It is not one function that keeps us in this state but rather a combination of many psychological functioning's that work together to keep us in our normal waking state.

Tart names four types of influences that stabilize and maintain a certain state of consciousness. *Loading stabilization* is the first and means how we load our system with some activity to keep us in a certain state. Normal waking consciousness is stabilized by doing things and acting in the world. Certain meditative states are being maintained by mantra, paying attention to the breath and so on. *Negative feedback stabilizations* are where the exit of a state brings discomfort or other negative consequences. When we are drawn into a state because we want more of what we get in that state it is called *positive feedback*. This can often be the case with drugs, and also certain meditation experiences. *Limiting stabilization* is when we put a boundary on the situation to keep us from shifting into a different state of consciousness (Combs, 2000). In spiritual traditions attention seems to be the reoccurring theme, it might be on breath, posture, a word, a visual pattern or the world around you. Either way, single pointed attention is used to bring an increased intensity to an experience and transport the individual to another state of consciousness (Combs, 2002). This is also true in the yoga tradition where concentrated attention is considered to be one of the foundations for practice (Iyengar, 2002).

2.3 Samadhi

Due to the limited space there will be no overview of the history of yoga or descriptions of the different styles practiced in the west today. The one yogic concept that will be introduced is samadhi, the single most important non-ordinary state of consciousness described in classical yoga texts.

Most of today's popular yoga styles here in the west draw great inspiration from the yoga sutras of Patanjali, and it is one of the most cited and discussed writings in the yoga community today. They were written about 2000 years ago and are considered a classical presentation of raja yoga, the royal yoga of the mind. The sutras is written as an answer to what yoga is; a practice "to calm the fluctuations of the mind" (Bouanchaud, 1999; Caplan, Portillo and Seely, 2013). This is also the place where the eight limbs of yoga are described, the physical practice of different poses called asanas makes up only one of these limbs. The

practice of moving through the path described in the sutras is a way to reach samadhi; “*a blissful state where the practitioner is absorbed into oneness with the divine by releasing the ego*” (Stephens, 2010 p.7). The descriptions of samadhi make it clear that it is what we here consider a non- ordinary state of consciousness.

The yoga tantra movement was a reaction against the dualistic practices described in earlier yogic literature, like the yoga sutras of Patanjali. The movement was influenced by Mahayana Buddhism and grew to be a big influence on modern yoga. The core idea is that everything in the universe is connected and an expression of the divine, it can be tapped into by the yoga practitioner as a source of divine consciousness and being. This view is very different from the one presented by Patanjali, but today they have merged together and modern day yoga draws on both these traditions (Stephens, 2010). The single most popular tradition of yoga in the west today is Hatha yoga, first described in writing by Swami Swatmarama in the fourteenth century. It looks at many yogic concepts, including samadhi, and the understanding of it is in line with the sutras and tantra yoga. There are three purposes of hatha yoga described in Swatamarama’s book *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2011). The third one is about waking the pure consciousness through which one ultimately connects with the divine by engaging in practices rooted in the physical body. Samadhi is also described in the *pradipika* as simple bliss as a result of practice. Sri K. Pattabhi Jois (1958), the founder of Ashtanga yoga, said that yoga is samadhi, that particular state is what it is all about. B.K.S Iyengar describes samadhi as the flower of consciousness ripened into the fullest fruit of practice (Iyengar, 2002). The understanding of the concept samadhi varies, just like the western concept of consciousness and Iyengar explains why it is so hard to describe samadhi : “*Neti! Neti! –It is not this! It is not this! The state can only be expressed by profound silence.*”(Iyengar, 1979 p.52).

2.4 Psychological and spiritual development

This section will give a brief outlook of some theories on psychological and spiritual development. The aim is to provide essential background information on the interconnectedness of the fields on non- ordinary states of consciousness and human development. Experiences with non- ordinary states take place within the context of human experience. In order to understand how a person makes meaning out of their experiences with non- ordinary states we need to know something about how we develop and grow both spiritually and psychologically.

Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1971) both developed theories on human development within the humanistic tradition. Maslow's model was based on how an individual's needs must be satisfied at each particular level of growth before he can progress on to a higher development level and potentially reach a stage of self-actualization. Rogers' ideas were similar in that he also believed that humans have a tendency towards wholeness and actualization of his or her's potential (Ivey, D'Andrea and Ivey, 2011). However, in their later works both Rogers and Maslow questioned the limitations of a purely humanistic approach and opened up for another level of human development called transcendence (Rogers, 1984; Maslow 1969). In Roger's (1980) words:

“ I am open to even more mysterious phenomena – precognition, thought transference, clairvoyance, human auras, Kirlian photography, even out- of- the- body experiences. These phenomena may not fit with known scientific laws, but perhaps we are on the verge of discovering new types of lawful order. ” (Rogers, 1980, p.83).

Maslow (1969) added transcendence as another stage on his hierarchy of needs model and described how transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive level of human consciousness where relating to oneself, others, nature and the cosmos is ends rather than means.

Ken Wilber has developed a meta-theoretical framework on human consciousness known as the AQAL model. This is an attempt to present a map over all the potentials of human growth and development. His model includes waves of development, streams of development, states of consciousness and the self. Wilber's theory is based on how we as humans are developing through many different areas simultaneously and that we can be more developed on some than on others. Anyone at any level or any place in their spiritual development can have a peak experience, where a person is on the developmental stages will determine how that person incorporates it (Wilber, 2000). Allan Combs has written extensively on consciousness and psychological development and he writes that;” *Each tends to interpret their experience in the ways they already understand the world*” (Combs, 2009 p.98). A person's way of understanding the world is a product of their developmental structure.

Children are also capable of having peak experiences but they are being processed through frontal structures making the interpretation and expression of these experiences pre-conventional and egocentric (Combs, 2009). This applies to adults as well, since the stages of development are not tied to a certain age. An experience with a non-ordinary state of

consciousness is therefore interpreted according to the stage of development of the person experiencing it. For a higher development to occur the experiences have to be translated into something more permanent than states; structures (Wilber, 2000). At a higher level of development the person would be better equipped to making the peak experience more permanent. Maslow (1964) referenced to this as a plateau experience, a more permanent state of being. Here the individual will experience a more fundamental change involving how one sees the world. This can say something about why different people understand and make meaning of their peak experiences in so many different ways.

Meditative experiences stand out because they are often cultivated through practice over time. They also tend to be more stable than other spontaneous experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness. The potential that the person then has tapped into in the fleeting moment of the experience can become more accessible even out of these states as a part of the persons developmental structure (Combs, 2002).

Aurobindo Akroyd Ghose was one of the modern pioneers in developing theories on consciousness and a life of yoga. His theory and practice of integral yoga was designed to unite body, mind and spirit into one single transformed being. With this idea he moved away from the more traditional schools of yoga in India which focused on the nonphysical aspects of human experience and turning away from the material world and the physical body. In contradiction to the traditional way of living for yogis, Sri Aurobindo maintained that his Integral Yoga could be practiced while at the same time living actively in the world (Aurobindo, 1993; Miovic, 2004). In this sense his yoga is similar to the way many western yogis and yoginis live their lives today within the hatha tradition (Stephens, 2010). His theories are traditional in the sense that they draw on the ancient Indian philosophy of Vedanta with the ascending levels that surround the individual self. In most yoga practice the goal is to penetrate these realms, but Integral Yoga holds the view that yogic transformation is an evolutionary process. Instead of releasing the yogi from the physical world like traditional practice, the goal here is to integrate all levels of the being into one. Integral Yoga is therefore a purification process that builds on our experiences in the physical world and then goes beyond it and integrates it (Aurobindo, 1993; Miovic, 2004). At first glance this might appear to have some similarities with Wilber's (2000) concept of staged development and integration, however Aurobindo stresses that spiritual development is cyclic, and although evolution usually move upward they are still cycles and do not act in a linear fashion (Aurobindo, 1993).

2.5 Spirituality- spiritual experience

Experiences with non- ordinary states can sometimes be referred to as spiritual or even religious, but they do not mean the same thing or describe the same phenomena. It is important to be aware of the difference and especially when the topic is yoga, a tradition closely linked to religion. The aim with this section is to give an overview of what spirituality and spiritual experience is.

Similar to the concept of consciousness, spirituality and spiritual experiences are also hard to define. It is important to be aware of the distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion will here be considered a social phenomenon, as it is shaped by social context and exists in a social context (McGuire, 2002). Spirituality is more about the subjective relationship with something, someone or everything and everyone. There are endless definitions of spirituality but a broad and inclusive understanding that it is what gives meaning to life for each individual. It can therefore be closely linked to religion, but it is still possible to be spiritual and not religious, or opposite. The word spirituality will mean different things to different people, and the various academic fields also approach spirituality in very different ways. In religious studies it is often viewed in the context of non-organized religion (McGuire, 2002; Botvar, 2010; Hervieu-Leger, 2000) and in the field of consciousness studies it is closely linked to development as we have seen (Wilber, 2000; Combs, 2009). In counseling and psychology it is connected to meaning making and personal growth (Ivey, D'Andrea and Ivey, 2012). Here we will be less concerned with defining spirituality and more concerned with understanding something about the spiritual experience.

The view here is that whether or not an experience can be considered spiritual is entirely up to the person having the experience. So there will be no attempt at defining this concept that is being spoken about in so many different ways. However, many people having experiences with non- ordinary states or peak experiences refer to them as spiritual or religious (Tart, 1972). The two concepts experiences with non- ordinary states and spiritual experiences therefor often overlap, and can be used interchangeably. They do however not mean the same thing, as many people having experiences with non- ordinary states don't consider themselves to have had a spiritual experience. Another related concept is awakening experiences, a term for experiences happening outside spiritual or religious practice. Spiritual experiences can thus be said to be those experiences with non- ordinary states that happens as a result of a spiritual practice (Taylor, 2012). Religious experience is something different as that indicates an organized experience. This is related to the difference between religion and spirituality that

we touched upon earlier. The altered states taking place within a religious context are often molded to match whatever experience that operates within that specific religion. Tart (1972) uses the word indoctrinated, and this indoctrination would then shape not only how the non-ordinary state is experienced, but also interpreted. This is relevant to experiences taking place within the yoga community too, as there might be certain expectations about what peak experiences are given value.

William James (1907/2007), in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, described religious experience to be the experience of perceiving a reality that transcends one's ordinary state. This can be compared to how we have here viewed non-ordinary states of consciousness. His primary interest was in direct religious experience. He maintained that even though spiritual experiences could possibly be explained through brain pathology, they are still very valuable and can be life changing. The memory of these experiences and a sense of importance always remain with the person. He explains that a mystical experience often contains one or many of these marks: 1) Ineffability- not being able to recount the experience accordingly with words 2) Noetic quality- Insights of truth or important revelations 3) Transiency- Most mystical states don't last longer than one or two hours 4) Passivity- the state is involuntary and happens to the person, even though it can be induced voluntarily.

In his book *Integral Psychology* Ken Wilber (2000) mentions five common definitions of spirituality, and explains how all of them deserve to be included in an integral model about human development, and how they are all relevant:

1. Spirituality involves the highest levels of any of the developmental lines.
2. Spirituality is the sum total of the highest levels of the developmental lines.
3. Spirituality is itself a separate developmental line.
4. Spirituality is an attitude (such as open-ness or love) that you can have at whatever stage you are at.
5. Spirituality basically involves peak experiences, not stages. (p.129)

Spirituality is, like the other developmental lines described by Wilber and Combs also seen as a staged development (Combs, 2009). The idea behind spirituality as a growth process is that “*The human body everywhere grows 206 bones, two kidneys, and one heart; and the human mind everywhere grows the capacities for images, symbols and concepts. Likewise, it seems, the human spirit everywhere grows intuitions of the Divine*” (Wilber 2000 p.17).

Stanislav Grof disagrees with Wilber's descriptions of spiritual development as a linear process and instead points out that a spiritual opening often is a combination of regression and progression (Grof, 2012).

The view of spiritual experience presented here resembles the yogic concept of samadhi in that it is also the final stage of a development. In Iyengar's words "*The yogi has departed from the material world and is merged with the Eternal. There is no duality between the knower and the known for they are merged like camphor and the flame*" (Iyengar, 1979, p.51).

The idea that there is a common core to spirituality, shared by all the world's great spiritual and religious traditions is called Perennial philosophy. Transpersonal therapy, the works of Wilber and Combs and Aurobindo's philosophy and can be said to be in line with this way of thinking (Wilber, 2000; Combs, 2009; Cortright, 1997). Perennial philosophy is concerned about understanding human spirituality and spiritual experiences through finding the agreements between the world's spiritual traditions (Combs, 2002; Huxley, 1945). It is useful to separate between two expressions of spirituality those who emphasize the Personal Divine and those who emphasize the Impersonal Divine. Spirituality in many of the eastern traditions has been about seeking a merging for the individual in to the Impersonal Divine, and in mainstream Christianity, Judaism and Islam the goal for the individual has been a personal relationship with the Divine. This is an over simplification as most Hindu traditions are also theistic, and mainstream eastern religiosity tend to lead towards a personal relationship with the divine. When reading religious writings from the three big monotheistic religions, it is easy to see that they too emphasis an Impersonal, non-dual nature of spiritual experience (Cortright, 1997).

2.6 Spiritual emergency

Experiences with non- ordinary states can be traumatic for some people (Grof & Grof, 1989). This section aims to show what the possible dangers of having such powerful experiences.

Spiritual emergency refers to "*how the self becomes disorganized and overwhelmed by an infusion of spiritual energies or new realms of experience which it is not yet able to integrate*" (Cortright, 1997 p.156). Transpersonal psychotherapy uses this term to warn about the dangers of a pure psychological approach to inner states, removed from the spiritual traditions they belong to (Cortright, 1997). A spiritual emergency is both a crises and an opportunity at the same time, and holds a possibility for a new development of consciousness.

What seems to be defining for the outcome is whether or not the person experiencing the crises get sufficient spiritual guidance by a skilled teacher, guru or therapist (Grof & Grof, 1989; Cortright, 1997; Combs, 2002). “*Without proper support the person can be engulfed not only by spiritual energy but by unconscious forces of the psyche that are unleashed in this process, leaving the person adrift in a sea of energies that he or she is not equipped to deal with*” (Cortright, 1997 p.156). Transpersonal therapy views traditional psychiatry as possibly damaging to people’s consciousness development because it fails to include spirituality and spiritual crisis. R. D. Laing (1967) challenged the idea of normality in society and pointed out that psychosis could be a vehicle to inner discovery where the consciousness could be expanded. In Grof’s words; “*traditional psychiatry makes no distinction between psychosis and mysticism and tends to treat all nonordinary states of consciousness by suppressive medication.*” (Grof & Grof, 1989 p. xi). In their essay *Spiritual emergency: understanding evolutionary crisis* Grof and Grof (1989) explores the idea that many episodes that are labeled mental illnesses today are not really disease, but rather a crises of the evolution of consciousness, a spiritual emergency.

Most often spiritual experiences develop gradually through a process of dedicated religious or spiritual practice. The spiritual journey that person has been on over time has then prepared for the emergence of spiritual experiences such as expanding love, the feeling of oneness with the universe or deep insights and clarity. Sometimes the spiritual experiences happens so unexpectedly and without preparation, this could lead the person into a spiritual emergency causing fear, confusion and attempts to control the experience. This often happens when the person has no conceptual framework to deal with the experiences or that there is not enough physical or emotional resilience within the self to integrate what is happening (Cortright, 1997). Taylor makes a distinction between spiritual experiences happening as a result of spiritual practice and awakening experiences, which can occur spontaneously. In this last type of experience there lies a possibility for a spiritual emergency. This is very relevant in the yogic tradition where one is considered to grow into one’s spiritual experiences. This is also why many of the works on yoga stress the importance of the eight limbed path (Swatamarama, 2011; Jois, 1958; Iyengar, 1979). It is there to prepare you for the experience of samadhi.

Chapter 3: Methodological choices

The process of Organic Inquiry requires the researcher to repeatedly follow a three step process with preparation, inspiration and integration (Clements, 2004). This is also what I have been doing over and over again in this process. In a longer timeframe this has been a linear three step procedure for me with preparing for the project by reading, planning and doing yoga. Then in the inspiration step I collected the data, from both my own story and the participant's stories. The last part was for me the integration of everything. At the same time these three steps has repeated themselves over and over again during this project, in a cyclic manner. Often they have taken me back again, to do something differently or rethink thoughts I had. Looking back I am able to appreciate the natural movement these organic steps have provided in my research project and I realize that I have been living the methodology as Braud (2004) describes it.

