

## **ICSA 2024 Barcelona**

### **Theme: Evidence-based Practices in Cult Recovery**

#### Title:

The Healing Power of Listening: Survivors' stories and the dark history of Yogi Bhanjan's Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma community leave thousands of practitioners worldwide asking, "Is this a cult? Am I in a cult?"

#### Abstract:

3HO, the Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization Yogi Bhanjan established in 1969, hosts non-profit entities governing Kundalini Yoga and Sikh Dharma activities, and billion-dollar companies such as Yogi Tea and Akal Security. Experts acknowledge that 3HO was and still is a cult. For decades, yoga, religion and community businesses successfully covered up Yogi Bhanjan's sexual abuse, child abuse, emotional and financial abuse, homophobic behavior, and exploitation that affected thousands. His involvement in drug and arms trafficking, financial and business fraud, tax evasion and the FBI investigation into 3HO murder cases were masterfully swept *Under the Yoga Mat* for over fifty years. The massive revelation of survivors' stories started in early 2020 with the release of the book *Premka, A White Bird in a Golden Cage, My Life with Yogi Bhanjan*, written by Pamela Dyson, an early leader of 3HO. Kundalini Yoga teachers and students worldwide burned their books, others broke with the organizations, still others labeled the testimonies as fantasies and continued to worship Yogi Bhanjan. In this paper we show how for community members at different points in time and in different locations, near and far from the spiritual leader's inner circle, it was often listening to the abuse and misdeeds experienced by other community members, that awakened their own memories of abuse and/or made them realize this healthy, happy, holy lifestyle was designed to control their minds. The survivors' stories led them to insights that marked the beginning of their cult recovery process. We will bring examples of adults and children who lived in the inner circle of Yogi Bhanjan (†2004) who recounted how their own healing began after listening to other stories. And we will share how these stories impacted Kundalini Yoga teachers and students around the world who more recently encountered his teachings but never met him.

Els Coenen is a former Kundalini Yoga teacher and 3HO-member (2008-2018) – former president of the Belgian Kundalini Yoga federation (2010-2018) – former member of an advisory team of 3HO's Compassionate Reconciliation Commission (2021-2022) – host of [www.abuse-in-kundalini-yoga.com](http://www.abuse-in-kundalini-yoga.com) – author of *Under the Yoga Mat: The Dark History of Yogi Bhanjan's Kundalini Yoga* (Izzard Ink Publishing, 2023) GuruNischan – [GN@gurunischan.com](mailto:GN@gurunischan.com) – born and raised in 3HO - co-author of *Under the Yoga Mat* and host of the *Uncomfortable Conversations Podcast: The Untold Stories of the 3HO Kundalini Yoga Community*.