

# Becoming a Being of Pure Consciousness

## Fasting and New Age Spirituality

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**ABSTRACT:** Fasting is an unexplored area of New Age spirituality. Using material that is primarily ethnographic, based on long-term participant observation fieldwork in Sedona, Arizona, a small town renowned for its New Age associations, this article examines some forms of fasting that are commonly recommended and attempted in New Age spirituality. The ethnographic data are supplemented with material drawn from two New Age spiritual leaders who are connected to Sedona, both of whom recommend fasting. Fasting is analyzed as a form of managing and organizing interspecies relationality, following the work of Graham Harvey. The consequences are framed in terms of the effects fasting has on the social organization of relatedness, or kinship, and on accusations of being dangerous or exhibiting “cult-like” behavior.

**KEYWORDS:** New Age spirituality, food, fasting, religious foodways, commensality, kinship and religion, American new religious movements

In his exploration of how religion constitutes everyday relationships, scholar of religion Graham Harvey identifies consuming food, as well as norms surrounding sex and strangers, as central.<sup>1</sup> In terms of food, religions encode rules for “eating respectfully,” killing other creatures for consumption, and eating with others.<sup>2</sup> How we eat with others creates and maintains community through marking

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boundaries. This places religion as part of the fabric of social life. Fasting, then, is an interesting perspective from which to view food and religion because by intentionally renouncing food, the faster respects the right to life of other species while at the same time abrogates social relations with other humans by refusing to partake in the sharing of substance—eating—with them. Fasting would seem to be a very specific form of religious act: one that implies a particular stance toward the world and other beings within it.

There are some religious traditions with well-established fasting practices, such as medieval European Christianity, which will be discussed below. These traditions have rubrics for when, in what manner, and for what reasons adherents should fast. Fasting in New Age spirituality is different because there is no specific formula for fasting; when and how it is undertaken is based on individual choice, and it can be inspired by any number of different traditions. In this article, I examine the place of fasting in New Age spirituality and what it means in this context to renounce eating and sometimes drinking. I suggest that fasting in New Age spirituality is a route to self-knowledge and enlightenment, one that separates the individual from others, particularly their kin, but also from the norms of food and diet in mainstream American society. Fasting reinforces the individualism of the spiritual path; the rejection of food is part of a rejection of society.

It is particularly apposite to examine fasting as religious praxis through its New Age manifestation because in many previous sociological accounts, there has been an intense focus on the apparent consumerism of New Age practices, but not on what those involved in these practices actually consume.<sup>3</sup> “New Agers” are said to consume practices such as yoga and reflexology (often in what is described as problematic, culturally appropriative ways), but what about their practices of consumption? The ethnographic and historical literature on New Age notes concerns about the way food is produced, leading to preferences for vegetarian, vegan, local, macrobiotic, and organic food.<sup>4</sup> New Age spirituality is linked to green politics, environmentalism, and the philosophy of deep ecology in part through concerns about food and how it is produced.<sup>5</sup> However, the renunciation of consumption in New Age spirituality is an unexplored area of research, to which this article contributes.

My engagement with New Age spirituality is primarily ethnographic.<sup>6</sup> It is from 22 months of participant observation in the “New Age mecca” of Sedona, Arizona, that the following provisional definition of New Age spirituality derives.<sup>7</sup> New Age spirituality is a constellation of beliefs and practices clustered around the central concept of energy as an all-pervasive force; the universe as a pantheistic conception of divinity; progressive stages of enlightenment described as a spiritual path; and a millenarian belief in a new paradigm replacing the old paradigm, also called variously the Age of Aquarius, the shift, or the ascension. A key

principle is that everything is energy and all energy vibrates at specific frequencies. The universe is composed of hierarchically ascending dimensions with the highest point called “source” (also called spirit, zero point, and the singularity), which is the highest frequency of energy and from which all energy emanates. Our planet is in what adherents call the third dimension, which is characterized by density and materiality. Sedona is said to be located at an intersection of the grid of planetary energies, sometimes called “ley lines.” It is renowned as the site of “vortexes,” sites of spiraling spiritual energy, sometimes given as specific rock formations, sometimes as the whole geographical area of the red rock canyons within which the town is situated.<sup>8</sup> This special energy is credited with attracting the spiritual seekers who live in the town, many of whom stay for only short periods. However, some people maintain a longer residence in what is also a resort town, with high property prices and little in the way of jobs outside of basic services and tourism.

