

Candice Schutter : [00:00:00] Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse and the 'cult'ure series.

As we move into the new year, I'll continue making room for survivor stories and what their remarkable resilience has to teach us as we continue this ongoing exploration of what puts the cult in culture.

Today's episode is part one of a two-part conversation that is, in some ways, circling us back to the very beginning of this series.

Let's take a closer look.

Candice Schutter : When I first launched the culture series back in August of, was that last year? Jesus. I think I'm still landing in 2023.

Anyway, from the moment I started this series, I've been doing my damndest to make it crystal clear that this isn't a series about [00:01:00] this cult and that cult. Nor is it meant to be a diatribe that centers on any specific organization.

It's an ongoing conversation based on the premise that cult dynamics are every damn where. So some of you might be wondering, why circle back to the Org? Allow me to explain.

During episode 33, which was perhaps one of the most personally revealing episodes to date, I shared about two decades I spent cycling in and out of a variety of new age wellness cultures. And I spent the majority of the episode sharing in detail about a five year period of my life when I was singularly, and I do mean singularly, devoted to a mind body fitness company, which I refer to as the Org.

My relationship to the Org transformed my, in both wonderful and woeful ways.

It was both the wonderful and the woeful that led me to dive deeper into Org culture in the early two thousands, when I decided to upend my [00:02:00] life and relocate to Portland to work for the company's innermost circle. These were three of the most personally challenging years of my life.

I wanted to acknowledge and share my own experiences and find ways to better understand the dynamics at play. So I did a ton of research, and I also invited my friend and former colleague, Tracy Stamper, to share her own more recent story of working and being expelled as a trainer in the Org.

And I marveled at how over a decade after I left the same dysfunction seemed to be at play. Once I had language around it all, the patterns began to emerge quite clearly, as did the bittersweet realization that my silence had made me, however indirectly, complicit in the pain that Tracy and so many others had experienced in the many years that followed my leaving.

Many former Org teachers, trainers, and employees have since reached out to us, and I've had to override well-worn indoctrination that forbid me from even listening to their [00:03:00] stories.

You see, at the Org, and in many new age wellness circles, there are very clear boundaries around self-expression. Leadership makes an example of those who express less than pleasant emotions. These folks are considered high maintenance and low vibe, and they're very often accused of one of the Org's three cardinal sins: gossiping, complaining, or heaven forbid, creating drama.

And as I speak these words to you, I'm quite certain that there is a hivemind buzz among those who are still in at the Org, who are aware of the podcast and stand decidedly against those of us who choose to speak out against 30 plus years of culty wrongdoing.

And the sad truth of the matter is, the indoctrination goes so deep that most of them will refuse to even listen to our stories.

Toxic positivity breeds obedience, and so many people in culty new age communities are suffering in silence, going along to get along, keeping [00:04:00] quiet and falling in line, all in the name of higher vibrations.

This conditioning is so insidious that even when we leave the vow of silence, it sticks.

In the last episode, I interviewed Sarah Edmondson and Nippy Ames, stars of HBO's *The Vow*, NXIVM survivors, and recognized advocates in the world of cult recovery. It was a validating conversation for me personally, and toward the end of the episode, they spoke at length about shame, specifically how it is a useful tool when it comes to indoctrination. If you missed it, it's worth circling back to because they did an excellent job of describing, and illustrating through personal examples, how shame has the power to cage us or to set us free.

Brene Brown has done a ton of research on shame, and I believe it was in her book, *Rising Strong*, where she revealed what research demonstrated to be the two biggest shame triggers we face. Two internalized voices. Never good enough. And [00:05:00] who do you think you are?

Hmm. Yeah, that checks out.

While I was in the Org, I kept quiet in the face of fucked up power dynamics because I was always so busy second guessing myself. In my mind, I never knew enough. I wasn't far enough along on the path to dare contradict my superiors, who made sure I knew my place in the order of things. Nor could I reconcile their love bombing behavior, that at times left me feeling pretty certain of my worth.

It was a teeter totter ride of highs and lows that left me feeling nauseous and spiraling in shame. The never good enough voice in my head was operating at full tilt.

And then once I left, I continued protecting the practice and its players. And I told myself it was because of all the benefit I'd received. But really it was because, well, who do you think you are?

I remained silently complicit to the dysfunction because on some level I didn't believe that I had the right to own and [00:06:00] name my experience, let alone call for top-down accountability.

Perhaps what I find most fascinating in all of Brene Brown's research of late is that she's discovered that boundaries are absolutely essential to our ability to live a life free of anger, resentment, and self-righteousness.

In fact, her research has shown that the more we fail to express our limits, the more likely we are to engage in gossip, judgment, and criticism of ourselves and others. It is our silent acquiescence that makes us intolerant to the needs of others and more vulnerable to toxic social engagement.

She writes: " Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They're compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment."

Oh hell yes.

And I would add, boundaries. Don't just create safety in the moment. They aren't just [00:07:00] self-protective as we move into an uncertain future. They can liberate us from the past.

To say aloud in front of others, that thing from before that happened to me, it wasn't, it isn't okay with me. And I will no longer pretend it doesn't matter. I will no longer be complicit and therefore bound to those who continue to inflict harm.

But this stuff is complex. Telling the truth about our culty experiences isn't all about pointing fingers at power players at the top. And yes, there is very much a time and a place for that. But it's not only about them, those people over there doing those things. Culty culture is a complex and interdependent co-creation.

There are many talented and well-meaning folks who deeply long to create change at the Org, and this has been the case for decades. Many call for a change in leadership, adding their voices [00:08:00] to many dozens who've cycled in and out of the inner circle over the course of 30 plus years.

It's never happened. But let's just imagine for a moment that it did.