3.1 Preparation

3.1.1 Organic Inquiry

In my quest to find a method to approach my research question I found many methods that invited the researcher to take a look at the human experience. Some research methods are developed specifically to look at subjective experiences. Phenomenology for example has a focus on the person's inner world and experiences as they are perceived by the person experiencing them (Thagaard, 2009). I found my topic of non- ordinary states of consciousness too complex to be covered in a traditional phenomenological inquiry. Certain experiences are not really experiences in our everyday sense of the word, and I consider non - ordinary states of consciousness as one of those experiences. As this is a topic that is not easily captured by a traditional qualitative approach I decided to use a transpersonal research method, namely organic inquiry that is in the tradition of qualitative and narrative research (Anderson and Braud, 2011). I have followed the guidelines for the method as presented by Clements (2004) and Curry and Wells (2006).

Organic inquiry is a transpersonal research method with roots back to the field of transpersonal psychology and the idea of humans as ultimately spiritual beings (Braud and Anderson, 2011). The method has been developed mostly by Jennifer Clements as an expanded version of Organic Research, which she constructed together with Dorothy Ettling, Dianne Jenett, Lisa Shields and Nora Taylor back in the early 1990's (Clements et al. 1998).

Experiences of non-ordinary states of consciousness are difficult to do research on because they leave no other evidence than memory (Clements, 2004). Because of the special nature of my topic I therefore chose this research methodology, as I felt that it was the one approach that would be best suited to answer my research question. At the same time, I have a feeling that the methodology chose me too, from the moment I first read about it I knew that would be my approach for this thesis.

Organic inquiry is based on in depth interviews with a narrative focus. The method focuses on transformation in addition to information, and “*incorporates the idea that research can include spirit, body and feeling as well as mind*” (Clements, 2011 p.132). The researcher is asked to use his or hers own experiences and investigate a topic that is close to their heart. The researcher starts out with writing his or hers own story before selecting participants (Clements, 2004). Participants are selected based on them having had meaningful experiences with the topic and that wants to share their experiences. It is then conducted in –depth interviews with the participants where they tell their personal story about the topic being researched in a narrative way. The researcher then writes the interviews into stories that are later sent out to all the participants for them to respond to. Someone who hasn’t been a part of the project is also invited to read the stories and respond to them in a letter. The response from both the participants and the outsiders in combination with the researcher’s personal story of transformation serves as a way of showing transformative change. The researcher is then free to analyze the stories the way he or she sees fit (Clements, 2004). One example of this method in use is Caryl Gopfert (1999) who wrote her dissertation on betrayal among students of Zen Buddhism, her own experience of being betrayed by her Zen teacher served as the starting point for the study. Through her writing the dissertation she healed her wounds, and transformed her own view of what had happened in addition to the views of some of her participants.

3.1.2 In- depth interviews

Since I am interested in their experiences and since it goes well with Organic Inquiry I decided in-depth interviews are the best way to go deeper into my research question. Interviews are a conversation with a certain structure and a purpose (Silverman, 2011). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe the semi structured interview as an interview with a goal to collect descriptions from the participant’s world and experiences.

Silverman (2011) warns about an uncritical use of the interview as a research method and he claims that many times other ways of gathering data would be more beneficial. While this is an important discussion to be aware of, one must not forget that the interview also has some qualities that gets lost in the other ways of collecting data. The interview offers a unique opportunity to try to grasp some of the complexity of human experience. If one is interested in learning something about the subjectivity of a person, the interview could be a good choice of method (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

There are different forms of in- depth interviews, but the common idea is that you can get useful information from someone by talking to them (Silverman, 2011). I chose something in between an unstructured and a semi-structured interview because I wanted the participants to be able to tell their story as freely as possible (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). At the same time I have a few points I want them to include (Appendix C). I also wanted to be able to participate in the interview, and follow the guidelines from Clements that recommends sharing some of your immediate analysis during the interview (Clements, 2004).

In my project it is the yoga teacher's subjective experience I'm curious about and an in-depth interview will be the best way to get to the heart of their experiences (Cresswell, 1994). For a moment I was contemplating having the participants write down their stories instead. That would have been simpler but I decided that meeting them and listening to their stories as they told them to me ultimately seemed like a better foundation for me to be able to say something about their experiences. The interview situation is also unique in that they have someone to witness their story and that they are being supported and guided in their reflections by me, the interviewer. In my opinion this will give better quality stories.

3.2 Inspiration

3.2.1 Me- the researcher

My interest in the subject on non- ordinary states of consciousness comes from my own experiences with such altered states, mostly during meditation. I am very well aware that this is something to traditionally be mindful of when conducting research. Since I am doing this as an Organic Inquiry my own background and experiences are not seen as an obstacle but rather a prerequisite to do research on the subject. Fundamental in Organic Inquiry is the adequateness of the researcher. In the tradition of Schumacher (1978) there is an idea that the researchers own experiences with the subject is what makes him or her capable of understanding it in others. The method is therefore most relevant when looking at topics that

give deep meaning to the researcher or in exploring experiences that the researcher has also had (Braud, 2004).

Writing my own story was important to be able to separate what was mine from what I would meet in the participants. There is a certain danger in that the stories might merge together and find meaning in each other (Braud and Anderson, 2011). To avoid this I finished writing my story before I even contacted the participants. That way, my story would not be influenced by the other stories or by my reaction to them. My story is my starting point, the foundation for my curiosity about the subject, and at the same time, my contribution to this project.

Throughout the project I made an effort to get on the yoga mat every day to either do yoga or meditate. I also kept a meditation journal, to have a record of what was going on inside me. These were also ways to live the project in a way. By “living the methodology” as Curry and Wells (2006) puts it, I became more aware of the natural flow this methodology provides. It made me value the steps I was going through over and over again; preparation, inspiration and integration (Clements, 2004). It took some weeks into the project, and one finished interview before I found myself trusting the cyclic process of the project completely. Over and over again I returned to meditation, yoga or journaling if I was confused on what step to take next, or if I was being worried about an outcome. After I started trusting the process, I really do feel that this was research in partnership with spirit (Anderson and Braud, 2011).

3.2.2 Recruiting participants in partnership with spirit

The participants were chosen based on them being yoga instructors that had attended a teacher training. Other than that formality I had two important criteria for selecting research participants. One was that I wanted to find individuals that had experienced non-ordinary states of consciousness. The second was that they had stories that they wanted to tell. This was an important part to make sure that the telling of the stories will flow free without much interference from me. Both of these criteria’s are in line with Organic Inquiry’s emphasis on how participants have to have had meaningful experiences with the topic of study (Clements, 2004) and also be able to articulate it (Curry and Wells, 2006). Because of the limited time, and the nature of my chosen research I decided early on to only about three or four participants. Three was my minimum, so I decided to have four in case someone changed their mind, or turned out to be incompatible with the project. If more than one would back out, I had three more yoga teachers I could contact that had reached out to me, asking to be in the project.

I sent out emails to many different yoga studios with the invitation to participate (Appendix A), some words about how I wanted to look at certain experiences during yoga and a note that said “if you feel called to do this please contact me”. By that last line I showed myself more than anyone else that I trusted the process to guide me to the right participants, or rather to guide them to me. It was a way for me to let go of the need to control what was happening, and who to interview. Clements encourages this as the organic study will have a life of its own (Clements, 2004). Some of those who contacted me quickly started to share their stories with me, in a way that led me to believe that these were stories that needed to be told. Those were the people I chose to interview, the ones who could not wait to share their experiences and who apparently felt called to do it.

About a week before each interview I sent the participants the interview guide and specified that they should read it, but that it was their choice if they wanted to prepare for what they wanted to say or not. The invitation letter, the interview guide, my mail correspondence and casual meetings with some of them were ways for me to keep the participants well informed about the project. This is important so that the person being interviewed knows what to expect and understand what they are contributing to (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). The participation in this project is more comprehensive than just one interview, and so that leaves a risk of the candidates to feel that a participation would demand too much time and energy from them (Josselson, 2013). In this case I found that to be an advantage because it sorted out some of the perhaps less motivated candidates, leaving the ones who were really eager to tell their story.

3.2.3 Collecting their stories

In interviews associated with Organic Inquiry the researcher will ask the participants to describe their own experiences with the subject (Clements, 2011), and that was what I did too. The interview guides was simple and open (Appendix C) and I had informed the participants that it would take something between 1 to 2 hours (Josselson, 2013). My attitude going into each interview was also very open, I made an effort to be in a meditative state, very aware of what was going on in me, in the participant, and also separating those two (Clements, 2004). I also meditated before and after every interview to first prepare and then close the session (Curry and Wells, 2006).

Since the relational quality is more important than the actual questions in this research method I made an effort to connect with all the participants (Clements, 2011). As it turned out this

was very natural and I did feel a sense of connection with all the participants. They also inspired me with their stories, their individual yoga journeys and their presence. I was maintaining a focus on their stories throughout the interviews while at the same time being mindful of what was happening inside me and how I was affected by their presence and their words. I was very concerned about separating their stories from mine, and not merging with the participants (Braud, 2011). After each interview I wrote about my own mood, insights and feelings during the interview situation for later use in the process of analyzing the interviews.

For me it was important to do the interviews at the yoga studios as this provides a nice setting and frame for the interview. It is after all here that the teachers practice what it is that we were supposed to talk about. The intimacy of the yoga shala turned out to be the perfect setting and the interviews were all conducted on yoga mats drinking tea. In organic Inquiry it is encouraged to use some procedures to invite the spiritual into the interview setting (Baud, 2011), having the interviews in the yoga shala was one way for me to do that. Another thing I did was to meditate before every interview and I attended the classes of two of the teachers. This gave me a stronger sensation of their identity as a yoga teacher. As I suspected, all of the participants were curious about my background in yoga, and I think my openness about my own journey made it easier for them to talk freely. All of the participants read the information letter and interview guide together with me when we met and they then signed the agreement (Appendix A and C). The interviews were audiotaped and each lasted for about one and a half hours.

After I had conducted all the interviews I wrote them all into stories that would be the foundation for my analysis. I kept only the part that I considered inspirational and relevant. In the tradition of Organic Inquiry I left out details and descriptions that were unnecessary revelations on solipsism (Braud, 2011). I believe that the stories have in them a possibility for transformation for the participants, the researcher and the reader. When I wrote them I was mindful to write it in a way that served the reader rather than the storytellers need to be understood (Braud, 2011). The process of writing these stories was a creative one, and again I turned to meditation when I was feeling stuck. Overall I am surprised at how little I had to edit the interviews in order to make them into stories. I didn't change entire sentences, and I didn't add anything. What I did was to change some of the words, edit out what I found to be irrelevant and change the placement of the paragraphs in order to have a beginning and an end to the stories.

3.2.4 Responding to each other's stories

After I had written the individual stories based on the interviews I sent them back to the person they belonged to, to get them to accept the story. This was important as the participants were more than just interview subjects. In some organic research the participants are called co-researchers (Braud, 2011), and while I don't call them that, I still appreciate their contribution as more than just being an informant. However, this did offer some challenges, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) warn about sending interview transcripts back to the informants because of how seeing their words on paper might give them second thoughts about participating. They can also start denying having said certain things, because it looks more harsh written down than when spoken. The Organic Inquiry method still put a lot of emphasis on the group story and my way of doing this was having them respond to each other's stories so naturally they have to read their own first. I did experience some challenges at that stage, with one of the participants becoming concerned about maintaining anonymity and having second thoughts. They all testified that it was a strong experience seeing their story in writing. One of the participant felt a need to edit her story herself, to take out what she didn't like. I gave her a chance to do it, but as I read her finished story I decided to not include her in the project as I thought the edited version from her was too far from the original interview. The three participants I was left with all approved their story right away. One of them did minor editing's with the language in her story, but nothing more than changing a few words, and it did not alter the content of the story in any way. I did not add in or write anything new to the stories. The third story I edited again when I noticed a reoccurring theme in all three interviews that I had originally left out when I transcribed the third story. Since I found the same topic of their parents to reappear in all three I wanted to include it in the third interview as well. I then took a look at my transcription of the interview and included a paragraph I had originally left out. Other than that the stories remained unchanged from the day I first wrote them in to stories.

After all three had approved I sent out a copy of each story to each of the participants for them to respond to. Based on reading each other's stories and mine, they all wrote about a one-page reflection. This particular way of responding to each other stories is a way to bring wholeness into the study; it amplifies the meaning of the data (Clements, 2004). It also shapes the individual stories into a group story because they are now connected, instead of separated. Their response letters can be found in the appendix and serve as a way to show transformation through the participation in this project.

3.3 Integration

3.3.1 Ethical considerations

This research project has been reported to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). I have also followed their guidelines about how to inform the participants as well as their ethical guidelines.

The participant's confidentiality has been maintained by giving them new names, and keeping recognizable information out of their stories (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Recognizable information includes education, age, city and yoga studio. Like I suspected before I began, and confirmed by all my participants, most yoga teachers in the same cities know each other. This is also often true for yoga teachers in different cities as well, so making the stories anonymous was very important. However one of the participants had details in her story that she knew would probably be recognized, I suggested altering that detail but she protested as she felt it was a crucial part of her story. Both her and me therefor assume that some other yoga instructors will be able to recognize her, but we are still choosing to let the story be as it is. In her words "That detail is too powerful to change".

I arranged it so that the invitation letter (Appendix A) with all information regarding the project was read and that the consent form (Appendix B) were signed before we started the interviews. This was important to make sure that the participants were well informed about what they were contributing too.

3.3.2 Quality in the study

It is important to be aware that a study performed using organic inquiries do not necessarily transfer to a larger population or a different context. That should not be the point either; rather it is about inspiring and going deep into something that is hard to reach in more traditional research methods. It is therefore hard to apply traditional concepts of quality in research to studies done in this research tradition (Curry and Wells, 2006). There is no established procedure to ensure reliability, validity, generality and communal consensus in this methodology. This would seem problematic within a positivistic view on science. Organic Inquiry however does not do an attempt to say something about the objective reality, but rather about experiences (Braud, 2004). As Curry and Wells (2006:51) puts it: "*The unique features of the Organic Inquiry methodology challenge the normative views of validity in research.*" To appreciate this unique way of conducting research the reader therefor have to

lay aside any preconceived ideas about quality in quantitative research and accept that Organic Inquiry is fundamentally different.

Braud (2011) suggest that the researcher use bodily-felt resonance as an indicator of validity. This way of using somatic awareness as validity is something that resonated with me, and gave even more meaning when I started working on the interviews. Several of the participants started crying during the interview, and one also mentioned goose bumps while telling her story. This can therefor serve as an unconventional way of validating that the interviews touched upon something very real and powerful for the participants (Curry and Wells, 2006). Organic Inquiry is not yet a finished approach to conducting research, and the organic nature of the procedure excludes the possibility of it ever becoming a finished approach. It offers to expand the traditional concept of research in a way that make the researchers more sensitive to how the research is affecting, and being affected by their lives (Braud, 2004). Bodily felt resonance is one such new way to indicate validity.

Other ways to ensure quality in the research include transparency and researcher reflexivity. Throughout the process I have strived to be open about everything that I do, and also to continuously be aware of my internal processes. Transparency is also important to serve others who attempt on doing a similar study. The fact that the participants have approved their finished stories written by me is a way of ensuring accuracy (Curry & Wells, 2006; Creswell, 1994). Writing my own story first was also a way to separate what is mine and what is the participant's (Anderson and Braud, 2011). Researchers that have had the opportunity to produce their own story on the topic before conducting interviews are less likely to try to find their own truth during the interview or analyzing process (Josselson, 2013).

One thing that makes Organic Inquiry stand out from most qualitative research is its emphasis on transformation of the researcher, the participants and possibly even the reader. Since transformation is one of the goals about the Organic Inquiry process there have to be some way of showing the reader how this has happened. There are mainly three ways that I am doing this. My new story at the end is one way of showing my personal transformation through this project. The reflection letters from the participants on how they react to each other stories makes it clear how they are touched by being a part of this process. A third and just as important part are the reflections from the invited readers of the stories. Their reflection letters show how they have been touched by reading the participants stories even though hay haven't been a part of this project or gotten the opportunity to tell their stories.