Foodways have an important place in the realization of New Age spirituality in everyday life in Sedona. Food and eating are regarded as symptomatic of the third dimension, in which beings require the physical consumption of material substances. In higher dimensions beings exist in states of pure consciousness or “light,” and higher vibrational forms of energy do not require the physical process of digestion in order to be nourished. The third dimension is characterized by density and toxicity—there are unspecified toxins in the food, air, and water that lower the vibrational frequency of beings exposed to them. Elsewhere, I have described a hierarchy of foods in New Age spirituality that includes a range from those with the most density and lowest vibrational levels, especially meat, fish, and industrially processed foods, to those with the most light and highest vibrational levels, especially plants and organic, raw, and homegrown foods.<sup>9</sup> Fasting is at the top of this hierarchy, with the ideal of subsisting purely from sunlight and air—known as breatharianism—as the substances with the highest vibrational frequencies in the third dimension. Fasting is a means of purification of the body, called “cleansing” or “detox.” It is a way to rid the body of toxins, which leads to raising the frequency of the vibration of a person’s energy, meaning a higher level of spiritual enlightenment, bringing one closer to source. This spiritual evolution toward source is symbolized as becoming less dense and more light. It is realized through restricting food groups, a diet which also tends to produce bodies that are physically lighter.

Echoing the sociological accounts mentioned above, the religious validity of New Age spirituality is often dismissed by wider American society, including within Sedona itself. Groups are accused of being “cults,” with their leaders compared to infamous figures such as Jim Jones (1931–1978) and David Koresh (1959–1993).<sup>10</sup> Fasting is one of the practices in New Age spirituality that is interpreted as strange and as potentially causing self-destructive behavior. The way breatharianism is

reported in the media is an example of this.<sup>11</sup> Such reports focus on the case of Australian proponent Jasmuheen (b. 1957) and her inability to maintain more than a three-day fast under test conditions. They provide scientific critiques of the practicality of fasting by medical professionals, and often end with dire warnings about the physical effects of prolonged fasting. They do not grant it legitimacy as a religious practice, but instead emphasize its harmful effects and give the impression that it is an inherently dangerous thing to do.

During my fieldwork in Sedona, some of my informants spoke of breatharianism as the highest form of dietary practice, but no one I met actually practiced it. People involved in New Age spirituality would often undertake fasts, but they were occasional, instrumental, and periodic. The first section of this article presents two ethnographic cases of individuals fasting to outline how fasting occurs in New Age spirituality. The second section examines the recommendations on fasting from two New Age spiritual leaders, using material from talks I attended in person, their online videos and posts, and news articles written about them. This material on New Age fasting is emplaced in its American cultural context, and is juxtaposed with perspectives from others in that context who view it as a practice that is aberrant and a sign of being in a “cult.”

New Age fasting is part of what Harvey names “the etiquette of interspecies relationality.”<sup>12</sup> In New Age spirituality, energy is the central organizing principle of interspecies relationality. The principle that everything is energy means that all beings have a fundamental equivalence, yet at the same time they are hierarchically separated through the concept of dimensions and different frequencies of vibration. This creates a tension between equality and hierarchy that is managed in part through consumption practices. While everything is energy, energy vibrates at different frequencies, and some beings have higher vibrations than others. In order to raise one’s personal vibration, according to a New Age spiritual perspective, consumption practices restrict foods that have lower vibrations in favor of those with higher vibrations. The substances with the highest vibration in the third dimension are light and air, which means that the best form of nourishment is to not eat food at all. Consequently, relationality is undermined, both with the society that organizes food production and with those who do not follow the same consumption practices. Fasting denies commensality—the sharing of substances in a social environment especially through eating together—which structures relatedness between persons as well as interspecies relationality.<sup>13</sup>