When we mistakenly believe that all the problems in a dysfunctional system can be solved by changing out the face of who's serving at most high, who's calling the shots at the top of the pyramid, we're kind of sort of missing the point.

Of course, better leadership will always lead to better results. And kicking all the narcissist a-holes to the curb is a good start. Accountability at the top can and will make a measurable difference, and it's an essential step worth taking. I'm not here to argue otherwise.

But consider this. When we assume that personal agency is primarily a function of who is leading us well, do you see how culty and problematic this is?

We need to hold our leaders accountable? Absolutely. And also, surrendering ourselves to the idea that we are all at the mercy of those in [00:09:00] power. That's gonna get us right back where we started.

It's a both and scenario.

Is culty leadership the problem? Without a doubt, yes. And culty, followership. There's a profound need for us humans to evolve and mature in our understanding of influence. Firing the leader of a culture they created that's inherently culty. It may solve the problem temporarily, but as long as there are people quite literally buying into the notion of supremacist power down bs, problematic issues will continue to show up. Especially when power replacement is coming from within the highest tiers of an existing hierarchy. We mimic the dynamics we were raised in, and cult leadership is no different.

The point is coercion, undue influence, narcissistic power plays, these are all very real psychoactive forces. But even if we nip [00:10:00] each one of these in the bud, at every turn, cult dynamics are going to continue.

Because so many of us are unconsciously falling prey to a supremacy born capital C cult culture that fetishizes wealth, so-called beauty, and better than higher up perspectives. When it comes to personal development and social growth.

Reforming culty culture will require leadership accountability, and deep trauma informed personal work. Both and.

I am not going to pretend even for a nanosecond that I know how to fix any of this. I do not. But given the research I have done, I feel confident that it begins with a painful and inconvenient acknowledgement, that cult dynamics exist not because of a few bad apples, but because the seeds that so many of us are continually placing in the ground carry within them the codes of patriarchal supremacist culture. As long as we continue to bend the need to people we admire, [00:11:00] appreciate, and or stand to benefit from, this shit's gonna keep happening.

We need to be able to speak honestly about our experiences. We must hold ourselves and others accountable for culty actions. And we each have to do the inner work necessary to open our eyes to how we are uniquely conditioned to fall under the spell of influence.

And this week's guest is doing all of the above.

Yamuna Benedict was born into a culture of compliance, and by the time she began working at the Org, she'd long been socialized to sacrifice personal integrity for the sake of a larger cause.

Yamuna was drawn into the innermost circle of the Org about two to three years after I left. There was a dramatic shift in leadership shortly after her arrival. And it is for this reason, in part, that her experience was, in my opinion, much darker and more troubling than mine.

She is braver than brave showing up here today, especially given her [00:12:00] visibility back in the day and the way in which she was suddenly expelled from the community. Her sudden disappearance has been a mystery until now.

It is a radical, audacious thing to tell the truth when you were taught never to speak of it. There are people who will attempt to shame Yamuna for looking back. But the real shame lies within the hearts of those who are silent, complicit, and sadly, blind to the ways in which they've been systematically conditioned to avoid empathic connection and wholehearted self-inquiry.

And I say this with all sincerity. My heart goes out to them. I know how lonely it can be.

And so does Yamuna. She spent eight years in the shadows and now she's ready to share her story with us. Not to gossip, complain, or create drama, but to liberate herself from a cycle of self abandonment that existed before and after [00:13:00] her time at the Org.

I've invited Tracy Stamper to join us in this conversation because of the love she exudes, and because I have learned where there is one, there are many. May Tracy's wholehearted presence be a representation of the growing community of former Org members who now support and stand in solidarity with Yamuna.

This conversation will roll out in two parts, and as in previous episodes, we will use aliases for the Org and its leaders.

This episode may be triggering to current or former Org members, or anyone who has experienced high demand groups or emotionally-coercive relationships. Please listen with care.

The stories and opinions shared in this episode are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any group, individual, or organization.

[00:14:00]

Candice Schutter : So here we are, back together. Tracy Stamper's here with me, and she's once again bravely been willing to join me for a conversation related to the Org and essentially our, our circle of two has expanded considerably.

And so where there were two, now there are three. In fact, there are dozens, many dozens. And our particular guest today is somebody that when Tracy and I sat down to speak with her, the conversation was so rich and revealing that we decided we wanted the conversation to continue, and we wanted to bring you all in on it.

And most importantly, Yamuna wanted the same thing. So Tracy's back with me.

Hi Tracy.

Tracy Stamper : Hi Candice.

Candice Schutter : I'm so glad you're here. It's really great to be in sharing this space again with [00:15:00] you.

Tracy Stamper : Thank you.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. So any thoughts you wanna share with the listeners in regards to this conversation we're about to have and how and why you wanted to be here today for it?

Tracy Stamper : Absolutely. Yamuna is a beautiful soul. When she came into our private Facebook group that Candice and I are holding for healing, the response that she got from others was so gorgeously overwhelming. People were so excited to see her. She was, much like you were Candice, she was such a pivotal figure in the Org, and developed relationships and people got to know her and then she just disappeared.

And it has [00:16:00] been, just on a personal level, it's been amazing to reconnect with her. And on a project level.

Candice Schutter : It's hard to find words, isn't it? Yeah.

Tracy Stamper : It's, it opened my eyes even wider than they've been opened, and I feel like I'm sitting on fire right now.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm. . Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Tracy Stamper : I'm just gonna keep breathing.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Tracy Stamper : And, just hold beloved Yamuna with you.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. And I wanted you back because you're also very beloved in terms of the community. One of the things about doing this with you, Tracy has been just who you are, the purity of your spirit is a really unique thing. And doing this with you made me feel all the braver, [00:17:00] because I don't know anyone who can speak ill of you.