These reflection letters can all be found in the Appendix and are an attempt to show that the stories have in them a potential for transformation for the reader.

3.3.3 Analysis

Clements (2004) describes how an analysis in organic Inquiry has three parts: the participant's stories, the group story and the report of transformative change. However the analyzing will start much earlier; even the interview was filled with analyzing, and I made a conscious effort to be aware when I was doing it. It is normal that the researcher starts analyzing as soon as he or she meets the participants and it is therefore best to be aware of it (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Braud (2004) also suggests being open to the participants about the analyzing while in the interview setting by mentioning relevant theory on what they are describing and sharing some of your associations as they come up. By doing this I hoped to give the participants a second chance to reflect on their experiences while at the same time giving them an opportunity to see their experiences in a larger context. My experience was that this gave an extra dimension to the interviews by lifting up the topics that were brought up.

Writing the interviews into the participant's stories was therefore the first part of the analyzing process. The second part was constructing the group story equivalent to the analysis in traditional qualitative research. I read the three stories three times each and then meditated on all of them, individually first and the collectively. This prepared me to write them together in what is called the group story. *"The group story has two parts. First, it is an edited experiential report of any analysis that has already occurred as a part of the data collection from interviews, from a group meeting with the participants, or from subsequent contact with the participants. Second, it is a theoretical synthesis of the researcher's understanding of the data."* (Clements, 2011 p.154) The first part of working with the group story is therefore what is presented here in the methods chapter. I then found three themes that reoccurred during the stories that I felt helped answered the research question.

The last part of the organic analysis was the report on transformative change (Clements, 2004). Here I worked on writing my own story of transformation as a result of conducting this research project. This part is also where I reached out to two external yoga instructors and asked them to write their response to these stories (Appendix J). These responses are meant to show how these stories and this way of presenting them can spark a transformational change in the ones reading them (Clements, 2004). The reports of transformative change have been placed in the appendix due to the limited space.

Chapter 4: Findings

The analysis in Organic Inquiry has three parts, the participant's stories, the group story and the reports on transformative change. The group story is the equivalent to the findings in more traditional methods (Clements, 2004). Due to the limited space in this thesis the individual stories and the reports on transformative change are placed in the appendix (Appendix F- J). However, I consider the individual stories to be the very essence of this thesis and I strongly recommend reading them before the group story.

Even though my personal experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness and yoga has been the starting point for this thesis, and is included in chapter one, it is left out of the data in this section. My intention here is to show the themes that emerged from the participants stories.

After having interviewed the participants, and written the interviews into stories, I began to see the emergence of three themes that can shed light on the research questions in this project:

- 1) Loving guidance
- 2) Healing experiences
- 3) Sensing the room

In addition I discovered a core theme that binds these three themes together and connects the participant's stories with the research question. I have called the core theme **"Transformations through yoga as a process"**.

4.1 Loving guidance

This theme describes how the participant's teachers have been a loving, compassionate force in their yoga journey. How they now see themselves as yoga teachers seems to be directly linked to how their relationship with their own teachers has been. It is the loving guidance from their teachers that has led them through their experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness and inspired them to give back by adopting a similar, loving kind of teaching style. The importance of creating a safe space for their students also seems to be adopted from their teachers. This safe space seems like a pre requisite for the students to bring up their own experiences with non- ordinary states of consciousness, or spiritual experiences.

Ines describes her interaction with her teachers at her yoga teacher training like this: *"With the help of the four wonderful teachers at the retreat I managed to get deep into positions I*

hadn't been able to do before. They challenged me in a loving and compassionate way, and I felt so blessed to receive guidance from these wonderful souls."

Ida's realization of the connection between the life she had been living up until her crisis and the snake bite came through conversations with yoga teachers *"In that process of learning yoga I started listening to my body more and it was then, and also after talking to other yoga teachers, that I started to see the connection between my life situation and my snake bite. I literally had to be bitten by a physical real snake to wake up."*

The first experience with non-ordinary state that the participants mention, were all initiated by their teachers. For Ida it was an instructed rebirth experience, for Ines it was a yoga nidra workshop and for Maria it was when her teacher brought her to see the Indian man and drink something that seems to have resulted in a drug induced state. They all describe feeling safe during the experiences. For Ida, her teachers didn't explain a lot *"They did not say a lot about what to expect but assured us that they were there."* In the midst of her experience she felt supported even though she was not conscious of what was going on in the room: *"I felt an instant sense of support."* *"After the experience my teachers would tell me that it was obvious that my leg was bothering me a lot so they all came to touch me with their hands but I don't remember feeling that."* Her experience with a non-ordinary state of consciousness was guided by her teachers, and they gave her support and a compassionate presence so she would feel safe and supported.

The same is true for Ines; she also explains how she felt safe with her teacher. *"I didn't understand what she meant but in a mysterious way I trusted her with all my heart and so when she took my hand I followed her into the night."* Marias words about her first teacher are similar: *"There was this safe and inspiring energy in that group from her."*

The concept of creating that safe space is something they take with them into their own teaching. They all felt safe with their teachers during their experience with non-ordinary states of consciousness, and now they are all trying to create that safe space for their students. The following part from Marias story illustrates this: *"I try to create a safe space for them to open up to me, and I often tell them that I am here if they ever need to talk. If a person is crying in savasana, I will go up to them and say "If you want to talk after class, I am here; if you want to be left alone, that is just as fine."* Ida expresses the same: *"I have students telling me that this yoga studio is their private area where they can talk openly, when in their outer life they are more closed, also about doing yoga. Some people are even ashamed to tell their*

co-workers that they practice yoga. Because of that it is very important to me that they feel safe in my classes.” Ines doesn’t use the word safe space in her story but she does communicate a great deal of love towards her students’, in a way that is similar to creating a safe space. The following part illustrate this: “Whenever I meet a new student I look for a part of myself in their soul. This is a way for me to connect with them and love them, and I love my student, I really do. Even the ones that stop by for a quick class, looks miserable and never show up again. I love them the most, because they need it the most.”

Ines story expresses gratitude towards her teachers at her teacher training: *“and I felt so blessed to receive guidance from these wonderful souls.”* Ida shows gratitude toward what has happened as well, but in her story her gratitude is directed at the snake: *“Before my rebirth experience my attitude about the snakebite was “why me?” And then after my rebirth I felt a deep sense of gratitude for what that snake bite had done to me and to the course of my life. If I hadn’t been bitten by that snake I could still be in that unhappy place in my life, with the wrong person.”* She attributes the change in her life partly to the snake bite, and after the rebirth experience she also gives the snake the qualities we normally would associate with people that have been important to us. It might seem like she views the snake as a teacher: *“and I remember feeling a great sense of gratitude towards what had happened and I remember thinking about the snake. I had this great level of compassion towards the snake, hoping that it hadn’t hurt itself my biting me. I strongly hoped that it was alive and doing well, and then I woke up.”*

It is not only their yoga teachers that the participants consider to be their teachers. For Ines, family has been an important influence. She mentions how she was introduced to spirituality at an early age by her mother and also how she consider her sister to be her first meditation teacher *“My older sister shared my mother’s interest, and meditation and chanting has always been important to her. I consider her my first meditation teacher and she was the one who recommended that I took the teacher training at that time in my life when I had stopped eating, exercising and even smiling.”*

There are some parts of their stories that make it explicitly how the loving guidance from their teachers has made them able to give the gift of yoga on in a loving way. After she has explained how her teachers challenged her in a loving compassionate way, Ines mentions how this influenced her: *“Both as a student and as a teacher I found my style and my confidence within yoga and I was ready to bring what I had learned out into the world.”*

At times it is not formulated that explicit, but it is clear that the same values they appreciated in their teachers are the same values that they highlight in their relationship with their students. Ida mentions how her teachers made her see the connections between her life and getting bit. Later in her story she mentions an episode where she explains to a student how her lower back problems might be connected to money problems: *“One girl came in telling me about how her lower back was really hurting her. I asked if she was stressed about money and she was so shocked and wonder how I could possibly know. I told her how money concerns often manifest in the lower back and that she needed to talk to her partner about it.”* Maria sees her student’s experiences with her as a teacher in connection to her own relationship with her teachers: *“I remember how my teachers would tell me things and I wouldn’t understand them, not until I was ready and then it all made sense. So, I know that my students have to experience these things themselves in order for it to make sense for them.”* What they are bringing forward to their students seems to be linked with what they have received from their teachers.

4.2 Healing experiences

This theme describes how the participants all see their experiences with non- ordinary states of consciousness as a healing experience. All three had lived through their own crisis before yoga, and the experience with a non- ordinary state through their yoga practice served as a healing for them. For all the participants the healing process was also physical during their experience with non- ordinary states. The experiences are described in ways that makes it clear that there have been life changing moments in a way that is beyond words and hard to describe. They have all reflected around these experiences in a way that makes them capable of noticing it in their students.

In Marias story it is not clear what her crisis was, she does not go into it any deeper than saying *“Ten years ago I was going through a difficult period in my life, at the time I didn’t know anything about yoga...”* Ida and Ines make their personal crisis more explicit. For Ines it was the loss of her husband: *“My whole world had fallen apart and I was left with nothing. Somehow the only thing that made sense was to attend a yoga teacher training. It had been a year since my husband had passed when I bought the plane tickets and went to Goa to try to find a purpose in my life again.”* And for Ida it was being bit by a snake, the trauma of almost dying, and the process of learning to use her leg again. *“I ended up in the hospital and I was unconscious for about 16 hours. My organs were shutting down and the hospital called my parents to say that I was probably going to die. When I woke up after those 16 hours the*

doctors told me that the bite would be deadly if I didn't get an antivenin right away, but the treatment also had a 50 percent chance of killing me, and in that case it would happen within ten minutes. Those ten minutes felt like an hour and was a very intense experience.”

Ida and Maria had never done yoga before their crisis and for both of them it might seem like a coincidence that they tried yoga for the first time. It is still in connection with their crisis. For Ida, yoga was a ticket back into healing her leg and running again: *“I was a huge avid runner before the snakebite and I could run an hour every day, and so when I moved to Hawaii for my new job I was very focused on getting back into running. My doctor advised me to try Yoga: “It will get you back in to running again in no time.” And so I did.”* Ines had tried yoga, but it was the loss of her husband that led her to attend a teacher training, thus taking her yoga practice further and opening up to the experiences of non- ordinary states of consciousness.

All three participants portray their experience with non- ordinary states as a healing experience. The following two parts are an indication of how Ida experiences healing through the rebirth experience: *“The victimizing of myself that I had been carrying around disappeared”* and *“It was such an interesting cycle for me and a truly life changing moment. My relationship with my father eventually healed, and it all started after that teacher training. A big realization for me when I was there was that my father is human, and that I needed to forgive him.”* Ines puts this in general terms and talks about all the students at her teacher training with this description: *“I couldn't help but to see the teacher training as a sort of healing process for most of us.”* From her own personal healing from the experience in the drug induced state she had this to say: *“This was the happiest moment in my life, for the first time I felt free from all pain. There existed no pain, only peace.”* She describes a similar realization after a meditation experience: *“I suddenly felt very warm, not in an uncomfortable way, but more like a blanket of comfort was wrapped around me. I instantly knew that I never needed to feel alone, cold or sad ever again. Something left my body, pain, grief and negativity that I had been manifesting suddenly took physical form and let me release it.”* Maria puts her first powerful experience in these words: *“and it changed me from inside. Things about myself that I had been intellectually aware of, but didn't know how to change, did change that day during that deep relaxation state. When I came out of that state, I could see everything clearly for the first time, the choices I had to make and what I had to do with my life. It was both scary and so very real. That was the point when I realized that there was really something special in yoga.”* For all three participants the experience with non- ordinary

states has been only positive and an enrichment to their lives, none of them describe any trauma or suffering in relation to these experiences.

The healing experience is described by all participants as something physical. For Ida she re-experienced the pain she felt when she was bit: *“The pain in my foot shot down and out, and then the pain was gone.”* Ines describes physical sensations as well: *“Something left my body, pain, grief and negativity that I had been manifesting suddenly took physical form and let me release it.”* Marias experience is similar, also with the sensation of something physical leaving the body: *“As soon as I realized that, there was something that shifted in my body. It was very physical, and I could feel things peeling off me and leaving my body. I had never experienced anything like it.”*

Their experiences with non- ordinary states as healing influences how they value it in their students as well. They all express an attitude of openness and willingness to talk about this with students. In Ida’s story we can read this: *“I have had people coming up to me after class when I have just briefly mentioned something and they tell me that they have had spiritual experiences. I had one student coming up to me telling me about how she had had so many spiritual experiences that she don’t talk to people about. But that one little comment I made had made her realize that maybe we were on the same wavelength and that she could talk to me about it.”* It was her spiritual experience that opened up so that the student felt it was natural to come and talk about her similar experience. Ines description indicates that she is more reluctant to engage in conversations about spiritual experiences, maybe because she can’t find the words to talk about it: *“I don’t talk about it that much, because words can’t do this phenomenon justice, but some days it just feels right to mention it, and then I do.”* Maria is very explicit about how her experiences have prepared her for meeting the same in her students: *“My experiences with spirituality help me understand my students better. Sometimes, I can see myself where I was some years ago through them.”* The healing experience the participants have had makes the value experience with non- ordinary states in their students as possible healing for them too.

4.3 Sensing the room

This theme describes how the participants think about their relationship with their students. They all describe an ability to sense the room, meaning that they understand their student’s needs in a way. Another thing they mention is finding that balance between bringing in spirituality and also catering to those who don’t consider themselves spiritual.

The participants communicate that they intuitively understand their student's needs. Ida considers herself to be able to sense the room: *"I think you can sense the room as a yoga instructor. I can come into a class and feel how stressed people are."* Ines has very similar descriptions: *"The class of people I have in front of me speaks to me without words and I intuitively know what I should bring up, and what I should keep silent about."* Maria also describes an ability to read her students: *"Some students are very needy, and you can tell who they are right away. I guess recognizing that is an ability that you develop over time."*

The ability to sense the room is relevant to be able to meet the students where they are at. Ida explains how sometimes she senses that her students aren't open for spiritual issues: *"Whatever spiritual I might try to bring up won't resonate with them or even register. So it is always important for me to check in on how the class is feeling and meeting them where they are."* Ines describes how she can see where her students are in their spiritual journey: *"I see that in my students sometimes too, that they have experienced it or that they are headed towards that experience."* What they both express is sensitivity to their students' spirituality, or experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Ida and Maria are concerned with finding that right balance when it comes to bringing in spirituality. Ida's story shows how she is a spiritual yoga teacher and is trying to balance this with also meeting the students where they are at: *"privately I am a very spiritual person, and I wish I was a more spiritual yoga teacher. At the same time I see that if I bring in too many spiritual elements people get skeptical. Right now I want to make yoga approachable, and I also see a need to meet people where they are at."* Maria has this to say about being able to meet people with different degrees of openness to spirituality: *"There are so many different people who go to yoga; some are very spiritual, and some are skeptical, even scared of spirituality. For me, it is a part of life, and I aim to include it without scaring anyone away."* Ida uses the word balance: *"I will still tailor to the community I am in as well, so it is all about finding that balance."*

The participants describe different attitudes when it comes to talking during their classes. Ines believes in the magic of silence: *"Some classes are thought without words. I believe in the magic of silence and movement. Other days I feel the need to share with my students a piece of the wisdom I was given by my teachers."* Maria sees talking as a way to connect what is going on in the shala to life: *"Life does not happen on the mat, it happens out in the world. I hope that I give people some guidance in how to connect what they learn here with what is*

going on out there and also apply it to life challenges. That is why I like to start my classes by talking about something that I find to be important.” Ida’s attitude towards talking can be compared to Ines’s: *“Talking too much can be something that new teachers do because they are uncomfortable with being in front of people in silence. But I find the silence to be amazing when you are with students.”* At the same time she sees the value in sharing her wisdom: *“I find that it is those little drops of wisdom from the teacher that can change everything for a student.”* They all describe how they share their knowledge, with their students through talking in addition to practicing, and although Ines is more hesitant towards talking in classes she too shares her wisdom with her students.