## A TALE OF TWO FASTS

Alice lived in Sedona during 2012 until she moved to New Orleans after a few months.<sup>14</sup> Originally from Illinois, Alice was in her early

twenties, and had experienced periods of homelessness. She had little contact with her family anymore, and spoke of them rarely, in softly negative tones. I knew her through a small, local circus group. On a baking hot day in the summer of that year she brought hula hoops, juggling balls, flowers, and fabric over to a mutual friend's house for use in a future circus performance. Alice tried on items from the costume box and danced around. We ate raw chocolate bars and chocolate-peanut butter ice cream.<sup>15</sup> Alice refused both because she was on what she called a "banana fast" that day. She could eat only bananas, either in their raw form or as dried banana chips, and drink water. As she spun around with her eyes wide and beaming, she said that her fast was "okay," but it was making her "a bit high."

Alice periodically went on banana fasts for twenty-four hours. The aim was to "cleanse" her system of toxins and increase her spiritual awareness. In her regular diet Alice was vegan, and she placed particular emphasis on eating fermented food, which she identified as living. In her view, living foods consumed with awareness about their production had a higher energetic vibration and were therefore better for her health. She viewed health in terms of an interaction of her body, mind, and spirit. This kind of diet was typical of people involved in New Age spirituality in Sedona; it emphasized health in a holistic sense of being about more than just physical sensations and lack of physiological disease, and identified a diet composed mainly of plants, fermented foods, and living foods (such as sprouts and yeast), as the route to health. In the argot of New Age spirituality, this type of diet vibrates with a high frequency of energy.

Alice taught and practiced kundalini yoga. Banana fasts are promoted by California-based yogi and healer Hari Nam Singh, an adherent of Yogi Bhanjan (1929–2004), an Indian guru who brought kundalini yoga to America in the late 1960s.<sup>16</sup> While Alice possibly got her idea for the banana fast from Hari Nam Singh, she followed it for only one day rather than the fourteen days he recommends, and she did not combine it with cardamom pods. Alice combined her interest in kundalini yoga with Ayurveda. In her interpretation of Ayurveda, there were three types of people: *pitta* or fire, *kufi* or air, and *vata* or earth; and Alice identified as *vata*. Banana fasts fit well with her digestive profile, she told me.<sup>17</sup>

New Age Ayurveda is different from classical Indian Ayurveda, particularly in its connection between Ayurveda and yoga as complementary medicinal systems.<sup>18</sup> The classic *rasayana* diet is primarily *amla* (a sour Indian gooseberry) and milk.<sup>19</sup> There is little to suggest that banana fasts were considered *rasayana* in the classical Ayurvedic texts. However, banana fasts are popular among online wellness and vegan lifestyle advocates. Figures such as Leanne Ratcliffe (Freelee the Banana Girl), Loni Jane, and Yulia Tarbath recommend banana fasts and eating vegan

or fruitarian diets on their blogs, YouTube channels, and social media pages for health and weight loss, often going further and attributing life-altering effects to the consumption of vast amounts of particular fruits.<sup>20</sup> The banana fast sits at a particular intersection of veganism, yoga, and Ayurveda that points to the New Age transmutation of these currents into something different. The fast is peculiar to the concerns of white Western women who want to “eat clean,” an aim that also, not coincidentally, relies on a diet that enables weight loss.