Your heart is just so always in the right place. And so having you to walk through this fire with has made me feel a little bit fireproof. So I wanna thank you for that. And um, and I wanted you back for this for obvious reasons, like we laid this foundation together in many ways and also, pragmatically speaking, you were in the Org when Yamuna was there.

Tracy Stamper : Mm-hmm.

Candice Schutter : And so you have a particular perspective that I don't have. I was so far removed, and while listeners will learn Yamuna and I have a lot in common in terms of our experience, many, many years apart, I wasn't there. I didn't get to know her and see the role that she played and, and also I didn't have the perspective that you have of a trainer, which was a specific kind of relationship that you had with her and that inner circle that had grown so much [00:18:00] since I left. So it just feels really important that you're here on a lot of levels. So thank you for being willing to do this with me, and I'm super excited for us to invite Yamuna in to join us. So shall we do it?

Tracy Stamper : Yes, let's do it.

Candice Schutter : Yay. Okay. All right, everybody. Welcoming in Yamuna Benedict.

Hi Yamuna. Welcome.

Yamuna Benedict: Hi, Candice. Hi Tracy. Thanks so much for having me on.

Candice Schutter : Thank you so much for joining. And so how are you feeling Miss Yamuna showing up here with us today?

Yamuna Benedict: I'm, I have feelings of excitement and joy and a little bit of nervousness.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: Tracy just asked if I was gonna announce I was on the podcast or let it be a surprise. And I've been [00:19:00] thinking about this, and I told my boyfriend last night, I'm doing this. No one knows I'm doing it. And I want it to be a surprise.

I'm gonna be the surprise guest on the podcast series. I don't wanna hear what anyone has to say of me speaking out. They can listen and if they wanna reach out, they can say something.

Candice Schutter : Beautiful. I love that. Well, we will honor that and that's how we'll do this, so it'll be our little secret.

Yamuna Benedict: I love it.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Until it's broadcast all over the world.

Tracy Stamper : That's what I did too. For whatever reason, there was a sense of safety that that approach gave me.

Yamuna Benedict: Mm-hmm.

Tracy Stamper : And it just kind of held me.

Yamuna Benedict: Yeah. I feel safe and comfortable with both of you. I've been enjoying the group, After the Org, and seeing who's in the group was, you know, surprising. [00:20:00] It's part why I reached out to you both cuz when I started listening.

First, the podcast got shared with me as a recommendation that I should listen to it because when my friend listened to it, she said, it reminded me of you.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: immediately was like, well wow, what's Candice saying? And I, Candice and I had never met before a couple weeks ago on Zoom, but we both knew of each other because we've both been involved in the Org. And when I started listening to the podcast, literally my mouth fell to the ground because it could have been me. It was almost identical. So many parallels. And after the third episode, when you got introduced on Tracy, the flood of memories and emotions that came up during the NGT years, cuz that's when I worked there. I had to reach out to you both. I, I could not sit here anymore.

And so I hadn't even made it through the whole thing, but I was like, there's too much connection. I'm [00:21:00] feeling this pull to reach out, and I'm so glad that I did.

Candice Schutter: Yes.

Tracy Stamper: As am I.

Candice Schutter: And just for the listeners, NGT is an acronym I won't go into the details about, but it's regarding the trainers at the Org and when there was first a big push to bring on a whole new group of trainers. So Yamuna was there at, in other regards as well, which we'll get into at a really, really critical time in the Org's evolution as a company, as an organization.

So that's part of why it's so amazing to have her here and to hear that perspective. And it's really interesting for me, you know, I left in 2007 and I had heard of you Yamuna like quite a bit over the years after. And I remember thinking, I hope that she's not having the same experience that I did, and I imagine that she is.

Yamuna Benedict: I was.

Candice Schutter : Yeah, just feeling a sense of connection to you even [00:22:00] though we'd never met. So it's pretty cool that we've recently connected, because I felt that over the

course of time, I, I just always, you were, you were just a particular person I was really curious about your journey, and what had gone down.

And so I was really interested in talking with you. I had no idea, what would be revealed, which we'll get to, um, because in the ways I hear you saying that your journey was parallel in many ways with mine. And also there were some things given the critical time that you were in where I would say, I found your journey all the more disturbing than mine. And I just feel so much empathy towards you that you had to walk through that fire.

And I'm just so deeply touched and overwhelmed with gratitude that you are willing to show up here.

Yamuna Benedict: It does take some courage.

Tracy Stamper : It does. I see you.

Candice Schutter : Yeah, we know, right? Tracy?

Tracy Stamper : We know

Candice Schutter : know.[00:23:00]

Yamuna Benedict: It was one of the things in the podcast that made me feel compelled to reach out and wanna share the story is how you refer to these years, you kind of gloss over them. And when you said that, I realized that's exactly what I did. Because I had kids and you have to keep going, and so I just picked myself up. Then I just kind of moved on. And when the podcast came out, this is the flood of emotions and memories are just became overwhelming. And then I'm like, I'm not over this because I have all these feelings. All these feelings are over pouring.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Thank you for saying that. I think it's really important you bring up such a, a really critical piece of this that I hope we can communicate around is that, like I hear feedback. Don't even hear it. I feel it, sense it feedback around like, oh, let the past be the past. Why do you need to go back and even look at any of this?

Aren't you just, well, there's the being a victim argument, which we all [00:24:00] have feelings about. But beyond that, I actually had someone just recently I was at a gathering and I was sharing about the series that I'm doing, and every time I mention cult dynamics, in my work, people like go crazy balls.

Like they just, everyone's so fascinated by it. And so there was lots of questions and people sharing their own experiences, which there's always at least one person in the room who has a story to share. And then one of the individuals there, who I consider a very good friend who I was sort of in line with her way of thinking for the longest time, she said something about, when do you decide when it's time to just move on?