4.4 Transformations through yoga as a process

The core theme through the stories regarding how they meet their students in relation to experiences with non-ordinary states is here considered to be that they all view yoga as a process. Their own transformations through yoga have been a healing process sparked by experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness. Their healing has been possible because of the loving guidance and safe space created by their teachers. This is the same safe space they are now trying to create for their students. It is the consistency in practice that will prepare their students for their possible spiritual experiences. None of them express a need to bring out the spirituality in their students or to evoke a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Instead they highlight that it can take time, and that they never push their students. They all express a trust in the universe and a trust in the transformations that will take place through the process of yoga. This trust seems to come from them having lived through the process. How they let the yoga process unfold in their students is similar to how their teachers have let them grow into their experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness.

Maria is most explicit about yoga as a journey and process: *“I can see their spirituality growing during their yoga practice. I notice how some people come to yoga because of the physical workout, but end up changing, in a fundamental way. Suddenly, they realize that it is not just a physical workout, and they start asking me questions about the spirit and the soul.”* She then expresses a trust in the process itself: *“and yoga will do to you what it has to do. It will make changes in you; for some people, it will take six months, and for others, it might take ten years. Eventually, yoga will awaken what needs to be awakened.”* She views her role as being the one to create a safe space for the experiences to take place: *“I try to create that safe space for students to be curious and open to the experience without preconceived ideas”* In other words, she is not considering herself to be the one creating the experiences. This is

similar to how she thinks about her teacher: *“and although she created those groups, she didn’t take credit for our changes.”*

Ines highlights consistency in practice in order for her students to experience real change: *“Meditation can do magic, it just requires regular practice. You can practice for years and then suddenly you see all the truth in the universe. That is what I tell my students to, to keep them practicing. One of my biggest concerns is getting my students to return to the mat over and over again to meditate, even if they feel a resistance. I believe that it is then the magic will happen.”* This magic is the same that Maria describes as: *“When they are ready, it will happen, and it is not my place to try to force anything to happen sooner than it is supposed to.”*

Both Maria and Ines consider the yoga process to be a tool for experiencing non-ordinary states of consciousness, or peak experiences, Maria describes it like this: *“All the classes and all the work on the mat is just the preparation work, and the fruit from that, the powerful experiences, might not take place on the mat, it could be anywhere.”* Ines describes the yoga process as a vehicle: *“All the meditation work you do builds up to something bigger, and that is what it is all about. Yoga is a vehicle that can transport you to wonderful places.”*

The view on yoga as an ongoing process leading up to something is also reflected in the participants discourse about their own spiritual journey. Ida talks about her own experiences with kundalini yoga like this: *“I have taken some kundalini classes and I get the same nauseous feeling I got when I got bitten. That is probably a sign that I should continue but it is such an unpleasant feeling and I don’t want to go through that right now. Maybe I am not quite ready yet to see how much I can manifest, and maybe my container isn’t big enough at this point.”* This is an indicator that she sees herself still on a journey as well, and the last part of her story makes this even clearer: *“One thing I love about this journey is that it is never ending.”* Maria sees her teacher’s role in her yoga process: *“the first class I attended with them started a process in me. Or rather, it reinforced a process that had started some time ago.”*

The following part from Maria’s story makes it clear that she sees the yoga process in connection with her own journey: *“I see the practice of yoga as a way to prepare the soil for those special moments or insights. If you don’t do that preparation work, then those special moments and experiences will just pass and you won’t notice them. So, at that time, meeting that particular kundalini teacher, I was ready for his message.”*

All three participants tell stories of a transformation process that have taken place in them through their yoga practice. This transformation is a result of a healing process through an experience of non-ordinary state of consciousness. The transformation has been possible because of the safe space and loving guidance created by their teachers. This is the same environment they are now trying to create for their students. They are there if the students want to talk, but none of them express that they start personal spiritual conversations with their students in a one to one setting. By being tuned in to their students, they express an intuitive knowledge of when to bring their experiences with non-ordinary states, and when the student is ready to hear about spirituality.

4.5 Summary of findings

In summary, this project produced the following findings associated with Yoga teachers experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness, and how that influences how they meet students that have had such experiences:

1. Loving guidance: This theme describes how the participant's teachers have been a loving, compassionate force in their yoga journey. How they now see themselves as yoga teachers seems to be directly linked to how their relationship with their own teachers has been. It is the loving guidance from their teachers that has led them through their experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness and inspired them to give back by adopting a similar, loving kind of teaching style. The safe space their teachers created for them is something that they try to give to their students.
2. Healing experiences: This theme describes how the participants all see their experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness as a healing experience. All three had lived through their own crisis before yoga, and the experience with a non-ordinary state through their yoga practice served as a healing for them. For all the participants the healing process was also physical during their experience with non-ordinary states. The experiences are described in a way that makes it clear that it has been life changing moments in a way that is beyond words and hard to describe. They have all reflected around these experiences in a way that makes them capable of noticing the same in their students.
3. Sensing the room: This theme describes how the participants think about their relationship with their students. They all describe an ability to sense the room, meaning that they understand their students' needs in a way. Creating a safe space is a way for them to take care of their students and give them something they might not be getting other places. This safe

space seems like a pre requisite for the students to bring up their own experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness, or spiritual experiences. Another thing they mention is finding that balance between bringing in spirituality and also catering to those who don't consider themselves spiritual.

4. Transformations through yoga as a process: The core theme through the stories regarding how they meet their students on experiences with non- ordinary states is here considered to be that they all view yoga as a process. Their own transformations through yoga have been a healing process sparked by experiences with non- ordinary states of consciousness. Their healing has been possible because of the loving guidance and safe space created by their teachers. This is the same safe space they are now trying to create for their students. It is the consistency in practice that will prepare their students for their possible spiritual experiences. None of them express a need to bring out the spirituality in their students or to evoke a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Instead they highlight that it can take time, and that they never push their students. They all express a trust in the universe and a trust in the transformations that will take place through yoga. This trust seems to come from that having themselves lived through the process.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The aim of this study was to take a closer look at how yoga teachers own experiences with non- ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet students that have had such experiences. Through the analysis three themes emerged; “loving guidance”, “healing experiences” and “sensing the room”. These three all come together in the core theme; “Transformations through yoga as a process”. This core theme has strong resemblance with Joseph Campbell’s theory of myth in his book “The hero with a thousand faces” (1968). The connection between my findings and the hero’s journey emerged as I was analyzing my data. His theory about the myth was not originally included in my literature review and it as not planned to be a part of this discussion either. However when I was finished analyzing I realized exactly how important that connection was for me. In the spirit of Organic Inquiry I trusted my intuition to guide me and decided to base the discussion on the concept of the hero’s journey. This section will take a closer look at the findings from chapter 4 and discuss them in light of some of the theory presented in chapter 2 and the concept of the hero’s journey.

The first section will give an overview of Joseph Campbell’s theory of the hero and how that connects to the findings. The three themes loving guidance, healing presence and sensing the room will then be discussed, and also the main theme; transformations through yoga as a process. In the end of this chapter there is an attempt to show how the hero’s journey concept from the myth can come in the form of a modern day yoga heroine’s journey.

5.1 The hero’s journey

Joseph Campbell (1968) describes how the heroic journey is both the basis of myths and a description of the process humans have taken since ancient times. We all follow our unique journeys through life, but the journey we each experience is remarkably universal. Behind the great legends, myths, tales, poems and dreams is the same story; the mono myth. This basic myth is about a call to action, a great trial in life, challenges along the way, helpers, conquering enemies, being saved and returning back to society with something new to share with others. The individual yoga journeys of the heroines in these stories all fit into how Campbell describes the classical hero’s journey. Marked by three major stages; separation, initiation and return, the journey can be seen in ancient myths, books and modern day movies. The journey begins with separation where the hero feels an urge for change. The second stage is initiation where the hero faces challenges and receives his gifts. Returning with the gifts to serve others is the third and final stage.

Myths have four main functions according to Campbell; metaphysical, cosmological, sociological and pedagogical. The metaphysical purpose is to raise awareness about the mystical source of all things. The cosmological function is to give a mysterious description of the cosmos, universe and all things. The sociological function helps define the culture and social structures. The final function, pedagogical, sets the stage for rites of passage, those important events that brings harmony and continuity into human life (Campbell, 1988; Genep, 1960).

Campbell describes a journey of transformation just like the stories in this thesis. Although they might not be familiar with the idea of hero's journey they all tell their personal yoga stories through these three stages. Ida also uses the description of a journey: *"One thing I love about this journey is that it is never ending."* Each stage described by Campbell is composed of several steps, and not all of them are compatible with the stories presented here. This may be in part due to the focus of the interview and the themes in this project. Overall however, the stories fit very well with the description Campbell has of the hero's journey. Ines' call for change was the death of her husband, Ida's was almost losing her life and her leg. Maria shares less about this stage but she opens up on how she was going through a difficult period in her life when she found yoga. This is an indication that the wake up calls doesn't have to be dramatic as in the first two stories, but they are powerful enough to push the person experiencing them into the second stage.

The Hero's journey is often portrayed as an external one, but they reflect an inner journey. The second stage is where the hero is tested and conquers what needs to be conquered. Through this he or she is transformed. The transformations of the stories presented here are all a result of their experience with non-ordinary states of consciousness. For Ida it was the rebirth experience that transformed her, and for Ines it was the drug induced state in India. Maria mentions several experiences during meditative states that had a transformational impact on her. Campbell writes how the hero's triumph is an expression for an expansion of consciousness, with the result being enlightenment, transformation and freedom.

Returning with the gifts, stage three is of great importance here. All the participants talk about how they use their experience and wisdom to give back to their students. In Ines' words; *"Other days I feel the need to share with my students a piece of the wisdom I was given by my teachers."* Their experience with non-ordinary states of consciousness in their individual journeys has prepared for meeting this change in others. The third stage is about having the

courage to act on their vision, and for all of these teachers their vision is that of the transformative power in yoga. Transformation takes time however, and they all stress how the process is what prepares for the powerful experiences.

5.2 Loving guidance or religious authority?

The loving guidance that the participants have received from their teacher has been of great importance to them, and it has shaped how they now teach, and how they meet their students. Loving guidance is the first theme described in the analysis. One thing that is striking though is that the participants all have positive things to say about their teachers, none of them mentions any critical elements of their teaching style. They also seem to have adopted the elements from their teachers teaching style. It seems like there is a tradition being passed on, a certain way of teaching and relating to students that are being handed down from teacher to aspiring teachers. The way in which this is described does have some similarities with religion (Hervieu-Leger, 2000), and this leads into the question of whether experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness taking place within the tradition of yoga should be considered religious experiences.

Tart (1972) describes how religious experiences can't necessarily be termed non-ordinary states of consciousness because they are being indoctrinated within a particular religious system. The experiences being told in these three stories have all taken place within the tradition of yoga. It is reasonable to assume that there are certain expectations in that environment about how spiritual experiences occur. This means that it is possible that the experiences with non-ordinary states that participants opened up on here have been shaped by the yoga community they have been a part of. All three participants describe their first experience as taking place within a teacher training or a workshop. Both are what can be considered to be very intense settings, where one spend time with the same teachers and fellow students for days. One reasonable question towards experiences of non-ordinary states in such settings would therefore be whether or not it is a result of anticipation or facilitation from the teachers.

This question can be further legitimized by noticing how the participants describe their teachers with great admiration. There are some similarities here to religion in that the experiences to a certain degree have taken place in a group setting. This is closely linked to the discussion of whether or not yoga is a religion. Prayers, chanting, gurus and spiritual experiences are elements that can easily be associated with religion and often are. Yoga has

historically been closely linked to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism and it would be naive to believe that all that connection is gone. However with establishing itself in the west, yoga has changed to, and is now a merging of several spiritual ideas and above all an idea of oneness with all (Stephens, 2010). This does however not mean that yoga practice isn't religious practice.

The worldviews described in these three stories have some similarities with perennial philosophy. There seems to be this idea that our fundamental nature is a spiritual one and that everything and everyone is connected (Cortright, 1997). These realizations have come to the participants during the experiences of non-ordinary states. Ines describes it this way: *“there were no boundaries and I could see the connections between everything that had ever happened to me, and everything that would happen in the future. I saw myself as a small part in the big cosmic play called the universe.”* Maria is even more explicit about her realizations: *“I felt like I had no boundaries anymore, I couldn't tell where my body ended and where the world started. I had a profound realization that we are all one, this is all the same.”* This is very much in line with perennial philosophy's idea about spirit as an identity with the divine (Cortright, 1997; Huxley, 1945). The yoga stories collected here are beyond religion, in the sense that none of the participants mentioned religion, being religious or belonging to a religious group. Maria explains how her experience opened her mind: *“I had a profound realization that we are all one, this is all the same.”*

The descriptions of the yoga teachers in these stories does not resemble that of a religious authority, rather it is similar to how spirituality is described within yoga, for example in Aurobindo's works (Miovic, 2004). He did not view his integral yoga as a religion, but rather a system to reach a higher level of spiritual development. All three participants bring up spirituality and it seems that they consider themselves to be spiritual.

From the three stories presented here we see that the teacher is there to facilitate the process, give support and loving guidance but not to create the experience. Even though there is a tradition being handed down, the participants don't describe it as a fixed truth, but rather the tradition of each finding their own way through their own unique experience. Maria explains how she is not the one creating the spiritual experiences *“I know that my students have to experience these things themselves in order for it to make sense for them. When they are ready it will happen, and it is not my place to try to force anything to happen sooner than it is supposed to.”* These words make it clear that the participant doesn't view herself as a

religious authority but rather a guide. Despite of this, the similarities between their teachers teaching style and their own is striking, and very much in line with how religious traditions are being handed down (Hervieu-Leger, 2000). There is a sense of lineage in the stories presented. Ines talks about how she passes on the wisdom given to her by her teachers.

The relationship the participants have had with their teachers has to a large extent shaped how they again relate to their students. The same is true for the guidance they received in connection to their experiences with non- ordinary states. Some might call western yoga today religion, and it certainly has a lot of elements closely linked to religion (Caplan, Portillo and Seely, 2013). However the participants have not articulated anything that can indicate that they consider it a religion. They talk about it as something beyond religion, In Ines's words: *"My teachers, and especially the woman who brought me to see that Indian man, gave me so much when they opened my life to yoga. I am now devoting my life to give this gift on, and I feel so blessed to be able to do what I do every day."* In their view they have been given a great gift by their teachers and this has inspired them to pass the same on to others.

When the participants don't refer to yoga as a religion or themselves or their teachers as religious leaders they are a part of a tendency in western yoga today where one restrains from using the word religion (Stephens, 2012; Iyengar, 1979; Sri Aurabindo, 1971). While the descriptions from the participants stories do not fit the definitions of organized religion they can be compared to what Davie refers to as self- spiritualities; *"a diverse, ill-defined and somewhat amorphous set of ideas held together by a relatively small number of consistent and crosscutting themes –notably an emphasis on the self and self- discovery, and a tendency to connect."*(Davie, 2007 p.164) Davie highlights how this religiosity is concerned with the interconnectedness between body, mind and spirit and universe where each person is a part of a connected whole. This resembles the values being brought up by the participants. However their experiences are also similar to organized religion in that their experiences and their spirituality take place within a community (McGuire, 2002). With the similarities in how these three yoga teachers scribe their experience, their cosmological worldview and the place their experiences has taken place it is natural to point out that they are a part of a tradition that some might consider religious. The descriptions both of their experiences with non- ordinary states and their involvement with yoga belong within a tradition of yoga in the west today, and the yoga tradition is closely linked to religion.

The role of the teacher is crucial in all three stories; by the participants they are considered the ones who made the experiences with non-ordinary states, and also the transformation, possible. The role of the teacher can here be seen as that of the Supernatural aid described by Campbell (1968), a guide and protective figure that will offer some security to the hero. They all describe that one teacher that makes their first and life changing experience with non-ordinary states possible and positive.

5.3 Healing experiences

This is the second theme that emerged from the stories. It is connected to how the experiences the participants describe have served as healing experiences for them.