This is just one way to fast, however, and the individualism of a New Age spiritual path means that when someone chooses to fast, it is done in a way that resonates with their particular energy. Peter went on a fast for four days during his vision quest in 1993, which he claimed changed his spiritual path irrevocably. Originally from New York City, where he had had a successful career as a criminal defense attorney, Peter was 70 years old when I met him in 2012. At the time of his fast, he was going through what he described as a “midlife crisis” with his then-wife. To help navigate this difficult period in his life, he attended a series of courses at the Omega Institute in upstate New York.<sup>21</sup> On the back page of the institute’s catalogue he saw a vision quest advertised. Peter interpreted the position of this ad as a sign that that was what he needed to do. He had predetermined this vision quest for his journey because he believed that a sequential series of synchronicities that he had created for himself prior to incarnation in his present life constituted his spiritual path.

The vision quest took place over the course of ten days. On the first two days, the quest was held in Durango, Colorado, and then on the next six days it moved to Canyonlands National Park in neighboring Utah, then on the final two days it returned to Durango. It was loosely based on what was labelled a Native American rite of passage ceremony, through which each participant said goodbye to their former life and welcomed their new life.<sup>22</sup> Eight men and two women participated, led by two white American guides whom Peter identified as either therapists or psychologists. They fasted in Canyonlands for four days. On the first day they stayed in the camp together, then the next morning each person went off on their own to find what the organizers called a “power spot.” Peter chose a spot high up on a sandstone rock formation. He spent three days there, fasting, consuming only water. On the last night of the four, he was supposed to stay up all night praying for a vision to take back with him to change the way he viewed his life.

Peter described how he had no music to listen to and nothing to read; he even had to cut the labels out of his clothes so he could not read them. He had only a basic canvas tent for shelter. The purpose was to be in his own space without distractions. Peter related how he had no problems with fasting the first two days, but by the third day he found himself bored and restless. The guides had taught him to have “funerals”

in which he talked to people he knew to let go of past slights. Peter described these as “pity parties,” and said he had many on that third day. At the same time, he perceived messages in the natural world unfolding around him. The most significant message he received was that next week he would be back defending clients in murder cases in New York City, so he should enjoy this while he had the chance. After that he enjoyed himself again, watching bugs in the day and the stars at night. On the fourth day, when he was meant to stay up the entire night, he moved up higher in the rocks and made a fire, then fell asleep around 11 p.m. When he came down and rejoined the group, they broke their fast with *ji cama* and some kind of cereal.

While he did not stay up the final night and receive a vision, Peter credited that vision quest as a turning point in his path. Soon after, he left his marriage, his career, and New York City. He moved to Arizona, first to Scottsdale and then Sedona. He continued to work in the law as a public defender, but he did not give this job much effort. It was just a way to support his life in Sedona, where he went hiking every day and enjoyed his time, free from the constraints and stresses that he had previously suffered.

At first glance, Alice and Peter’s fasting practices appear to have little in common. Alice fasted on her own, informally and not in an organized group, and still carried on with her ordinary daily activities with her friends. Peter, on the other hand, was part of a group who paid professional retreat organizers to create a particular experience for them. He was secluded from his ordinary daily activities; his job and family were part of what he was trying to escape from. She was immersed in her social life; he was sequestered from his. Alice ate bananas and water; Peter consumed nothing except water. Alice looked to the Indian traditions of yoga and Ayurveda for inspiration; Peter claimed his fast derived from Native American practices. The outcome for Alice was part of the everyday dietary practice through which she regulated her relationship with food. For Peter it was more dramatic, and it led to a life-changing decision. However, expressed in both of their justifications for restricting food intake was a need for cleansing, or purification: in Alice’s case it was a cleansing for the sake of her physical health, whereas for Peter it was for his emotional and psychological health. For both Alice and Peter, fasting had greater significance than simply eating less food.

Medieval history scholar Catherine Bynum relates that in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Europe—a time of frequent famine—food took on religious and economic significance.<sup>23</sup> Self-discipline was exerted through controlling the body by repressing eating and hunger. Fasting was a way of expelling demons (a representation of sin), and of following Jesus’s example, previewing life in heaven when they would not have a body or bodily needs. Food was more important in women’s

piety than men's; certain women used fasting as an expression of piety, and a few became famous for it. Bynum provides a sociological and phenomenological account of female fasting in medieval Christianity, and argues that fasting gave a way for women to be religious through the only resource they had significant control over, food.