And it was sort of like, I, I heard where she was coming from. She was coming from this place of love. And it's this, again, this indoctrination around, if I tell my story, if I do work around the wounds that resulted from it, that I'm somehow spiritually regressing. That I'm like stuck when in fact this is the doorway through, in my mind, to the [00:25:00] liberation, to the "spirituality" we've all been yammering on about for all these years. Like, how do we, if we don't reckon with what's true and what's real, how do we move forward? And so I have a lot of feelings about that, obviously. So I'll just let that stand.

And I'm curious, Yamuna, for you, what is your purpose today? Because I know you and I know your heart. It's not, let's take down this company. Let's what? Like that's not where you're coming from. Like tell us for you and your own journey of self-expression, like why are you here today?

Yamuna Benedict: Well, there's probably several reasons I'm here, um. The involvement in the Org is one segment, but the topic of cults and the cult in culture got my brain reeling.

Most people probably don't know my background. And I was born into a cult. My parents were living in and running the Berkeley Hare Krishna [00:26:00] Temple in 1975 when I was born. That was my first home. My birth certificate name is Yamuna Jivana Devi Dasi. It was given by the spiritual master Prabhupada at the time.

And so when I started listening to the podcast, I started reflecting on my own life that my entire life I have been in cults starting with birth. And I am here cuz I just wanna learn my own patterns and behaviors, and what is the attraction?

Because the Org is not the only cult-like organization I've been in. I've been involved in two different MLMs heavily. When I moved into the second MLM, I got witch hunted from the first group that I was in and banished and my account canceled and the whole group of girls here came after me.

I just had another job that was so similar. The energy and [00:27:00] feelings as working at the Org. And I was there almost the same amount of time, and it was about the same amount of time into the job that I knew this isn't right. So why did I stay another three years? And so for me it's kind of like, you know, I am, if you don't look at the past, you're never going to move forward. Learn, grow, change, learn from your mistakes. So just closing the door, glossing over it. That is, that happened eight years ago. I'm still carrying this around and making decisions in my life from this experience that I glossed over. So that's why I'm here, to look at myself, my patterns, what is the attraction? And then once I know it's not healthy, why am I staying for more abuse? What is that?

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: And you know, you touched on this in the episodes I listened to that the tools you were learning help give words to the feelings and recognition of what was going on. It's [00:28:00] exactly what happened to me. And what I realized, this nervous feeling was very familiar to me.

It's how I felt around my father. I always kind of had this nervous fist. So it was normal. It was just normal to feel this way. And then as I was getting involved with the Org and doing the practice and really paying attention to the sensations in my body. Putting a name to this. I called it the stress fist in my gut and that maybe it's normal, but this probably is not healthy for me.

But it still took me years to get out.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

That's really beautifully articulated. Thank you for that. I think you speak for more than yourself in terms of why we're here in sharing, so I really appreciate that.

Yamuna Benedict: Another reason why I'm here, cuz you spoke to me and I hope someone else can heal, feel [00:29:00] inspired to make a change or know they're not alone or

Candice Schutter : Yes.

Yamuna Benedict: whatever that thing is that helps you heal.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

Tracy Stamper : I have no doubt that that will come from your sharing since you are a beloved human. And, and it was so amazing to see the reception that you got when you came into our online group. It was beautiful.

Candice Schutter : yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: I have heard a lot of kind words from amazing people,

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm. Oh, that makes my heart so happy. So happy. That's why, that's why there's a group. That's why we're coming together. It's not banding together to disband. I mean, that that's there, I'm not gonna lie. Now it's there. It wasn't there in the beginning for me. And the more I learn, it's sort of there, too.

[00:30:00] And it's also really more than that. It is just this feeling of, well, it's very much like the purpose of the Me Too movement or any sort of social justice movement where people come together and they have that me too experience of, oh my God, I'm not the only one. I've been in this silo of isolation, and I haven't been able to talk about this. And now we're all openly able to express these things.

And, and some of the folks that are in the group have been out as long as me, and it's the first time they're talking about it, too. So, um, yeah, this is just really meaningful.

So I'd love to hear a little bit more about your childhood, if you're open to sharing, given that you in some ways have you have a, I say sometimes, like my first cult was my family And I

say that because I, I believe that's everyone's first cult in a way, the way that I use the word cult. I'm actually trying to reorient people around that word. Right? Um, [00:31:00] so my family was my first cult, and it operated in a certain way. And your family, in terms of your nuclear family, was probably your first cult in the way that, I mean it, but also it was within the context

Yamuna Benedict: Of a cult.

Candice Schutter : Of a cult, right?

So there's, there's a perspective that you have, and I would love to hear more about your childhood and what you experienced as a child, and then what you see now from the perspective that you have. Um, so start in the middle and go both ways. You know, share with us about your childhood.

Yamuna Benedict: You know, my parents were, so they're running the temple. My dad's title was the Temple President. My mom was making the altars, dressing the dieties, making the flower arrangements. You know, I was really small at this time and I mean, I was a baby and my mom tells a lot of stories. I do have one memory of, I was probably two and a half or three years old in, in the [00:32:00] temple.

And I'm just running around doing whatever, and I have this very vivid, clear memory of a man taking me into a closet and closing the door. And I was standing, looking at the door and I can still see his figure. And I do believe he was getting ready to molest me. And right before he did, my mom, she realized she couldn't find me. She was going everywhere. And the door flung open and my mom ran around him and picked me up. And I clearly remember this.

And a lot of people are aware, there was a huge lawsuit against the ISKCON Temple. So ISKCON's the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, that's what the American temples are called, ISKCON. That was, there's lots of sects of Hinduism. So this is what I'm referring to, the ISKCON movement.

They have schools called gurukuls where the kids would go to [00:33:00] gurukul and years ago there was a huge lawsuit against the people that were putting the school on for molesting and abusing the children. And when it was time for me to go to school, my dad wanted to send me to the gurukuls he was all in to everything going on.