All the participants view their experience with a non-ordinary state as a spiritual experience, and they all bring up the word spirituality. This is in line with Taylor's (2012) definition of spiritual experiences as a result of spiritual practice. The yoga described here is a spiritual practice that has led the participants towards spiritual experiences. Their descriptions match William James' (1907/ 2007) markers for a mystical experience. In line with his first mark Ineffability, the participants highlight how their experience is hard to put into words. Ines tries to convey how difficult it is to describe: *"I don't know how to describe it, but it was completely real and in my mind not a dream at all."* The second marker is Noetic quality, and this fits well for all the participants stories. They all describe how they had during or after their experience, and these insights led to a healing process in them. Ida healed her relationship to her father in addition to accepting having been bit by a snake. Ines had this realization during her meditation experience: *"I instantly knew that I never needed to feel alone, cold or sad ever again."* The third mark James describes is Transiency, Ines and Maria don't mention anything about the duration of their experiences but Ida mentions that her rebirth experience lasted about two hours. The last mark is Passivity, the state is something happening to the person, and although the participants were taking part in activities to bring on the states described the description is still about how it is happening to them and not by them. In Marias story this is very clear: *"I got into a special state right away, and even if I had wanted to move, I couldn't."*

In the second theme of Healing experiences it became clear that all the participants see their experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness as a healing experience. There seem to be no negative feelings, fear or anger directed at the experiences. All three had lived through their own crisis before yoga, and the experience with a non-ordinary state through

their yoga practice served as a healing for them. One interesting question is whether this is connected to the context the experiences took place.

Transpersonal psychiatry warns about the dangers of spiritual experiences that are happening without the person being ready (Cortright, 1997). Perhaps the yoga journey builds up the resilience the individual needs in order to have a healthy reaction to the non-ordinary state of consciousness. The process can be necessary in order to prepare the individual for those experiences. The three teachers all emphasize the process, and not pushing their students. Ines puts it like this: *“Meditation can do magic, it just requires regular practice.”* And it is this regular yoga practice that prepares the student for the experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness. This preparation might be what keeps the student from experiencing a spiritual emergency as described by Grof and Grof (1989). Instead the participants in this study were able to translate it into a healing, transformative and very powerful experience. Maria describes how yoga practice is the preparation work: *“I see the practice of yoga as a way to prepare the soil for those special moments of insights.”* The feeling of being transformed and experiencing healing through non-ordinary states is here a result of consistency in practice.

The experience of healing is interesting because it says something about how a journey through yoga can have an ability to heal. Caplan, Portillo and Seely (2013) discuss how eastern yoga combined with western psychology can be inspired and learn from each other on how to reduce the effects of psychological trauma. This is an interesting idea, and in this context the stories presented might show examples of how this is already being done. This project gives some clues that modern day western yoga as it is being practiced at the yoga studios, retreats and teacher trainings is already a merge between western psychological ideas and eastern yoga. Ida's rebirth experience is the best example as it has many similarities with holotropic states, breath work and rebirthing as described and practiced by Grof (2012). He explains the function of the heavy breathing identical to the one Ida practiced during her rebirth experience: *“faster breathing extended for a long period of time changes the chemistry of the organism in such a way that blocked physical and emotional energies associated with various traumatic memories are released and become available for peripheral discharging and processing.”*(Grof, 2012 p.96) The similarities are striking as Ida's story describe how the heavy breathing got her in a trance like state that led her into experiencing the snakebite, her time in the womb and episodes from her childhood again.

Another similarity is that she describes how this led to healing, and that is also the potential Grof sees in rebirth experiences and other holotropic states. Ida's yoga teacher training can on the basis of her description be said to be a merge between eastern yoga and western psychology. It included the traditional yoga aspect combined with exercises similar to those used in transpersonal psychology. At the same time psychology is not mentioned explicitly as a part of their stories, Ida doesn't draw this connection herself. Maria even highlights how she has to remind her students that she is not their therapist. So the teachers might not view themselves as having the role of a therapist in relationship to their students.

5.4 Sensing the room

The third theme that appeared during the analysis was sensing the room. The participants all describe an ability to sense the students need, and they adjust their teaching style and the topics they bring up accordingly.

A relevant question is wheatear they are really sensing the room or their own projections? There can be said to be a danger in the conviction that you know what the other person needs and wants. This can be seen in the light of Buber's (1970) thoughts about the I- thou relationship. Here we meet each other in authentic existence without objectification, as compared to the I- it relationship where we meet the other as an object. Imagination and ideas have no place in an authentic relationship according to Buber. One can question wheatear the teacher are acting on their imagination and ideas rather then what is really the needs and wants of the people in the room. This is especially relevant as the teacher meets a whole room of people, how do they manage to meet every single one on their individual needs? At the same time there is the possibility that there is something happening in the room, and that though their journeys they have cultivated the art of meeting each person as a thou and sensing their need. Some parts of their story might indicate that they are tuning in to their students, Maria describes how she meets students that cry in class: *"If you want to talk after class I am here, If you want to be left alone that is just as fine."* With those words she is opening up for the student to express hers or his needs.

Other parts of the story indicates the opposite, Ines writes how she *"look for a part of myself in their soul. This is a way for me to connect with them."* If she is looking for apart of herself in them, it can seem as if she is projecting or imagining. The nature of this Inquiry is also relevant here, the stories are all told to inspire and transform and the participants are aware of this. The participants do communicate an ability to sense the room, and although it is

impossible to conclude on wheatear or not this is happening, it should be pointed out that it sounds like a wonderful ideal.

Perhaps what the participants are tapping into is a form of group flow as described by Csíkszentmihályi; a mental state where the person is completely immersed in whatever activity she or he is doing (2000). His use of the concept flow is similar to the use of the word in yogic terms. On a group level it can be attained when a group of people are in this state of flow together, working towards or with something. Some yoga classes can be seen as an expression of such group flow and maybe that makes the teachers able to sense this state and get an intuitive knowledge about where their students are. When Ines explains that she looks for a part of herself in their soul this might be an expression for an oneness with the student and being in a flow together. She also points to how her students are her teachers as well and this indicates that she considers the relationship between her and her students goes both ways. The participants don't talk about a yoga class as a group that much but comments like this can be a hint at something happening at group level too.

One of the topics brought up is spirituality in classes, and they talk about that with their student one to one as well. The act of balancing how much and when to bring in spirituality is something they all bring up. But they seem to express that they know when the time is right for bringing up spiritual issue and also who is ready to talk about spiritual subjects. The participants communicate openness to the varieties in people attending their classes. Everyone seem to be welcome and Ines express how she loves every one of her students *“Even the ones that stop by for a quick class, looks miserable and never show up again. I love them the most, because they need it the most.”*

Sensing the room can be seen in relation to theories on counseling (Ivey, D'Andrea & Ivey, 2012) and the importance of meeting the person where she or he is at, Ida even mentions this specifically: *“So it is always important for me to check in on how the class is feeling and meeting them where they are.”* The question then is, to what extent is this being done? As we have seen their own teaching style and worldviews are in the context of yoga, and there is a possibility that there lies an implicit idea that the students should go through a similar journey as they have. Meeting them where they are at could simply meet meeting them where they are in their spiritual development. In Marias words: *“I know that my students have to experience these things themselves in order for it to make sense for them.”* There can be said to be certain expectation in this to, that it is only a matter of time before things will happen.

5.5 Transformations through yoga as a process

The three themes described in chapter 4, loving guidance, healing experiences and sensing the room, all come together under the core theme: Transformation through yoga as a process. The process is connected to yoga as a journey and to a cosmological view expressed by the participants. A common feature seems to be trust in the universe and how everything happens for a reason. As well as going through their own personal process, they are also expressing a belief that they are a part of a bigger process that includes everything and everyone. The yoga teachers experience going through the process of yoga, with crisis, finding yoga and a teacher, experiencing a non-ordinary state, healing, and finally, facilitating that same process in their students. This process as a whole is common for all three of them and it is this process that is determining how they meet their students. The processes they have been through themselves seem to be what they want to facilitate for their students.

The processes described are similar to a psychological and spiritual growth with their experience with non-ordinary states as a peak experience. Maria talks about how these states are temporary: *“This is not a state I stayed in, but still, just having had that experience reminds me that it is all good.”* This can be compared to a plateau experience where the individual experiences a more fundamental change in how one sees the world (Maslow, 1970). Her worldview shifted as a result of her experiences, and she is still in a process of change, the Kundalini experience she mentioned happened only a few weeks before I spoke to her. The same is true for Ida who highlights that she is aware that she is still in a process of change and growth; *“Maybe I am not quite ready yet to see how much I can manifest, and maybe my container isn’t big enough at this point.”* The participants recognize the process they are in and they are not rushing anything in their own development or their students.

The trust in yoga as a process is something that is evident in all three stories. The universe is mentioned in Ida and Ines’ story and although Maria’s story does not contain that word, her descriptions are similar: This points to a shared idea about an external force that makes things happen through yoga if one only trusts the process. An underlying cosmological idea in these stories is that the universe or whatever one chooses to call it will make things happen. Ida explains it like this: *“The biggest lesson for me in all of this was that we are not supposed to force anything to happen, or take control. I know now that I have to go with it.”* Maria also gives an insight into the same worldview in her story: *“Circumstances I couldn’t possibly have created for myself started lining up for me. It was quite an amazing experience, and that reinforced my belief that there was really something happening through yoga.”* This trust

towards the process and what will happen, and that the universe will take care of things is reoccurring through all stories and is in line with the tradition of yoga and the concept of the impersonal divine (Cortright, 1997; Stephens, 2010). The participants don't mention God, but they mention a process guiding them towards something. This idea can be seen in light of the cosmological function of the myth described by Campbell (1988). It is a worldview that describes the cosmos in a mysterious way, as a process we are all a part of. This worldview is then likely to be passed on to their students through their journeys, and conversations. The fact that all the participants seem to share this cosmological view about yoga as a process might be an indication that it is a common worldview in the yoga community.

5.6 A yoga heroine's journey

The three themes and the core theme transformations through yoga as a process have here been closely linked to the concept of the hero's journey by Joseph Campbell (1969; 1988). This section will try to show how this theory of the myth can be relevant to yoga practitioners today.

Most of the hero's journeys described by Campbell are traditional myths, and he comments on this saying we need new myths to go with this modern world we are living in, myths that can encompass the whole world and everyone in it. The three journeys described here can all be said to be modern day heroine's journeys. Yoga, with its increasing popularity today, especially with western women, offers a unique possibility for a heroine's journey for everyone. At least that is in part the image that is being sold today through yoga in social media and yoga celebrities. The story of the woman who suffered in the busy, demanding society, then started practicing yoga and found inner peace and happiness is in my mind the epitome of a modern day myth. It is not universal however, but describes a path taken by what can be described as fortunate western women. As much as western yoga loved to trace its roots as far back as possible, to ancient India, the yoga thought here in the west are uniquely western and modern. The resemblance a yoga story can have to the hero's journey might help explain why people are drawn to it; it can serve as a possibility for them to be the hero in their own life. There are numerous examples of western women living and embodying this yoga journey today. Kino McGregor's book *Sacred Fire* (2012) and Rachel Braaten's *Yoga Girl* (2014) are some examples of prominent members of the yoga community sharing their personal stories of transformation through yoga. For the many women reading about their journeys these stories can be read as modern day myths.

One might argue that there lies a danger in this. The ideal of being a modern day yoga hero might not be attainable for everyone. Another thing is this experience with non-ordinary states as the peak experience and moment of transformation. It can be reasonable to question if these experiences serve as an entrance into some yoga communities. Are similar experiences needed in order to be accepted as truly spiritual? This raises an issue on false spiritual experiences, and I do see that being an issue if people feel that such experiences are their way in to a community. Another thing is the question on whether the students feel like there is a right way to go through the process of yoga. Does the yoga journey as communicated by these teachers define for their students how real yoga related experiences are supposed to be? The questions will have to be left unanswered here. However, it is important questions to reflect over, for example in connection to Tart's (1972) thoughts on religious experiences not really being non-ordinary states, since they are tainted by the religious frame in which they are taking place.

The yoga teachers in this study use their own stories as myths in the sense that they live by them and translate them into something they also use with their students. Their own personal yoga journeys with their experience of non-ordinary states as the transformative experience can be seen to serve the same function as a myth. They have a metaphysical purpose by opening their students mind to the mystery and possibility of these experiences. They serve a cosmological purpose in that they communicate something about the universe, everything is connected and all is one. The sociological functions of their stories can be said to be a preservation of this way of teaching and living, they might serve as an ideal to students about where their yoga journey should take them. Last, these experiences have served as rites of passage to the participants (Campbell, 1968; Gennep, 1960): after this experience the student is now a teacher.

The relevance of the yoga journey presented here might be restricted to female westerners within the yoga community, but the participants themselves see their stories as more universal. Maria stresses how it is not necessary to do yoga to have these experiences. Her experience had taken her beyond yoga, and transcended the physical aspect. All the participants describe the same when they talk about yoga as a vehicle or a means to something else. It is not really about the poses, the texts or the community, but something more transcendent. Their stories are yoga journeys, but as myths they can be read as something more universal (Campbell, 1968). They are all stories of a heroine's journey, leaving the normality of modern day life, discovering the eternity inside and then returning to assist

others on the same journey. The experience of being in the process of yoga, and encountering non-ordinary states turns the student into the teacher, completing the journey and giving back by modeling the yoga heroine's journey to their students.

Chapter 6: Transformation

One of the aims of organic inquiry is to offer a possibility for transformation in the participants, the researcher and even the reader. Transformation has been the binding theme in this project, both in regards to the stories being told, the core theme, and transformations in me the researcher and the participants as a result of this study. My own story of transformation at the end of this chapter and the participant's response letters are an attempt to show this transformation to the reader.

This last part will include some concluding comments, limitations of this study, relevance of the study, further research and my own personal story of transformation through this project. Due to the lack of space the participant's reports on transformation as well as the reports from the two invited readers can be found in the appendixes (Appendix I & J). The response letters from the participants and the invited readers are identical to how they looked when I received them, meaning I have done no editing on the language.

6.1 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to take a look at how yoga teachers own experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet students that have had such experiences. What was found was that it is the experiences that the yoga teachers have had with non-ordinary states of consciousness that makes them value the same experiences in their students. They understand how powerful it is and they want to be a part of facilitating that process. But it is not the experience in itself that has defined how they meet their students on their experiences; rather it is their personal journey as a whole. Going through the three steps and experiencing the transformational powers that lies in a yoga journey is determining for how they meet their students on their experiences. Three themes were found; loving guidance, healing experiences and sensing the room, they all merge in the core theme transformation through yoga as a process. The loving guidance from their teachers made their experience of transformation and healing possible, and they are now passing this on to their students by sensing the room and their student's needs, meeting them where they are and creating a safe space for them. The process the participants describe is similar to the concept of the hero's journey, and maybe that is one of the attractors in modern day yoga. It might resonate with something deep inside us and remind us of the mono myth. Through consistent practice everyone have the possibility to experience life changing moments and becoming the hero or heroine in one's own story. The yoga heroine's journey presented here is seen as a version of the mono myth and thus have the same function as a myth; it can inspire, transform

and offer a journey into our deepest self (Campbell, 1968) The experiences with non- ordinary states described here, all served as a rite of passage, turning the student into the teacher.

6.2 Limitation to the study

The experiences that the participants brought up were all experiences of non- ordinary states of consciousness within the context of yoga. I had tried to specify that my project involved all experiences with non-ordinary states, both in my invitation letter and while talking to them (Appendix A). However the responses I have gotten makes me question if I could have done it more explicitly. The participants might have some experiences that could be of interest in this project even if they personally don't connect them to yoga.

As happens in all research, this study was limited by my own assumptions and biases. I started this investigation with a few assumptions that were clear to me from the beginning and that underlie the theoretical and methodological choices I made. I believed that experiencing or at least recognizing the existence of and knowing something about non- ordinary states and spiritual experiences are necessary in order to meet others on these experiences.

All three participants were women between the age of mid-20s to mid -40s living and teaching yoga in Norway. One thing worth mentioning is that the responses I got from my original invitations to participate in the project almost exclusively came from yoga teachers with roots in other countries besides Norway. This might be a coincidence, related to certain reluctance in talking about these topics in the Norwegian culture or it might be a direct result of the invitations being in English. I had however written all the emails in Norwegian and although the attached official invitation was in English I specified in the mail that I would be happy to translate it to them and that the interviews could be held in Norwegian if they preferred.

One of the interviews I did is left out of the project, due to the participant wanting to change too many things when I sent her the finished story. I gave her a chance to edit out the parts she did not want to share, but the story she then sent me was too different from what the original story looked like and from the theme of this project. I should have been clearer from the start that the things she did not want to share should be left out. If I were to do it again I would not have given her a chance to make small adjustments to the story either, as that did change the story too much and took up both her time and mine.