Although the fasting practices of Alice and Peter were ostensibly linked to Indian and Native American practices, these connections were perhaps superficial. On a deeper level, the purposes of fasting that Bynum gives, purifying the body of sin and previewing a future life without a body that requires food, can be seen in the justifications for New Age fasting. In place of sin, the body is purified of toxins. Instead of an existence in heaven without a body, it is non-corporeal existence in a higher dimension that is previewed. Religion scholar Michelle Mary Lelwica describes how Christian ideals about body and food, sin and purity have a deep cultural inheritance in America.<sup>24</sup> While there is a difference in the degree of fasting undertaken—the medieval women described by Bynum fasted for much longer periods—there is a similarity in the inversion of the pain of hunger. Both Peter and Alice claimed fasting made them feel good, much like the states of mystical ecstasy medieval women claimed fasting brought.<sup>25</sup> Self-punishment can also be gratifying in religious systems that have negative associations of flesh and corporeality, in Christianity as earthly sin, and in New Age spirituality as third-dimensional density.

However, unlike the historical context Bynum describes, New Age spirituality has not evolved in a time of hunger and famine. On the contrary, the problem of food in American society is not scarcity but abundance. With obesity deemed an “epidemic,” how much food individuals consume is a moral issue.<sup>26</sup> Regulating food intake is a route to secular salvation by cultivating the ideal body, a state of physical perfection.<sup>27</sup> New Age fasting takes this principle back into the religious realm, producing the better body while simultaneously claiming to transcend the need for that body. Spiritual elevation forsakes the body, leaving it behind, along with the social relationships built and maintained through consuming food. It is an individual, embodied route to salvation. Yet this embodied route denies the needs of the body, and becoming a being of pure consciousness means leaving the body behind. The soteriological aim of New Age fasting will be made clearer by turning to the recommendations of two New Age spiritual teachers.

### **“LET ME HAVE A SIP OF WATER, BECAUSE I FEEL THIS FEELS GOOD”: SPIRITUAL TEACHERS AND FASTING**

New Age fasting is primarily instrumental. It is believed to be a method of cleansing the body physically and spiritually that elevates

one's energy to a higher vibration. It is undertaken periodically to achieve specific effects. In Sedona, I heard it recommended by speakers promoting wellness and raw food diets, for example at the Raw Food Expo where the "raw food trucker" advocated juice fasts as a way to cure cancer, and by those who positioned themselves as spiritual teachers. In this section, I present two such individuals: Quinn Eaker (b. 1983) and Bentinho Massaro (b. 1988). Both men have connections to Sedona, although neither live there. The material is drawn from hearing them speak, watching their YouTube videos, reading their blogs, and reading news reports about them. In both cases, fasting practices conform with their understanding of how individuals can achieve spiritual enlightenment and consequently change society.

I heard Quinn Eaker speak at a free talk called "Quinn-tessentials" in the garden of the ChocolaTree organic vegan restaurant in West Sedona in 2013. A favorite local hangout for spiritually minded people in Sedona, the garden was flourishing with trees and flowers and festooned with fairy lights. I sat at a wooden table, listening to the babble of the water feature and the soft vibration of the wind chimes. Roughly eight or nine other people sat at similar tables arranged around an elevated stone platform that acted as a stage for events. A tall white man in his early thirties with messy brown hair in a top-knot, a goatee-style beard, a long floor-length maroon jacket with symbols, and leather pants in patchwork brown, strode in purposefully holding a small child, maybe two to three years old. He was accompanied by a short East Asian woman in knee-high black boots and a diaphanous linen dress. Quinn Eaker announced that today we would focus on the "formless aspects of existence." To demonstrate, he played the didgeridoo, coming around to each audience member and aiming the instrument up and down their body so that we experienced the "formless aesthetics" of the experience. Everything is energy, he explained, it is all made of the same stuff. Difference comes from our experience, and so any definition is "pure limitation." However, limitation is essential to the experience that we have. There can be no game without rules. The universe is infinite and not bound by rules, but we are here to experience. We must live by rules in order to experience, so we must have contrast.