And thank God for my protective mother who was like, my baby's not going anywhere. I was the first born. My mom had had three miscarriages before she had me due to the stress of getting up at two in the morning and she just said she got dragged around till she would miscarry. I was the most wanted baby ever. And when my dad wanted to send me away, she just, no. And my mom, you know, a lot of their relationship was a doormat and my dad steamrolled her. But it was one thing that my mom stood up for. And I'm so grateful because who knows what kind of person I would be if I would've been shipped off to the gurukul school.

So instead of going to gurukul, my parents started shifting from [00:34:00] temple life to business life. And the vedic scriptures, they call it grihastha, it's family and business. You're raising the family grihastha lifestyle. Um, and they had a incense and potpourri business. So they slowly started drifting away from living and breathing the temple and to running a business.

I remember selling incense with my mom at the Berkeley Flea market when I was little. She was selling incense by the stick.

Candice Schutter : That's awesome.

Yamuna Benedict: I still go to the temple once in a while. My brother got married in New York seven years ago in the Krishna Temple. My brother and father are still very, very involved in the Hare Krishna movement.

Growing up I just remember like as I was getting older, I didn't feel comfortable in the environments. I, there was definitely the hierarchy. There's a lot of chauvinism. Women are in the background, seen in not heard, barefoot and pregnant kind of [00:35:00] mentality serve the men. And so I just remember as I was getting older and I didn't like being at the temple. very judgey.

When I was 22 and in India I met my children's father who's from America, who's been into the Hari Krishna since he was 17 years old. And he lived at the LA Temple on Venice Boulevard. A lot of people know the LA Hari Krishna Temple. And so that was the first place I lived with him. So I lived in the community there, and I found it very hypocritical. There was a lot of show going on on the street cause, you know, you have to chant on your beads. You have your bead bag and you chant Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Krishna. You know, but then people were doing things they're not supposed to do behind closed doors, but in front of everyone there was perfect. And if you weren't doing those things, there was a lot of judgment. Oh, you didn't chant your [00:36:00] rounds today. I'm better than you. And so I just never really liked the energy and dynamics and the judginess.

I've been to India three times on spiritual journeys with my father to all the holy lands. My name Yamuna, I'm named after a sacred river in India that means the river of life. Um, It's in Vrindavan, where Lord Krishna was born. That was my last trip to India in 1997. And it's where I met my boy's Dad. Came back here and ended up pregnant with twins within about three months.

Candice Schutter : Hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: I say the river of life gave me more life than I bargained for.

Candice Schutter : That's

Yamuna Benedict: But there was a, a swami or a guru in India who was, he was American, but he had lived in India for over two decades. Um, I remember I was in a very long taxi ride with him and the taxis, [00:37:00] it feels like you're gonna die when you ride in a taxi in

India. It's very scary. And my brother and I are in the back seat and he's in the front seat, and I remember talking to him about the feelings at the LA temple and the judgey and the, and you know, I'm better than you cause I'm doing this. And, and he was the first person that inspired me and he said it, it doesn't matter if you chant 16 rounds, if you're doing it mindlessly, Krishna or God, it's what you wanna do from your heart. So if you only chant one bead, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare, Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare, God loves you. It's only what you're doing, not what you're not doing. And I will never forget that taxi ride, and it was the first time that I felt inspired by someone in the ISKCON movement because everyone else focuses on what you're not doing.

So yeah, a little bit about my Krishna [00:38:00] background.

Now I've found the Habad. I have a lot of Jewish background. My mother's mother is Jewish. My father's father's Jewish. And it's something I've been learning about the last six years. And Habad means the Jewish Learning Center, and they're just trying to educate Jews and bring Jews back to Judaism because after World War II, people really let go of all the practices and rituals and tried to hide being Jewish. And they're here to teach everyone to be Jewish again.

So I'm going, I was just at a woman's class last night. It's called Rosh Chodesh. It's once a month, a woman's class. And, so I've always been on a spiritual journey, seeking enlightenment, growth. Probably what attracted me to the Org, the personal growth and, and I've been a dancer my whole life.

But that it was something more than fitness, um, and I know there's a lot of feelings [00:39:00] and opinions on that, that it's more than just a fitness class, but it was for me. And part of it I think really comes from my background of just, you know, where is God? How do you grow?

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: How do you become more aware? How do you help people?

Candice Schutter : Yeah. I really consider myself a seeker as well. And interesting that you brought in that word. Cause I was just on the trail this morning listening to Sarah Edmondson being interviewed on We Can Do Hard Things. She's talking to Glennon and Abby and Amanda and sharing her story, which made me delighted beyond belief that they were featuring a cult survivor story on such a large platform just, and Sarah's just amazing. She and Nippy have been on the podcast and she's an extraordinary individual.

And I was listening to this and Glennon said something, and I'm not gonna do it justice. She said it in her Glennon way. But she said something about how she's a seeker and being a seeker isn't being a finder. Like [00:40:00] she says, if you are a seeker and you feel like you've found it, then you're probably in a cult.

Tracy Stamper : Wow.

Candice Schutter : Which I thought was such a, a beautifully simple way of saying it. And she was sort of saying it tongue in cheek. But I think there's really something to that. And, and that she's like, basically being a seeker is seeking and seeking and seeking until the day you die.

And staying in that place of being a seeker. And so I, she identified herself that way. I definitely identify that way. Tracy, I'm I, I'm not sure if you do.

Tracy Stamper : You are, you're sure.

Candice Schutter : You sure? Okay.

Tracy Stamper : You know.

Candice Schutter : I feel like I know you, but I don't wanna speak for you. Um, so we're all seekers here, and I do believe that there were some pieces that helped me to find parts of myself in the Org's programming. So I don't wanna discount that. And I really don't want us to, we really need to come up with a better metaphor than throwing in the baby out with the bathwater. It's just the worst. But, I don't wanna do that. Right?