6.3 Relevance of the study

I became interested in the subject of non-ordinary states of consciousness as a counseling student, and it is also my hope that the stories presented here, will be of relevance to counselors. All three yoga teachers that have been interviewed here are working in a helping relation to their students, and this is similar to counseling.

I hope to show that non-ordinary states of consciousness is an important part of some people's lives, and that this should also be reflected in counseling or coaching conversations. It is my opinion that there might be something to learn from the way yoga teachers' talk about and with their students on this topic. My hope is that counselors in many different positions can learn something from seeing how yoga teachers meet and talk with clients that have experienced non-ordinary states of consciousness. After all, spiritual experiences like altered states of consciousness doesn't only happen to people who meditate or do yoga. I think it is important that counselors are prepared to meet clients on the spiritual issues as well, including their experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness.

I also hope that this study can help to shed light on a part of Norwegian spirituality that there hasn't been conducted a lot of research on; spirituality in yoga.

The response letters in the appendix together with my own story of transformation in the end show how this project already has been of relevance to the people involved, even before it has been completed. I have chosen to let the response letters speak for themselves and not analyzing them in any way. I will however point out that they demonstrate how relevant participation in this project has been for the teachers involved. This is clearly a topic and a process that has the potential to transform. As inspirational stories I believe that they can be of interest to yoga practitioners as a way of reflecting over their own individual journey and how they make sense of it. The relevance of this project lies not only in the scientific, but also in the transformational power it has shown and might continue to have.

6.4 Future research

This study has been concerned with how yoga teachers that have experienced non-ordinary states meet students on their experiences. Although the focus has been on the yoga journey from student to teacher it has also touched upon spirituality in Norway today. As I mentioned in the introduction yoga is an important arena for spirituality, and it is my personal opinion that it would be interesting with further research on this area.

Stories about spirituality can serve as a great inspiration and spark transformation in everyone involved, including the reader. That is the idea in Organic Inquiry, and that is the idea behind this project. I believe this is true regarding research on other topics regarding spirituality too. It would be interesting to read transpersonal research on the topics on spirituality in Norway today. It is my opinion that spirituality needs to be understood not only from a sociological perspective but also from the perspective of the people having the spiritual experiences.

In my own future exploration of the particular topic in this thesis I would be interested to see if this pattern that showed up here could be found in other yoga instructors as well. Since this is an organic study I would also be curious about how the participants think and feel about their stories being seen as journeys in relation to the hero's journey. Is this something that resonates with them? I can easily picture a more comprehensive collection of yoga stories that can serve as an inspiration and possibly spark a transformation in new students, just embarking on their own yoga journey. I would like to find stories that are quite different from the ones presented here.

6.5 My own transformation

When I decided to write about yoga I also committed to a daily practice. I have heard stories about people writing academically about something close to their hearts, and then losing it in the process. I didn't want to just write about yoga this semester, I wanted to live it too. That is why I have been getting on the mat almost every day, taking classes about three times a week and attended workshop with different teachers. I even spent five weeks in Thailand where my time was divided between spending time with my family and doing yoga.

I can feel the changes in my body, every week I feel stronger and more flexible. One popular yoga saying is: "*I bend so I don't break*" and I find that to be true. As my body has grown more flexible so has my mind, and I am more open to whatever comes my way. In a way a stronger body has given me the strength I needed to make some untraditional choices about my future.

This project has been my own heroine's journey; I have been given an opportunity to see my life and my experiences with yoga as a journey through different stages. One thing that resonated deeply with me was the great importance other people have had on my personal journey. The people I consider to be my teachers are not limited to yoga teacher, there are so many that have influenced my journey and how I now think, learn and see the world. My teachers have opened up the world to me and given me a glimpse of a greater mystery. I

remember how the world changed the day I had my first child almost eight years ago, that one little person made me see everything in a new light and nothing was ever the same again. That is what a teacher can do, open up the world again. In a way this project has given me many new teachers and opened the world again several times. At the same time I am reminded of how this journey I am on is mine alone. Yoga is to me a lonely practice. It can be done in a room full of people, but it is fundamentally about an inner journey, and that is always a lonely one. Even though my practice is lonely I never feel alone, I too feel that connectedness and oneness that the participants mention in their stories. Our journeys might feel lonely at times, but in my humble opinion, we are never alone.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix A: Invitation to participate

Invitation to Participate in Research Project

Experiences with Non-ordinary States of Consciousness in Yoga

Dear yoga teacher, you are invited to participate in an organic study on experiences with non-ordinary states of Consciousness in Yoga.

This project is a Master Thesis Project at NTNU, The Norwegian University of Science and Technology. It will look at how Yoga teachers meet clients that have experienced non-ordinary states of consciousness. Of particular interest is how this is being shaped by their personal experience with such altered states. The study is interested to see if there might be something to learn from the way yoga teachers' talk about, and with their students on this topic. The research question is: *In what way does yoga teachers own experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet student that have had such experiences?*

The participants in the research project have been invited to join on the basis of their position as a Yoga teacher.

Participation involves one meeting for about one hour between the researcher and the participant. During this meeting you will be asked to tell about your experiences about the subject. You will be asked to include if and how it has influenced your life and how you make meaning out of that experience. This interview will be audiotaped. Based on this interview the researcher will write a story. This story will then be returned to you for editing, so that you can check if it represents your experiences the way you see them. When all the stories (about four) are collected and written, they will be edited so it will be impossible to recognize the participants. The stories will then be sent out to each of you participants to read. You will then be asked to write down your feelings and insights in the form of a one-page reflection based on the stories you read. In addition two people that haven't been involved in the study up until that point will be invited to read the four stories and write a page with their reflections. This will be an attempt to show how the stories can inspire and influence others.

All information is confidential and in the stories that the other participants will be given to read there will not be used any names on teachers, students, cities, centers or any other information that will reveal the identity of the participants. The same is true for the written publication of the study. Your identity will be anonymous.

The Project is planned to be finished by May 15th, 2015. After this the interviews will be deleted and any information that could identify the participants will be destroyed. If you

choose to participate in this Study you may withdraw your consent at any time, and all of the material about you will then be deleted.

If you wish to participate in this study or have any questions please contact Marie Glasø Glein, the student that is doing this research project, on email: marie_glein@hotmail.com or phone: 93088572. The Project will be supervised by associate professor Jonathan Reams. He can be reached on email: jonathan.reams@ntnu.svt.no or phone: 73591651.

Sincerely
Marie Glasø Glein

7.2 Appendix B: Consent form

Consent Form

I have received the information about the study and am willing to participate. I know that at any time I can withdraw from the project and all material about me will then be left out from the study and destroyed.

(Signed by participant, date)

7.3 Appendix C: Interview guide

Interview guide

Thank you for participating in my project. This will be an unstructured interview where you are asked to tell your story about experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness. That means that you will be able to tell your story without much interference from me. I might ask some questions to clear things up, but you will be the one leading the conversation.

We have two types of consciousness, natural and altered. The normal awake state, dream state and dreamless sleep are what we refer to as natural states of consciousness. Altered, or non-ordinary states of consciousness include every other, such as near death experiences, meditative states, drug induced states, spiritual experiences and many more.

My project is about non-ordinary states of consciousness and that is also what I want you to focus on in your story. You can choose some experiences to highlight, and try to see them in connection to your life and yourself as a yoga instructor. Please try to tell it as a story with a beginning and an end, this will make it easier for me to stay true to your experience when I am writing it into a written story for my thesis.

This is your story, so think about how these experiences has influenced you and what meaning you put into them. The topics I hope that you can say something about is

- Your experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness in yoga, meditation or other settings.
- How you see yourself as a yoga teacher, and how you relate to your students

Your feelings and thoughts are as important as the actual experience, so feel free to elaborate on them when you find it natural. You are also free to draw in other experiences that you see as connected to the subject here today.

7.4 Appendix D: NSD approval

Jonathan Reams
Institutt for voksnes læring og rådgivningsvitenskap NTNU

7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 26.01.2015

Vår ref: 41576 / 3 / MB

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 12.01.2015. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

*41576 Experiences with non- ordinary states of consciousness in Yoga
Behandlingsansvarlig NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig Jonathan Reams
Student Marie Glein*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering.

Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget

skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 15.05.2015, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen
Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Marianne Bøe

Kontaktperson: Marianne Bøe tlf: 55 58 25 83

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Marie Glein marie_glein@hotmail.com

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering -
Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 41576

Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke på hvilken måte yogalæreres egne opplevelser med ikke-ordinære bevissthetstilstander påvirker måten de møter sine klienter som har hatt tilsvarende opplevelser.

Utvalget informeres skriftlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet, men det kan tilføyes at studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning ved NSD.

Det behandles sensitive personopplysninger om etnisk bakgrunn eller politisk/filosofisk/religiøs oppfatning i prosjektet.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at studenten etterfølger NTNU sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet.

Dersom personopplysninger skal lagres på privat pc/mobile enheter, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 15.05.2015. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:

- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger somf.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette lydopptak

7.5 Appendix E: Invitation to read the stories

Invitation to participate in Research project

Dear _____ You are invited to participate in an organic study on experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness in Yoga. I have interviewed four yoga teachers about their experiences and written the interviews into stories. One of the aims in this study is to show how these stories can inspire a transformative change in the reader. I am therefore inviting you to read the participants stories and write a one page reflection about what comes up in you when you read them.

This project is a Master Thesis Project at NTNU, The Norwegian University of Science and Technology. It will look at how Yoga teachers meet clients that have experienced non- ordinary states of consciousness. Of particular interest is how this is being shaped by their personal experience with such altered states. The study is interested to see if there might be something to learn from the way yoga teachers' talk about, and with their students on this topic. The research question is: *In what way does yoga teachers own experiences with non-ordinary states of consciousness influence how they meet student that have had such experiences?*

Participation involves that you write your feelings and insights in the form of a one-page reflection based on the stories you read. Your identity will be anonymous.

If you wish to participate with your reflection or have any questions please contact Marie Glasø Glein, the student that is doing this research project, on email: marie_glein@hotmail.com or phone: 93088572. The Project will be supervised by associate professor Jonathan Reams. He can be reached on email: jonathan.reams@ntnu.svt.no or phone: 73591651.

Sincerely

Marie Glein

7.6 Appendix F : Ida's story

We had only been walking for about five minutes when I looked up to see which direction we should take next. I then suddenly felt a sharp sting in my foot. The first thing I remembered was feeling very agitated at my boyfriend. If I wasn't on this hike I wouldn't have been bitten, and the whole reason we were there was because he wanted to. The second thing I remember was feeling nauseous and then I was unconscious.

Looking back later I realized that my body had already been trying to tell me that I was in the wrong place with the wrong person. I kept getting infections, and they kept coming back even though I was treating them with western medicine. I took an almost deadly snakebite for me to wake up and realize that my life was heading in the wrong direction. Many times I have wondered if I could have avoided that snakebite if I had only listened to my body.

Luckily that was the only thing that happened, and I survived. That was the start of a long journey towards recovery, a journey that would also lead me into Yoga.

There was talk about amputating my leg, but after ten days they could finally find a pulse and they were able to save it. I did get better day by day, but I couldn't wear pants for months and me and my boyfriend still weren't doing any better. My family and my doctors wanted me back in Norway but I still couldn't fly so I had to stay. When it comes to me and my boyfriend at the time, it took this traumatic experience for us to realize that we couldn't be there for each other. After the bite he never let me process what had happened to me, and he was so eager for me to move on and look forward. It took about a year before I realized that I had almost lost my life and my leg, but I was still here, why?

Before I moved to live with my boyfriend in this foreign country where a snakebite would change my life, I was living in California and after the snakebite I went back to finish my degree. All those four years I had been living there I was homesick. And in spite of this when I was finished, I ended up moving ever further west, all the way into the pacific.

I was a huge avid runner before the snakebite and I could run an hour every day, and so when I moved to Hawaii for my new job I was very focused on getting back into running. My doctor advised me to try Yoga: "It will get you back in to running again in no time". And so I did.

As the universe wanted it there was a yoga studio right next to my apartment and I signed up, eager to get back into running. I was the only one who showed up at the first session, so I had

a private class, and it felt like coming home. It was so grounding and it was something so beautiful about that class. After a while my body did recover through Yoga and eventually I was able to go for my first run. I felt nice, but not in the same way yoga did. My running had always been about being stressed, and although I sweated it out I never felt like I processed anything with running. Yoga was different, and so I didn't run anymore, it was all about yoga for me from that moment on.

In that process of learning yoga I started listening to my body more and it was then, and also after talking to other yoga teachers, that I started to see the connection between my life situation and my snake bite. I literally had to be bitten by a physical real snake to wake up. My body was giving me so many signs to do something and I wasn't listening. That was such a big wakeup call when I saw that connection, and I started to see all the symbolism behind this snakebite.

I decided to do a teacher training, at the time mostly for myself and so I went to Bali. While I was there they offered us to do a rebirth experience. To prepare we had to go 24 hours in silence and meditate for 12 of those hours. My mind was racing at first and then it calmed down, there were so many ups and downs that day. They then gave us the instructions for the rebirth experience. They did not say a lot about what to expect but assured us that they were there. Ours was about two hours and were instructed to breath like you do when you are running, very heavily all the way down into the belly. There was this special music in the background and it was all very intense created a lot of energy.

Going into the rebirth experience I thought that it was going to be exhausting but within ten minutes all of a sudden I heard beeping like I was in a hospital and in my trance I opened my eyes and I was back in the hospital. I was surrounded by everyone and my leg was huge, very hot and I had a lot of pain. I was nauseous, hurting and very afraid. After the experience my teachers would tell me that it was obvious that my leg was bothering me a lot so they all came to touch me with their hands but I don't remember feeling that. The pain in my foot shot down and out, and then the pain was gone. I felt an instant sense of support. The victimizing of myself that I had been carrying around disappeared and in that calm state I could go back to the first place where I had ever felt supported and loved. I saw this pink glow and I heard my mother and fathers voice talking about how exited they were to meet me and I realized I was in the womb. The whole time while this was happening I kept thinking what is this?

And then all of a sudden I was back to a memory from when I was two years old and I see my brother. Then it moved to when I was about ten, living with my family in Belgium. My dad traveled a lot and I could feel the sadness in that state I was in, together with my sister, brother and mother living in a foreign country without our father around. Then it jumped to when I was 13, still in Belgium. My dad was no longer even more and my parents weren't doing that great. The last childhood memory it took me back to was me at eighteen, graduating and having a huge fight with my dad, the pain from it was there too. All of a sudden it jumped back to right before the snake bite. This is interesting because when the snake first bit me I was looking up to see which direction we should take. This second time, living through it again, I was looking down, right at the snake and I let it bite me. Then I was at the hospital again and it didn't go any further in time. My experience in the trance stopped there at the hospital and I remember feeling a great sense of gratitude towards what had happened and I remember thinking about the snake. I had this great level of compassion towards the snake, hoping that it hadn't hurt itself by biting me. I strongly hoped that it was alive and doing well, and then I woke up.

We were talking about it after and the teachers explained that it is really normal to go through these wormholes during a rebirth experience, some people see the future and many see glimpses of their past like I did. It was such an interesting cycle for me and a truly life changing moment. My relationship with my father eventually healed, and it all started after that teacher training. A big realization for me when I was there was that my father is human, and that I needed to forgive him.

Before my rebirth experience my attitude about the snakebite was "why me?" And then after my rebirth I felt a deep sense of gratitude for what that snake bite had done to me and to the course of my life. If I hadn't been bitten by that snake I could still be in that unhappy place in my life, with the wrong person.

I was reluctant to settle down in Norway for many different reasons but things started falling into place when I got back. I was offered an opportunity to teach my own class here, and I took it. From there on things just happened and I wasn't pushing for anything anymore. The biggest lesson for me in all of this was that we are not supposed to force anything to happen, or take control. I know now that I have to go with it. If something is trying to happen and I am blocking it, it doesn't mean that it is gone forever; it will come back in another form. Before I was bit by that snake I was so afraid of sharks that I avoided the water. I now think of it as If I

were supposed to be bit, and then I avoided the water, then the universe made sure that I would be bit on land.

I have students telling me that this yoga studio is their private area where they can talk openly, when in their outer life they are more closed, also about doing yoga. Some people are even ashamed to tell their co-workers that they practice yoga. Because of that it is very important to me that they feel safe in my classes.