What Eaker presented was a fairly basic exposition of the principles of New Age spirituality as I came to understand them through my fieldwork in Sedona. As applied to consumption, Eaker announced that we do not need to eat food; eating is simply the body's way of alchemizing energy. "Alchemizing" was a term used frequently in Sedona, and among New Age spirituality more widely, to mean transformation of one thing into another. Since food is energy and our body is energy, they share the same substance, however we experience them as different and part of that experience is the feeling of the necessity of eating. However, Eaker claimed it was not necessary to eat. We could gain the

same nourishment from breathing; indeed, breath is more important energetically than food. Air and water are more important than food. He described how he fasted for a month without solid food, but he did not get sick, rather he felt “really good” (a sentiment I heard from both Alice and Peter in describing their fasting experiences). Pointing to the many examples of people eating differently, such as breatharians and vegetarians, Eaker argued it was healthier to eat less. It is the personal state of consciousness, and not the specific food consumed, that dictates individual experience. Eaker then described different dietary restrictions he had tried: a month of consuming only juice, a month of eating only fruit, and two weeks of eating only doughnuts and coffee. Each time he did not get sick, each type of fast felt different, and throughout each one he still felt great. He felt great because that was his state of consciousness, so it did not matter what he consumed, or whether he consumed food at all.

To provide some background to his claims, Eaker explained how he had been “into health” for a long time. He was sickly as a child, which he attributed to a weak immune system. This experience of childhood infirmity was, at the age of seventeen, the catalyst for his “awakening” (a common term in New Age spirituality for what in another religious context might be called conversion). He dedicated his life to health as he was tired of being sick. Initially he based his approach on nutrition, following rules for including or excluding certain foods from his diet. However, he claimed that he was much healthier now. It was not about “what I eat but where I’m eating from, I have more power in me than the food I’m eating. It’s me that dictates the experience of eating.” He claimed that he did not get sick or gain weight from eating only doughnuts and that he still had muscle mass after weeks of fasting. He was able to overcome physiological processes of muscle atrophy and weight gain because his state of consciousness was such that he could choose the outcome of his experiences. As Eaker continually said throughout the talk, “it’s all energy and it’s all in alignment.” By realizing that everything is energy, he could choose to bring his consciousness into alignment with whatever he was experiencing, and therefore control that experience. When people get sick, or fat, or become unhealthy it is because they have not awakened to the power of their own consciousness. They do not realize everything is energy, and therefore they are not in alignment.

Quinn Eaker is the founder and spiritual leader of a “new paradigm” (another term for New Age) commune in Arlington, Texas, where he lives with three female permanent residents and his two daughters.<sup>28</sup> Called the Garden of Eden EcoVillage, the commune is based on principles of self-sufficiency and sustainability, claiming to be carbon neutral and producing enough food for all the permanent and temporary residents. The relationship between the Garden of Eden and its Texan

neighbors has not been harmonious. A SWAT raid in 2013 took place due to suspected marijuana cultivation, although police found no drugs on the property.<sup>29</sup> When local news reporters write articles about the commune, they explicitly frame it as a potential “cult,” mention child welfare issues, and focus on the possible polyamorous relationship between Eaker and two of the female residents (the mother of his children, Inok, and the owner of the property, Shellie).<sup>30</sup> The hostility of the local community in Arlington is acknowledged by the group, but they claim that despite this problem they continue to succeed in growing their community and they are selling the Garden of Eden in order to expand their commune on a new site.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout his videos, blog posts, and interviews, Eaker advocates self-sufficient organic farming as a better way of living than the norm in American society, which he describes as toxic, polluting, and unnatural. In a YouTube video, Quinn advocates fasting for as long as possible in order to purify the body.<sup>32</sup> The longer the fast, the more purification. To break the fast, Eaker recommends eating fresh squeezed juices or fruits and greens. The aim is “detox,” a shortening of detoxification, a term borrowed from addiction recovery discourse. Eaker reports that he did it once, eating only fruit and spirulina for a month, and got “really clean.” Fasting is recommended in order to get rid of toxins absorbed from a toxic world. The language used reveals a pollution discourse: fasting makes one “clean,” while the toxins in food created in mainstream society makes one dirty.