It's like those of us [00:41:00] who are seekers did find something. And those that are seekers who are still involved are finding something. And then there's also, both and, this other component of it, which we're gonna get into in a moment.

So let's talk about, you were on this path of seeking. How did you find and get involved with the Org in the first place? And how did that happen?

Yamuna Benedict: A friend brought me to a local class that was just in a rented studio on East Side. And, uh, it was I believe, fall of 2007. And I went to this class. And I loved it. I was, this is what I need. And moving and shaking and yelling and like, it just felt so good. And I got, I went every time the class was basically. I think it was twice a week. And I went for about a year before I learned, well, it was interesting cause this person kind of presented the class like it was their work.

And so it was like a [00:42:00] year before I knew there was the studio downtown that this headquarters. Headquarters! There's more classes. There's a training program. I was just like, blown away. What? There's more? This isn't just this one teacher. What?

And so as soon as I found that out, I like drove downtown and went to a class, and Raul was teaching, and whoa, talk about another level class. This is so exciting. And so then I'm falling into the studio downtown, right into the core of it all. And taking classes.

And I did my white belt in November 2009. I did the white belt on a scholarship. I wrote a letter that I love the practice. I'm a single mom. I can't afford this. And Seth granted me a white belt.

And I did the white belt and it was an [00:43:00] interesting experience that I enjoyed. Marissa was supposed to co-train with another trainer, and she never showed up to the training. And so I kept hearing about Marissa and hearing about Marissa. I had never met Marissa or gone to her class the whole time I was going to the studio. She was not real present. Um, and so I was very curious about her.

I had danced with Raul and the week goes by and Marissa never shows up. And the next thing I did was a workshop with a visiting trainer who did a learn a routine workshop, and so I learned the routine, and on, I believe it was New Year's Day, we did a big teacher jam, and I got asked to participate as a new white belt. And I was very excited and scared and they asked would I teach the first song, which was like an eight and a half minute song. And I was like, oh my [00:44:00] god, you know? Um, but I did it and I moved people to tears that morning, teaching this song.

And I just was high off the whole class and the feedback and all of it. And a few days later, like January 8th or something, I was coming out of a class got in the elevator and Seth hopped in the elevator and he was getting out on the third floor. So the fourth, it was a six story building. Fourth floor is the dance studios, third floor is the Org's office.

The door's open, he hops out, he looks at me, he goes, Hey, you gotta minute? Come talk to me. And he offers me a job as his executive assistant. And I'm like, wow. Yes, this is great. Yes, sure. I'm all excited, but this is where our stories get parallel. I didn't apply for this job.

Candice Schutter : Right, right.

Yamuna Benedict: That was the friend went, [00:45:00] oh, that's exactly what happened to me, Candice, hey, wait a minute.

Candice Schutter : You were chosen.

Yamuna Benedict: Two days later, I believe, January 10th, 2010, was my first day of work at the Org. And I'm very excited and I go to the office and Seth greets me with, you're also gonna manage the studio. I just fired the studio manager.

Candice Schutter : And this was, this was 2010, right?

Yamuna Benedict: This was January 2010.

Candice Schutter : Right. So they had, just to give people a sense, they had gone through, I think three studio managers since I'd,

Yamuna Benedict: since you left.

Candice Schutter : since I had left. So this was like, I think the third, maybe it was the second, but I, I'm pretty sure it was the third after I left studio manager that was let go. And

then [00:46:00] Yamuna was hired to do two jobs at once somehow, that she never applied for.

Tracy Stamper : At least two jobs.

Yamuna Benedict: Yes. And I was actually really excited to manage the studio because I loved the studio. And so coming from the Krishna movement, the studio was my temple. I worshiped the floors. I felt the energy in those floors that were put in, in 1905 and had been danced on for 105 years. I felt it.

And I worshiped it, and it became my temple. And my spiritual practice, and I felt connected to something bigger when I danced. I called it praying with my feet. I still call dancing, praying with my feet.

Um, but getting greeted with, you're also going to manage this studio. I was excited, but then I was like, well, what happened to, and I wish I could remember her name. I can't remember [00:47:00] her name. I can picture her face. And Seth just said, I fired her.

And I don't, I don't know if she was doing a good job or a bad job, but right away it initiated this like, oh, this isn't exactly what I thought. And this poor girl just lost her job. And then of course, she hated me. So I had an enemy immediately in the organization. She felt like I was vying for her job, trying to get her out, which wasn't the case.

But as I worked there for the years, there was lots of that kind of thing going on, backstabbing, trying to get someone out and someone in and favoritisms and stuff like that. So, um, that was my start.

2010 was a pivotal transitional year for the Org. Raul had announced his retirement at the end of 2009. And he was committed to a whole [00:48:00] plethora of trainings at headquarters that year that he did. And so I got to work with him for a year through this transition of him exiting.

And it was very interesting all the personalities. Seth, Marissa, and Raul. I quickly could see why Raul was exiting, uh, the power dynamics. And I like when you started talking about the meetings, cuz it was never a meeting. They went on and on and on and on and on and ended up like this counseling session that nothing ever got accomplished.

Candice Schutter : Yes, exactly. Ding, ding, ding.

Yamuna Benedict: And so that's all going on. And Raul basically just stepped out, and was showing up for the trainings at this point. And Marissa and Seth are figuring out how they're going to run the organization.

So I'm running the studio, I'm [00:49:00] hosting these packed trainings. Every single training had 55 attendees. They're coming from all over the world. I'm greeting them. Signing the waivers and checking them in and dancing.

And, um, I did do my green belt. Raul's final Green Belt in July 2010. And so I did get to do one training with him, and he's quite serious in the trainings and the pillows have to be a certain way. And he was very, very particular.