Some people may tell me that they always feel sad after a hip class and I then confirm that it's normal. I have also had students cry in my hip classes. If someone comes up to me I will always talk to them about it. One girl came in telling me about how her lower back was really hurting her. I asked if she was stressed about money and she was so shocked and wonder how I could possibly know. I told her how money concerns often manifest in the lower back and that she needed to talk to her partner about it. With my regular students, like this girl, it is easier for me to see where they are at, and talking to them about the topics they need.

I find that it is those little drops of wisdom from the teacher that can change everything for a student. I remember myself when a teacher mentioned energy and the heart chakra in one class I attended, and for the rest 90 minutes I would only think about that. In my teacher training I experienced how a teacher would describe the pose very simply and then let you sit there for 30 minutes and that thought me something about how well that worked. That also inspired me for my teaching. Talking to much can be something that new teachers do because they are uncomfortable with being in front of people in silence. But I find the silence to be amazing when you are with students.

The same is true regarding ringing in spirituality in classes, it is those small little sentences that can be so powerful to students. I have had people coming up to me after class when I have just briefly mentioned something and they tell me that they have had so spiritual experiences. I had one student coming up to me telling me about how she had had so many spiritual experiences that she don't talk to people about. But that one little comment I made had made her realize that maybe we were on the same wavelength and that she could talk to me about it.

I think you can sense the room as a yoga instructor. I can come into a class and feel how stressed people are. Even one person having a really bad day will influence the people around her and it can have a domino effect. Then I just make it my goal to get them out of their head

and leave them sweating before they land on their backs in savasana. Whatever spiritual I might try to bring up won't resonate with them or even register. So it is always important for me to check in on how the class is feeling and meeting them where they are.

I have taken some kundalini classes and I get the same nauseous feeling I got when I got bitten. That is probably a sign that I should continue but it is such an unpleasant feeling and I don't want to go through that right now. Maybe I am not quite ready yet to see how much I can manifest, and maybe my container isn't big enough at this point.

I am slowly bringing more spiritual elements into my yoga classes, privately I am a very spiritual person, and I wish I was a more spiritual yoga teacher. At the same time I see that if I bring in too many spiritual elements people get skeptical. Right now I want to make yoga approachable, and I also see a need to meet people where they are at. I am doing my 500 hour teacher training now with Shiva Rae and she is very spiritual. I am at this crossroad now and I know in myself that I will incorporate more spirituality into my teaching style. I will still try to meet the students where they are but as the spiritual part of me grows bigger it is unfair to myself to have to lock it up. I will still tailor to the community I am in as well, so it is all about finding that balance. One thing I love about this journey is that it is never ending. I will be 60 and still be self-conscious about something, and that is beautiful. There is no fun in being perfect.

7.7 Appendix G: Ines's story

My whole world had fallen apart and I was left with nothing. Somehow the only thing that made sense was to attend a yoga teacher training. It had been a year since my husband had passed when I bought the plane tickets and went to Goa to try to find a purpose in my life again. I did find a purpose, and I did find love again too, but far more important than that, I found something inside me that I didn't know existed.

I was introduced to spirituality at an early age, my mother used to read tarot cards and she was very into astrology. I never shared her interest in these things, but they were a natural part of my childhood. Chakras, meditation and dream interpretations were all normal topics around our dinner table. In my teens I was more interested in boys, makeup and partying and I never paid much attention when we discussed these things. My older sister shared my mother's interest, and meditation and chanting has always been important to her. I consider her my first meditation teacher and she was the one who recommended that I took the teacher training at that time in my life when I had stopped eating, exercising and even smiling.

On our first day of the training we were asked to say something about what had brought us here. I shared how I had lost my husband and how the depression that followed had led me into a darkness that eventually consumed every part of me. I remember crying so much while telling this, and I also remember the support and love I got from the other teachers and participants. Never before in my life had I experienced someone other than close family and friends to be so caring and compassionate. There was a deep openness between everyone there, and there were many of us that had experienced a great deal of pain and loss. I couldn't help but to see the teacher training as a sort of healing process for most of us.

The teacher training lasted four weeks, and through that time I got a really close relationship with one of the teachers. She had lost her husband too, and the similarities in our stories were striking. One night after the training was finished for the day and we were headed back to our rooms after dinner she asked me if I was ready to experience true healing. I didn't understand what she meant but in a mysterious way I trusted her with all my heart and so when she took my hand I followed her into the night. We took a taxi to an Indian neighborhood with no tourists in sight, and got out in front of a small house. I still remember the smell in the streets as we stood there, I could feel something new was coming my way and I had a sense of relief in me. When we knocked on the door an old man opened and we followed him inside. What happened after that is all a blur for me. He gave us both something to drink, and since I'm not

stupid I understood that it was some sort of drug, but I didn't care. All the pain in my life and all the darkness had left me numb. Before my husband died I would never have even thought about taking drugs with someone I didn't know in the middle of the night. Now everything was different and I just wanted to feel again, and be something more than the pain.

I was transported to this other place, I don't know how to describe it, but it was completely real and in my mind not a dream at all. To this day, 15 years later I still consider that one experience more real than this world around us now. People tend to think about this world as the real world, but I don't anymore, all I see is a reflection of the reality I encountered that night. I was still in that little house but everything had changed, the whole universe was there in that room. Everything I had ever known or loved was there at the same time, and no boundaries existed. My husband was there too, I didn't see him, but I felt him and no word was necessary because he and I were the same. The three of us in the room were one to and I felt a strong sense of oneness with the entire universe. The small table in front of me appeared to be as much a part of me as my arm or my mind. Quite literally there were no boundaries and I could see the connections between everything that had ever happened to me, and everything that would happen in the future. I saw myself as a small part in the big cosmic play called the universe, and I fell in love with all of it. This was the happiest moment in my life, for the first time I felt free from all pain. There existed no pain, only peace and the whole world was wrapped in a glorious pink light. The whole experience ended with a vision of myself doing wheel pose over the moon while the stars were dancing around me.

We stumbled out of that small house and into the streets, I looked up and realized that it was a full moon. We couldn't find a taxi so we walked for two hours to get back to the resort. When I got back to my room I took a long bath and realized that I had become a whole new person.

The next day of teacher training I truly experienced magic on my yoga mat. With the help of the four wonderful teachers at the retreat I managed to get deep into positions I hadn't been able to do before. They challenged me in a loving and compassionate way, and I felt so blessed to receive guidance from these wonderful souls. I continued to make tremendous progress for the remaining weeks I was there. Both as a student and as a teacher I found my style and my confidence within yoga and I was ready to bring what I had learned out into the world. My meditation experiences changes dramatically too, I started to find peace whenever I would enter lotus. After that night I understood that yoga was my path and I have spent

hours practicing and sharing my knowledge every single day since then. Yoga is what I do, what I live and what I breathe. It is everything to me, and always will be.

One of my most profound meditation experiences happened right after that teacher training. I was at home in my room, in a state of sadness. Being back home also meant that I was a widow again, not just this yogi on a self-development quest in India. I was having some doubts, my practice had felt empty in a way. I could feel a deep resistance towards getting on my mat that day, but somehow I knew that meant that I really needed it. I decided to do a quick session with some yoga and finish with a short meditation. The yoga practice was what it had been for the last 10 days, but when I got to the meditation something happened. I suddenly felt very warm, not in an uncomfortable way, but more like a blanket of comfort was wrapped around me. I instantly knew that I never needed to feel alone, cold or sad ever again. Something left my body, pain, grief and negativity that I had been manifesting suddenly took physical form and let me release it.

I think every yoga teacher has that one moment that defines them as a teacher, and always pushes them forward. That one experience that is so strong, and so real, that they can't help but to answer their calling. I see that in my student sometimes too, that they have experienced it or that they are headed towards that experience. I don't talk about it that much, because words can't do this phenomenon justice, but some days it just feels right to mention it, and then I do. The class of people I have in front of me speaks to me without words and I intuitively know what I should bring up, and what I should keep silent about. Some classes are thought without words. I believe in the magic of silence and movement. Other days I feel the need to share with my students a piece of the wisdom I was given by my teachers. My students are my teachers as well, I learn something new from them every day. Whenever I meet a new student I look for a part of myself in their soul. This is a way for me to connect with them and love them, and I love my student, I really do. Even the ones that stop by for a quick class, look miserable and never show up again. I love them the most, because they need it the most, and everyone is so beautiful.

I settled in Norway because of an incident that happened 10 years ago. I had been practicing and traveling and teaching for a few years when I came to Oslo to teach a workshop. While I was there I met a man, also a yogi and also very spiritual. He was a published poet, could do all the hard poses and had something about him that I didn't really understand, and maybe that was what attracted me to him. We fell in love during that workshop and I moved in with him.

For a few years I worked as a teacher at a studio in Oslo, and my life was all yoga, passion and late night poetry reading with my new love. I never questioned his intentions or wondered about our future. I was there with him and that was enough. A few years into the relationship I realized that things weren't as picture perfect as I had made them up to be, and that realization came during a meditation. I saw myself doing yoga at a beach being completely happy and alone. Sometimes we close our eyes for the pain, and we can only see it in retrospect. I left him some weeks after this and moved to a more peaceful place in to teach. Mother Nature had been calling for me all along, I just hadn't listened. Sometimes I still wonder what had happened if I didn't have that meditation experience. Would I still be with him and put his needs before mine? It was that one surprising meditation experience that showed me that he was keeping me from reaching my highest potential and that he was always more in love with himself than in me. Meditation can do magic, it just requires regular practice. You can practice for years and then suddenly you see all the truth in the universe. That is what I tell my students to, to keep them practicing, One of my biggest concerns is getting my student to return to the mat over and over again to meditate, even if they feel a resistance. I believe that it is then the magic will happen. All the meditation work you do builds up to something bigger, and that is what it is all about. Yoga is a vehicle that can transport you to wonderful places.

The universe is such a magical place, and my experience in India showed me that. Since that day I have traveled the world and seen a lot of amazing places and people. Yoga has been my passion ever since, and I know that is how it will be for the rest of my life. My teachers and especially the woman who brought me to see that Indian man gave me so much when they opened my life to yoga. I am now devoting my life to give this gift on, and I feel so blessed to be able to do what I love every day. My world is so full of love now, and I have everything.

7.8 Appendix H: Maria's story

My grandmother was a very spiritual person, but she was also a bit crazy. My parents were always very skeptical about her and her spirituality, so when I started having spiritual questions as a child they would say “You are turning into your grandmother”. To me, spirituality became tied to something negative, to being crazy. I spent many years distancing myself from that part of myself. Eventually, my spirituality caught up with me, and through the practice of yoga, I eventually experienced how spirituality can be many different things.

Ten years ago, I was going through a difficult period in my life. At the time, I didn't know anything about Yoga, but there was a yoga studio in my neighborhood, and circumstances led me to try it out. I wasn't hooked right away; some people are, but I wasn't. To be honest, I really didn't see what the big deal was, except that it felt good. It took several months before I started going twice a week. It's only then that I began to notice that there really was something happening. Because I didn't have much experience with spirituality, I couldn't explain exactly what was happening, but I could really feel something changing in me, and I got more and more into yoga. Over the next few years, I was practicing almost every single day, attending many classes many each week. The changes I started to experience in myself were noticeable in my life; I became more able to handle stressful situations. An explanation could be that I became more detached from situations that were happening to me. I could see them for what they really were. In addition of course was the strength and flexibility, and that gives a bounce in life. In those first years, I was practicing mostly Vinyasa and Ashtanga, and I didn't know much about meditation. My hikes out in nature were still my type of meditation, in the sense that it was there that I found inner peace and a quiet mind.

I had been practicing for three years when I started to attend workshops that my teacher held, in addition to the regular classes I was attending. The teacher I had at that point was my very first yoga teacher and one of the most famous teachers in that area. I think we were all a little bit in love with her and wanted to be friends with her. As I started to attend her workshops, we grew closer, and she made it very safe for us to share our stories with her and everyone else in the group. For her, it was very inspiring to see that what she was offering to us was really working. Many of us in that group had life changing experiences during the course. Some of the participants were struggling with addictions and other big challenges in life, and although she created those groups, she didn't take credit for our changes. Instead, I think she saw it as a sign that her path was working for us, and that she had something to contribute. It

was very inspiring for me to meet someone like that, very wise and welcoming at the same time. There was this safe and inspiring energy in her groups.

I was attending a one week course in Yoga Nidra when I had my first really strong experience with what yoga can lead into. We were guided through a one hour long meditation followed by listening to a cd we had each recorded. The recordings were of an affirmation we had set for our self. Mine was about letting go, because this was a big issue in my life at the time. What happens when you do this exercise is that your brain is on a different wavelength, and this induces a trance-like state. It is a way of reprogramming your subconscious and changing ideas about yourself that you might not be consciously aware of and don't know how to change. I had been practicing this self-hypnosis for many days in that workshop when I started to dread it; it was getting boring and quite time-consuming. One day, I decided not to do the exercise because there had been so much happening that day, and I was feeling tired and a bit bored of the whole thing. Then, I realized that was exactly why it was important for me to do it that day, and that was when I had a very powerful experience. I got into a special state right away, and even if I had wanted to move, I couldn't. I started to experience a lot of different things all at once; there were insights and physical sensations. My first reaction was to try to remember every little detail from my experience; I remember thinking that I had to remember all of it and write it down. This was so relevant because my whole affirmation was about letting go, and here I was, experiencing this amazing thing, and all I did was to try to hold on to it, so that I could keep it forever. As soon as I realized that, there was something that shifted in my body. It was very physical, and I could feel things peeling off me and leaving my body. I had never experienced anything like it. I ended up doing the whole practice that day, and it changed me from inside. Things about myself that I had been intellectually aware of, but didn't know how to change, did change that day during that deep relaxation state. When I came out of that state, I could see everything clearly for the first time, the choices I had to make and what I had to do with my life. It was both scary and so very real. That was the point when I realized that there was really something special in yoga.

I continued taking courses and workshops with that particular teacher. One of the workshops I remember very well was one about mantra meditation. Around the time I was attending that workshop, I had decided to spend some years abroad. While I was practicing my meditation techniques, things in my life started to fall into place, it was like someone had a magic wand somewhere and made my wishes come true. Circumstances I couldn't possibly have created

for myself started lining up for me. It was quite an amazing experience, and that reinforced my belief that there was really something happening through yoga.

One very powerful meditation experience I had happened a few years ago; I was sitting by the fjord, and my eyes were closed. I think I sat there for quite some time, and when I opened my eyes again, I felt like I had no boundaries anymore, I couldn't tell where my body ended and where the world started. I had a profound realization that we are all one, this is all the same; although I have a physical body, I am not ending where my body stops. I remember looking at the nature around me and at the ocean, and everything was pulsating, like a heartbeat in rhythm with my own heartbeat. It didn't last very long; as soon as my mind realized what I was experiencing, it stopped.

I don't think you can stay forever in this state, but experiencing it changes the way you observe the world when you are not in that state anymore. You have a different understanding of it. When you lose touch with what is important, you can remember that experience and how everything makes sense. That experience can serve as a reminder that everything is well. For me, it is enough to experience that once in a while, so that I can have a better understanding of what this life is all about. Experiences like that can be compared to when you come out of a fog, first you see the mountain but you are not really sure what kind of mountain it is. The more you practice, the more the fog clears. Eventually, you see the mountain for what it is, and then, you have the choice of whether you want to climb the mountain or not. You could even go around it. There have been things from my childhood that never made complete sense to me before yoga. But now, I see them very clearly, and I understand how they have affected me.

All the classes we take and all the practice that we do prepare us for the special experiences like the one I just described. And what I want to emphasize is that I don't believe it has to be yoga, it could be any sort of practice that leads you to this deeper understanding. Once you have had that experience of being complete in a way, even if you don't feel like that all the time, it does become easier and easier to step into it.

I attended my first kundalini yoga workshop a few weeks ago, and the two teachers were some of the most amazing people I have ever met. Their energy was so pure, and the first class I attended with them started a process in me. Or rather, it reinforced a process that had started some time ago. I started to feel like answers were coming, although I didn't really understand how. The next day, one of the teachers was offering private sessions based on a

special technique in kundalini yoga. I had never met this person before this course, but something inside me told me to go see him, and so I did. During our session, he said one sentence that had a profound impact on me. All of the hardness that had been building up in me crumbled, and even though what he told me was not new, this was the first time I was ready to hear it and accept it. I see the practice of yoga as a way to prepare the soil for those special moments or insights. If you don't do that preparation work, then those special moments and experiences will just pass and you won't notice them. So, at that time, meeting that particular kundalini teacher, I was ready for his message. The hardness and the fight left me, and I had a realization about not having to fight anymore.