In a blogpost on fasting, Eaker defines fasting as “going for a period of time without any food and only drinking some water or juice.”<sup>33</sup> He clarifies that fasting can last for a day, a week, or a month, however, going without food between meals or for a few hours does not count as fasting. It is an experiment that reveals how addicted to food we are. Fasting allows you to find out who you are “in the absence of food.” Nature is associated with being clean, whereas society is toxic, dirty, and polluting. Fasting cleanses the body of the ill effects of society, its food, and the way that food is produced. In terms of commensality, Eaker is suggesting not to share the substance of mainstream American society, but to share the substances—the food—that the group produces for themselves. This sets him in antagonism with wider society because in his view of fasting, cleansing the body of toxins means ridding it of the substance of society. It is an act of separation, isolating the self or a group of likeminded people from the society that poisons them.

Like Quinn Eaker, Bentinho Massaro claims to have achieved enlightenment as a teenager at the age of fourteen.<sup>34</sup> Born and raised in the Netherlands, in 2013 he moved to the United States and lived in Boulder, Colorado, and he lived in Sedona from April to December of 2017. He holds retreats in Sedona and other locations around the world known for their natural beauty, such as Hawaii and the Bahamas. While

he was based in Sedona, he held weekly meetings at the Sedona Creative Life Center, a well-known center in the town that rents out rooms for events with a spiritual theme. Known for his prolific social media use, Massaro uses Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and his own subscription-based website to spread his messages to his followers.

In a YouTube video on food, Massaro makes claims similar to Eaker that it does not matter what you “feed the body.”<sup>35</sup> He claims that “ultimately it does not matter what you put in your body” because the more conscious you become the less dependent you are on your physical body. He recommends that when still new to the path toward enlightenment, 70 to 80 percent of a person’s diet should be “healthy food.” However, it also depends on an individual’s personal alignment. Only the “sheep-like” need health systems, like vegetarianism. A select few, who are the most advanced in his estimation, are able to free themselves from the “collective agreements” and therefore be free from physical constraints, such as the need to consume food. As he talks in the video, he takes a sip of water, quickly following this seemingly automatic action with, “Let me have a sip of water, because I feel this feels good.” He then goes on to explain that with the proper level of focus it is possible to not need water.

Massaro advocates “dry fasting,” a form of fasting in which no food or water is consumed. For his meditation retreat in December 2017, called the “Sedona Experiment #2,”<sup>36</sup> the website listed partial preparations for participants:

We recommend daily dry fasts (no food OR liquids) of at least 12 hours, and daily food fasts of at least 15 hours. We recommend Concord grape juice with a tablespoon or two of lemon juice (pasteurized for both is good) mixed in to break your daily dry fasts, and to hold you over until you consume food, if at all. If you decide to do a full fast while attending this event, we only recommend the Master Fast System for this purpose. When/if you do eat, we recommend keeping it to raw fruits and/or salads, at least until the evening meal (which is after the last session). Maintaining daily mini-fasts and eating lightly during the day will help most people greatly in their meditations.<sup>37</sup>

In the promotional video for the Sedona Experiment #2 retreat, Massaro states that the aim is to become “not human,” and instead become a being of “pure consciousness.” This means detaching from the physical body and its physiological needs, which are illusory. Part of the path to breaking this illusion of physicality is dry fasting.