He exits and now it's Marissa's show. And I remember the first training that was just for Marissa. I wanna say it was the first NGT training, but I don't know for sure. I can't clearly remember. But I had checked everyone in and she's nowhere. And I'm calling her, [00:50:00] and texting her, and she's nowhere. And she had been drinking and shopping and forgot that there was a training.

Candice Schutter : Oh boy.

Yamuna Benedict: And so she shows up about 45 minutes late. I'm trying to entertain everything.

Candice Schutter : Ah-huh.

Yamuna Benedict: So I just remember like. Oh, this is like, totally different than Raul. Raul was like, are you gonna be on time or you gonna be like to the second?

And then here I'm like, so I'm all in that mode. Like, do it perfect, do it perfect. And then so I do all my part, and then the trainer doesn't show.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: And so I was like, oh, this is like totally different than, okay, I have to learn to work with this and babysit and track. And is she gonna show up.

Tracy Stamper : Wow.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

So was that kind of how it was once Raul left? Was that consistently an issue?

Yamuna Benedict: Not exactly like that, but also like, you immediately getting asked to go up and sub class after you've been at the [00:51:00] office all day. And the same thing happened to me as the studio manager. You're filling out the pay sheet for all the teachers that week, and so you subbed a class, you put your name down for the teacher fee. And Seth quickly pulled me over and said, oh, no, no, no. You, you don't get paid to teach here. This is part of your measly salary. He didn't say measly, but it was very.

Candice Schutter : Uh.

Yamuna Benedict: Um, and that it was all included. And I was like, oh, oh. Okay.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: And I continued to teach the 5:45 class many, many times, which also became a whole drama amongst the local teachers and who has the right to teach, and it was quite political all the time.

Tracy Stamper : Oh, ugh.

Yamuna Benedict: I call it managing a lot of diva energy.

Candice Schutter : Everyone's trying to clamor up the ladder. Like that's how everything's structured. So I just really wanna underscore that was the way that everything functioned was [00:52:00] such that certain people would be in the spotlight. They would be like the chosen child, the rising star, the whatever. And it was very sudden you never know who it was gonna be, how long they were gonna be there, and when they were just gonna be cast aside.

And so everyone was sort of trying to get mom and dad's love, if you will. Like, it was, it was hitting that mark for, for so many of us. Maybe not everyone. But for many of us.

And the diva energy. You used the word diva. Wasn't Marissa like openly willing to be called a diva? Wasn't that like a normalized thing?

Yeah. So that diva energy was, was sort of, um, pedestalized.

Yamuna Benedict: Yes.

Candice Schutter : Right? So not only are you rewarded for your hustle and your willingness to sacrifice, you're also rewarded for taking on that energy, that sort of diva energy. So, um, yeah, I bet it was kind of a shit show, especially after Raul left, cuz there was all that many more classes.

Yamuna Benedict: Yes. Who's gonna fill the classes? Particularly the Sunday [00:53:00] class was a major, major bone of contention.

Candice Schutter : Yeah. Well that was the dance, that was like the dance church class at the temple. Sunday mornings.

Tracy Stamper : Yes.

I even know about how special the Sunday morning class was all the way out here, however many thousands of miles. Like, that was real estate. That was prime real estate. I even knew that.

Candice Schutter : Yes. Some people would stay when they'd come for trainings. They would stay on. The training was a week long. Did you stay for a Sunday class, Tracy?

Tracy Stamper : At least once. Of course I did.

Candice Schutter : Yeah, sure. yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: As I worked at the Org, hiring and firing went on constantly. It was a revolving door of Marissa and Seth. Hire, fire, hire, fire. And this stress fist [00:54:00] that I speak of got bigger. Like, oh God, that's gonna be me one day.

Tracy Stamper : Oh.

Yamuna Benedict: That's how I just remember feeling like that for years. When you watch the owners hire and fire constantly.

Candice Schutter : Do you remember, Yamuna, it was so long ago for me that I don't have clear memory of this. Do you remember how folks that were fired or who left were, were they talked about? Was that ever discussed? Obviously you knew cause you were in like, you know, executive team meetings, what was going on. But in terms of like, how was that held by the leadership and then the larger community?

Yamuna Benedict: You know, I mostly, it's like, you're dead to me. They're gone. We don't talk about them anymore.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: That's mostly what I remember. And so as they would fire people, guess who got to fill their shoes? I [00:55:00] did.

And I remember at one point it's, I couldn't keep up with everything. I worked seven days a week. My phone rang 24 hours a day. And I remember then, Seth said he was gonna get me an assistant. But I didn't get to pick my assistant. He got to pick my assistant.

Candice Schutter : Of course.

Yamuna Benedict: And we put an ad out, you know, and this stack of resumes come in. And I remember how he started sorting them was first to go on social media and look at their photos and are they attractive or not? And so anyone that was not attractive went in the garbage right away.

As my time went on there, they're hiring and firing people and as they would fire people, I would get the responsibilities. So the Org had a record label and they fired the person doing that job. I start licensing the music. Um, immediately upon my [00:56:00] hiring part of the executive assistant to the CEO was overseeing the clothing line that they did. And so I was very hands on, and we actually revamped the entire clothing line, redid the patterns, photo shoots, getting it up online, pricing it all. So that was all under my watch. Managing the studio. I was very much like the office manager training any new person. And so these were all, like, when I got hired, there was a studio manager. There was someone overseeing the

clothes, overseeing the record label, running the office. But by the end of my five years there, I was doing all of these jobs without an increase in pay, even though they would fire a salaried person, including also teaching classes.

Candice Schutter : God.