Later in that course, we were doing a practice called Shiva Dance where we had our hands above our heads and were only allowed to stand on one foot at a time, dancing on the beats of a very uplifting music. We did that for a long time, and eventually, we got into a sort of trance. At one point in the dance, the teacher said "Let go of your mind and invite in your soul". I talked with some of the other students after, and several of us had experienced this as very powerful. For me, it was a sense of being complete for the first time. I was completely peaceful, and it felt like coming home. That isn't just from that one sentence, but also all the years of preparation work. Those words were the last pieces of the puzzle for me. Everything makes sense now, all the challenges and the hardship, it is all good. This is not a state I stayed in, but still, just having had that experience reminds me that it is all good. What we think matters very often doesn't matter at all. I am becoming more and more peaceful, and more and more content, forgiving and appreciative.

My experiences with spirituality help me understand my students better. Sometimes, I can see myself where I was some years ago through them. At the same time, it gives me a humbling feeling. I remember how my teachers would tell me things and I wouldn't understand them, not until I was ready and then it all made sense. So, I know that my students have to experience these things themselves in order for it to make sense for them. When they are ready, it will happen, and it is not my place to try to force anything to happen sooner than it is supposed to.

All the classes and all the work on the mat is just the preparation work, and the fruit from that, the powerful experiences, might not take place on the mat, it could be anywhere. Yoga is not just a physical practice, the foot behind your head is just a tool to experience something else, and that something else is how you are going to live your life. Life does not happen on the

mat, it happens out in the world. I hope that I give people some guidance in how to connect what they learn here with what is going on out there and also apply it to life challenges. That is why I like to start my classes by talking about something that I find to be important.

If you teach with passion and you teach from your heart, you have to be very open. It also makes you vulnerable. In the beginning, I used to feel invaded when people came and talked to me after class, because I was absorbing their pain as mine. And that is not good for neither of us. I therefore had to teach myself to be open but keep a certain boundary at the same time.

Occasionally, some students cry during a class, or they want to talk about practical or emotional issues. I try to create a safe space for them to open up to me, and I often tell them that I am here if they ever need to talk. If a person is crying in savasana, I will go up to them and say “If you want to talk after class, I am here; if you want to be left alone, that is just as fine.” Crying in savasana is yoga working. It is a release of negative emotions, Crying in public isn’t considered a good thing in our society, and you are not supposed to have an emotional breakdown in front of strangers. So, for me it is important to make them feel like it is ok, and I remind them that at some point, it happens to all of us that we start crying on the mat.

Some students are very needy, and you can tell who they are right away. I guess recognizing that is an ability that you develop over time. Those people are the ones that always come up asking questions. I have had some experiences where students have drained me for energy with their sad stories. Through that, I have had to learn how to have empathy without making their pain my pain. Sometimes, I have to remind people that I am not their therapist. At the same time, I have been on the other side as well. I remember the feeling when a teacher creates that safe space for you to have special experiences. You then look up to that teacher as being a quite special person, and it feels safe to talk. It is also a matter of managing my own resources; I can’t spend two hours after each class talking to students. Sometimes, the students will look at us like we know everything, both about the emotional but also the physical aspects. I have learned that it is ok to say that I don’t know or that I can’t take responsibility for them. I think it is important to teach people to take responsibility for their own body; after all, this is what yoga is about: listening to your own body.

There are so many different people who go to yoga; some are very spiritual, and some are skeptical, even scared of spirituality. For me, it is a part of life, and I aim to include it without scaring anyone away. Some students come to me with spiritual questions, and in some people,

I can see their spirituality growing during their yoga practice. I notice how some people come to yoga because of the physical workout, but end up changing, in a fundamental way. Suddenly, they realize that it is not just a physical workout, and they start asking me questions about the spirit and the soul. I believe we are all spiritual, we are just not aware of it, and yoga will do to you what it has to do. It will make changes in you; for some people, it will take six months, and for others, it might take ten years. Eventually, yoga will awaken what needs to be awakened, and it is a matter of being open to the experience. I try to create that safe space for students to be curious and open to the experience without preconceived ideas. I want everyone to feel welcome, no matter what their starting point is; but at the same time, I want to be true to what I believe. To me, yoga is connected to spirituality, and I can't take the spirituality out and make it into only a workout. I do believe that our soul chooses to come to a human form to experience and learn something and also to create situations where we will learn just what we are meant to learn.

7.9 Appendix I: Response letters from the participants

7.9.1 Response letter from the first participant

To the second story: I found this very interesting as to how she found yoga. She had it always in the background of her life but it didn't become a part of her life until she was ready for it. Sometimes I see that, or I feel that in my class. I want someone to just have it click and it doesn't. And I realize I can't force it or wish it upon someone. I can support them in their journey but I can't change them. Just like she said when she has a student that comes and is upset or not present and then maybe never returns. She wishes them the most love because they need it. It makes me think that instead of taking it personally one should just send love. Its not always about "me" its about them and what they are doing and feeling. And to be honest it's not of my business but I can support them and have that vessel there for them. I liked her idea of silence. Its something I feel deeply for in my class and in my personal practice but I notice not many others like it. Or are uncomfortable with it. They need and crave the fast paced classes with music and sweat. They need the distraction; sometimes I believe people are allergic to silence. Including myself. To be able to sit in a room with others and not talk is rare today. It's nice to know its something she hasn't 'conformed' to. She has kept true to her beliefs that mediation is the key to finding those lingering questions we have the answers we so long for. Silence is the key. Her story proves it. Her story proves that when we dive into silence and yoga and mediation we dig through hurt and sifts through pain to only find that we are not alone but we are loved. Not only by others but also by ourselves. Something we all should tap into. But to be able to tap into that space of infinite bliss we need silence. It seems so far away. I feel as if this story pulled me away from her experience and into something of my own experience that I avoid. I feel as if I can be the queen of distractions. I have all sorts of distractions to turn to when something or the other shows up in my life. I know but I also feel I don't tend to that side of me that I crave. I crave silence but do I give it myself. No. Maybe that's why I don't feel confident in being able to guide my students in it either. I distract them with high paced classes. Even when I give myself that space and time for silence, I fill it with thoughts or I need a song. Because sometimes I tell myself that silence is 10 minutes away from my phone. That reading a book is silence. That listening to a song is silence. That getting lost in a TV show is silence. Its not. Silence is silence. Silence is sitting. Silence isn't distraction. It's sitting. It's being present. It's being present with the uncomfortable and the rough edges of our self. I just sometimes feel I have more rough edges than id like. And writing that hurts. It hurts cause the idea of bliss can

sometimes just feel so far away. Even though I teach yoga everyday of the week and I meditate I still have my edges. I'm not perfect. Sometimes feel blessed by that fact. That I still have a long way to go. But other times I wish I was there. That my "toolbox" of spiritual tricks was just there for me to access. I guess we get used to that in our society. Being able to buy something or distract us to make something easier. And I guess that's what silence is. Its cant be bought. It has to be diligently and patiently worked on. Maybe silence isn't my issue. But patience is. Patience because id love to know what silence feel like now. And this story brought up feelings of me feeling so very far from it.

To the third story: I love what she said about us all being spiritual beings but just not aware of it. Just as I believe we are all manifesting beings but we just don't know how to use it. We are all just SO much and we all just don't know it. Even me. When I was younger I remember my mother trying alternatives therapies, and trying yoga or mindfulness. For some reason it didn't stick back then. But as the years went by she kept going back to it. Now she is very much into yoga, meditation and alternative therapies. While I was growing up I believe she struggled with making sense of it. 20 years ago we didn't have the same resources we have today, with the Internet and social media to find information we need. It must have felt a bit lonelier and daunting, not knowing if what you were doing was crazy or life enhancing. I'm fortunate to have had her with me as I started to become interested in it. It felt more natural. I had someone to share the journey with and no one to call me crazy. This story I read brought up the feeling that I've always been a spiritual person and I tapped into it regularly but I just didn't know what it was. When I was little during religion class we had to do a project, I chose to do angels and their spiritual abilities and capabilities to heal and change us. I loved this idea that we could call on different angels to guide us. That we weren't alone. My family is not religious and we rarely went to church. Maybe 6 times in my 18 years living with them but from an early age I always remember praying before going to bed. I've never ever seen my parents do that. No one in my family. But it felt so natural for me. I would pray to any deceased grandparents, ask for their protection, their love. It just felt so normal to tap into that spiritual realm as a child. I remember as a teen I moved away from that but when I left home and went to college something caught up with me. Id left my so-called nest and felt vulnerable. Maybe it's in these most vulnerable times that we turn to spirituality and spirit for guidance. It was in these years that I slowly began to dig into it. Books. A yoga class here or there. I even tried church because I felt that was a hole that needed to be filled. It wasn't at all but there was something about that sacredness in the presence of so many who believed

someone of higher power did truly love us and guide us that made me realize that too. I just didn't find it in Christianity but rather in spirit-uality. Realizing that I am power-full and not power-less. I am full of possibility and strength. All along I have it inside. This story just shows that we can find that route again, we might have it as a child and then leave that path and some how find it again. We find it in all sorts of different ways but it's comforting to know that so many of us are on that path. That path of finding. And that we are willing to do it. Its tough work. Inner work is hard. This story made me feel not so alone. And that its there. It's all there and I'm not alone.

7.9.2 Response letter from the second participant

It has been a very peculiar but also liberating experience to see my own words put into life by becoming a story, especially being tied together with other peoples stories in this way. It is striking to me that I have been carrying this around inside me and never once written it down into a text. I must admit now that it was with a bit of hesitance I accepted the story without changing any details. For some reason I was a bit repulsed by how egotistical I came across, and I did feel an initial urge to change the content. But then it dawned on me that perhaps this was a reflection of my own ego and that the words in my story was indeed what I said in our interview. My reaction towards these other two stories were similar as somehow they emphasized what I felt was missing in my story. When I instead chose to look at my own story the same way I looked at theirs, it changed right in front of my eyes. Without my own inner critic I could see my own story as beautiful. How wonderful it is to see my story in connection with these two other stories, together they give a beautiful portrait of the modern yogini. I am blessed to be a part of this project and it is with great curiosity I am anticipating the compleet thesis.

I see now that I have been avaiding the topic of spirituality with my students for many years. It might have been a result of the intertwining between my love life and my role as a teacher. Somewhere along the way those two got tangled into each other, and as spirituality is the most intimate part of me, that is the one I wanted to keep for myself. My new understanding is that this is holding me back and limiting what I am giving my students.

I imagine the teacher that got bit to be very young. I might be wrong but something with her story reminded me of when I was younger, so I imagine her to be young. Her ambition to slowly start implementing more spirituality into her classes spoke to me. I wandered where

my desire to teach spirituality had gone. My deepest concern will always be about getting my students to return to the mat and have consistency in practice, but I was reminded that spirituality and openness also are elements I want to have as a part of my teaching style. The timing for this project was good, as it reminded me about something I want to keep but had managed to forget. Spirituality is important to me, and yoga is spirituality, that is what it is all about.

Some of the meditation experiences in the third story were similar to mine, her words are better than mine I think. Perhaps there is something universal about the feeling of oneness with everything and being without boundaries. There have been many years since I have been very close to another yoga teacher. Vulnerability has kept me from being in that closeness, I think. And where I live now, I am the only one. That makes my identity very defined, I am the yoga teacher here, that is me. Those stories make me miss being one of many again, talking about asanas, chakras and the universe like that is the most natural thing in the world. I miss the closeness of being me with someone who understands my world. Reading these stories felt like a connection, not only to the two teachers writing them, but to every teacher out there.

Reading the other two stories did feel, in a strange way, as reading different versions of my own. It could have been me having their experiences and it could have been them having mine.

7.9.3 Response letter from the third participant

I have to admit that I was resisting reading the other stories at first. I guess it brought up some of my insecurities as a teacher and as a person, maybe thinking that the other teachers had more right to be in this study, or that I would find out by reading their stories that they have more right to be teachers than me. At the same time, I have been really excited, and I feel privileged to be part of this study. So, I was looking forward to this step of the process and reading the other stories.

Observing and feeling my resistance helped me reconnect with some of the things that I teach in my classes; accepting, trusting, letting go of expectations, believing in our own absolute goodness, and much more. It was a good opportunity to face the resistance and the fears coming up and then take a deep breath and do it anyway.

And of course, it was a powerful experience. I firmly believe that there are no coincidences and that we are faced with (or rather create) the situations that we need when we need to learn something on our path. The timing of it all is certainly no coincidence. I read those two powerful stories just when I needed it.

I was doubting myself as a teacher, and I was resisting reading the stories. But what came out of this process is a renewed inspiration and wish to share my passion for yoga with those around me and contribute, in my own small way, to help others on their own path. It reminded me why I want to teach yoga in the first place, and it reminded me how much difference we can make in people's life as yoga teachers. Setting our own little stone in the process of making the world a better place. Because if there is one thing that I am sure of, it's the power of yoga to make each of us feel better and by feeling better, we can in turn make others around us feel better.

Two particular points touched me deeply.

The first one is the connection between financial issues and lower-back pain. I have heard it before, and I did believe it on some level. But reading it again in this context felt like a little wink from the Universe.

The second one is the power and wisdom of listening to our bodies, before we get bitten by a snake, literally or figuratively. I teach about that all the time. I know it's the right answer in any given situation. Yet, I find myself ignoring the messages from my own body over and over again. Another little wink from the Universe...

This study feels like it has become a quite important step on my path. The timing of it, the insecurities and resistance it triggered, the renewed inspiration at a time when I was questioning my path, and the winks from the Universe. No coincidence. Only opportunities and help along the way.

7.10 Appendix J: Response letters from the two invited readers

7.10.1 Response letter from the first invited reader

My initial reaction when reading these stories was that they remind me of fairytales. They come with an open ending. That makes me appreciate them even more. These are lived stories. They woke something in me that has been sleeping, a yearning for a more spiritual path has arisen in me. Once I considered myself very spiritual but my path would lead me into a more normal life if that is what I can call it. My children and my job as a school teacher keeps me chained to this existence I am in now. Reflecting deeper on this I realize that I am the one who is chaining myself.

Tears were running after I had read the stories for they reminded me of a life I used to have.

I want to scream to the women in the stories that they need to cling to their experiences and their magic, maybe I have lost my own. Maybe it is there still waiting for me. I cannot put the blame on other components in my life when I am the one letting the magic drift away. It is my decision to only teach yoga once a week.

I still dream. Tonight I was a dancer and I danced away from everything. The stories took me away from everything. Or maybe that brought me closer. I am here now and I want to be in that part of myself again.

I am ashamed that I first saw these women as selfish, arrogant and spiritually vain. Residing in their bubble of self realization and being their full potential like I couldn't.

It helped getting the jalousie down on paper. It lost its power then.

Honestly I admire these three women and instead of missing the days when I had a story like that I will bring it to life again.

I am bringing my spiritual self back and connecting with the lost spiritual being in me.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute with my ramblings.

7.10.2 Response letter from the second invited reader

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to read these stories. They really made an impression on me. These stories arouse many personal experiences, feelings and memories. For me, it was the story of snake bite and her experiences of spirituality and the universe that was strongest. My yoga practice is also very spiritual and which affects the spirituality in my second job and in my private life.

At the beginning of my yoga practice , I felt myself that I had to put a lid on a lot to not scare away my clients. Eventually I realized that when I cover up my spirituality, I denied myself and my own yoga practice. I was not true to myself , and constantly felt that something was missing in my life . I eventually realized that I have put a lid on several areas of my life. I have therefore put a lid on myself . This has meant that I have not thought that I was good enough and constant devaluating my self. By letting go and letting feelings, thoughts and personal opinions come to the surface I felt a peace and acceptance . I have since I can remember had a feeling that I have not lived my own life. Now I do. I sit in the driverseat and decide which way to go . I meet some intersections along the way , and If I choose the wrong way , well then, it was intended. And the Universe will show me the right way, and I will learn something from the earlier dessicion . Yoga has taught me not to take myself or others so very serious. We are people all together . Vulnerable and with a desire to be seen. Yoga and my yoga environment see me . It also helps me to see myself clear , and to see others. My consciousness has changed, and that I thank my kundalinipraksis and daily meditation moments for.