Tracy Stamper : You know, this makes so much [00:57:00] sense. Not having known that when I was an active participant. But there would be so many different things that as a trainer I would need answers to. And when it seemed to me that whenever I would email or call or text and ask a question, I almost always got the response, oh, you wanna talk to Yamuna. Like over and over and over again. And I do remember thinking, is there anything that this woman doesn't do there? Now I know why.

Candice Schutter : Not, not a lot, apparently.

Yamuna Benedict: I, I got told that a lot. The trainers knew, if they wanted to get anything done, go directly to Yamuna. They, they figured out I am the bridge to getting answers to questions, moving something forward. Um, thank you for recognizing that, Tracy.

Tracy Stamper : Absolutely, and I [00:58:00] did learn. It took me a while, but I did learn, don't even bother with that initial email or call or just contact Yamuna.

Candice Schutter : So how many people are doing that, right? Like coming to you directly? Because they're not, they don't have any other inroad to get what they need and. And to be clear, you would think that the real answers to the questions would be at the top of the hierarchy, but it's really just right below that because of the chaos that's happening and has ensued at the top.

So I'm curious, how much were you working?

Tracy Stamper : Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: I don't even know. All the time. I never had a vacation. I, I did my blue belt in Sarasota, Florida in January 2012, which was a not-paid vacation, but I was representing the Org basically and worked the whole time. And when I came back, I told Seth, I remember telling him, you should just send me to [00:59:00] trainings, cuz I think I got every person to sign up for the next training there.

Tracy Stamper : Yeah.

Yamuna Benedict: And I should just be like a brand ambassador that I remember telling 'em I should be like a, an antenna to the headquarters. Cuz the trainings loved it. They loved having some connection there. And I'm a natural salesperson, and

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: I, I'm pretty sure like every single person signed up. I'm like, I should just do this. You guy, you wanna make money, you wanna grow it. Like, just send me to the training. But he, oh, no, no. He wanted me sitting right next to him.

Candice Schutter : Uh huh.

Well, you have that, you have that natural ability that made you, and also the ability to apparently multitask like a mofo. People who say that multitasking doesn't exist. I still really debate that and.

Yamuna Benedict: I do, too.

Candice Schutter : Yeah, I just yeah, you can juggle and dance and chew gum at the same time.

So you have this natural ability to recruit because you believe so much in [01:00:00] the promise. It's like that ability to recruit is really sort of built into like if you really have bought into the vision. And then you have these other skills in terms of communicating, like you're able to do that. And you have what I've heard called in the cultiverse charisma by proxy. So if you're close to the source, quote unquote, put that in quotes the source, and I'm putting that in quotes because we literally use that language. The source. The founders, were the source.

You are close to the source. So, and I know it's somebody who experienced charisma by proxy, you have this certain magnetism and ability to influence because you're connected to the top line influencers. So you just showing up there in and of itself is a sales point.

Right? And you saw that. You saw the potential of that. And I'm curious to hear from the part of you, and I think this, I have a feeling and sense this is gonna circle back to kind of your upbringing and the [01:01:00] environments you were in. I'm gonna make this observation, you tell me if it's true. You seemed sort of wired for this self-sacrificing devotion.

Yamuna Benedict: Yes.

Candice Schutter : Like that, that that working overtime wasn't really like a thing in your mind. Or like, am I taking a vacation? Like the devotion and the willingness to it.

Yamuna Benedict: I was serving the greater good.

Candice Schutter : Yes. Say more about that.

Yamuna Benedict: In, in the Krishna Temple, they teach you to be the servant of the servant of the servant.

Tracy Stamper : Hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: How can you serve?

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: So I could serve this whole global community, which was a 24 hour job.

Candice Schutter : Mm-hmm.

Yamuna Benedict: Seven days a week. so, yeah, no, I definitely, and this is part of what I'm just fascinated with, the whole cult in culture and the series and my wiring and. [01:02:00]

And I got great pleasure in serving the studio and the teachers and the trainers. And honestly, it is the fuel that kept me going is the love reciprocation that I got from the community, not from my employers, but from the community is what kept me going. And I felt like I was part of something bigger than myself, helping it grow around the world. And it could change someone's life. And it was exciting.

Candice Schutter : And so was there a sense like that whatever hardship that it might bring to you

Yamuna Benedict: You get, you get blessings.

It's karma. So I'm banking all this good karma, basically, like I'm putting good karma in my bank. If I sacrifice myself when I need something, karma or God's going to give it back to me at a different time.

Candice Schutter : Fascinating. Yeah. Okay.

Yamuna Benedict: Yeah. So it's kind of like, like your savings [01:03:00] account. You're just banking it. I'm gonna bank this in for the future.

Candice Schutter : Yeah.

Tracy Stamper : Well, then you are a very, very wealthy woman, Yamuna. yamuna wealthy.

Yamuna Benedict: Thank you.

Candice Schutter : We'll be back next week with part two of our conversation with Yamuna, where she shares more details about her time at the Org.

candice-schutter-_5_12-08-2022_110152: tell us a little bit about, you're scrambling around doing all the things, and also it sounds like you were maybe cleaning up some messes at the same time. Do you wanna speak that at all?

Yamuna Benedict: All the time Don't look at the man behind the . That's what I always felt like I was trying to keep the curtain closed.

Don't

[tracy_5_12-08-2022_120152](#): Whew

Yamuna Benedict: look back here. Everything's perfect. It was a show all the time.

Candice Schutter : You won't want to miss the rest of this [01:04:00] conversation.

If you wanna reach out to me, Tracy, or Yamuna in the meantime, head to thedeeperpulse.com/share to send a secure email. Or feel free to reach out to one of us directly.

If you're a former, or transitioning, Org member looking for community and support, send us a message telling us why you'd like to join our free and private After The Org group. We'd love to welcome you into the mix.

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Thank you so much for tuning in. Take care of yourselves and each other, and I'll see you back here next week.

Caio.