Massaro’s recommendation that participants in his retreats practice dry fasting formed part of the case made against him. In a piece published on the website medium.com on 1 December 2017, anticult activist Be Scofield pilloried Bentinho Massaro as a “tech bro guru” leading a “cult” with a “massive following.”<sup>38</sup> Based on spending one month going to Massaro’s weekly meetings at the Sedona Creative Life

Center and socializing with members of his group, as well as spending at least one evening with Massaro and his inner circle, Scofield laid out her case for the “how to start a cult playbook.” Item four is to “use disorienting methods to keep your devotees confused, distracted and in trance states.” Here, Scofield discusses dry fasting, quoting a blog written by a doctor who states that it is not a safe practice (the doctor was not commenting specifically on the Massaro case). Scofield talks about followers of Massaro who tried dry fasting and suffered hair and teeth loss, and another who claimed it ruined her mental health. It is not clear if the quotes come from comments on blogs and Facebook groups or from people Scofield spoke to in person. Massaro responded to this post himself, denying its allegations, as did one of his supporters. The supporter argued that dry fasting can be beneficial and healthy if done correctly, and that people take part in it of their own free will. He called Scofield’s allegation that dry fasting is used to disorient followers in order to manipulate them “bullshit.”<sup>39</sup>

In Sedona, there was an animated response to Scofield’s *Medium* post. Acrimonious disputes between Massaro’s followers and members of the local community broke out on a popular local Facebook group, the Sedona Bulletin Board, with a number of Massaro’s followers being banned from the group by a moderator (many were subsequently re-added). Members of the local community linked him to previous spiritual leaders such as James Arthur Ray (b. 1957), who was held criminally responsible for the death of three participants in his sweat lodge held near Sedona in 2009. They also compared him with a former resident known as Gabriel of Sedona (b. 1946), who was previously the subject of local and national exposes concerning financial affairs and sexual relationships with members of his group, now called Global Community Citizens Alliance.<sup>40</sup> There were calls on the Sedona Bulletin Board for Massaro to be “run out of town.”

On 9 December 2017, a participant in the Sedona Experiment #2, Brent Wilkins, was found dead at the bottom of a canyon near Midgley Bridge, apparently from suicide. The local Arizona news outlet followed up with its own reporting on Massaro, focusing specifically on the suicide of Wilkins and the subsequent investigation by law enforcement. The issue of fasting was raised as a potential danger in the report’s summary of the police interview:

The officers asked about Massaro’s favorite system of fasting, which involves weeks-long stretches sustained by only grape juice. If weakened students tried to hike, Stevens told him, they could overexert themselves in the Arizona desert. Massaro said he would warn them.<sup>41</sup>

Bentinho Massaro was not charged in connection with the suicide of Wilkins. However, in late December 2017 he left Sedona and

subsequently held retreats in Hawaii in April 2018, and Baarlo in the Netherlands in July 2018. He announced that the Baarlo retreat would be the last “for the foreseeable future,” and that he would instead focus on an online course.<sup>42</sup> Continuing his claims that “the new age is here,” Massaro wants nothing less than to change the world, which he will lead “vibrationally and financially,” and asks for \$2 billion and 10 years to do so: “Earth is out of time, and so is your corrupt, broken leadership.”<sup>43</sup>

Both Bentinho Massaro and Quinn Eaker offer formulaic interpretations of New Age spirituality by saying that individuals can create their own reality if their level of consciousness is sufficient, coupled with stinging critiques of current American society as being fundamentally corrupt. The solution is to create a new form of spiritual community. Eaker calls his off-grid homestead the Garden of Eden and is seeking investors for Eden 2.0 on a larger site, while Massaro seeks billions to create Trinfinity City, promising an enlightened society by 2035. Both men use social media and the internet extensively to promote their ideas. The use of technology seems novel, and threatening from an anticult perspective, yet this is a means to an end. The substance of what Eaker and Massaro propose is back-to-the-land self-sufficient communes, much like what was tried in the 1960s-1980s at places like Rajneeshpuram and The Farm, among many others.<sup>44</sup> The backlash against both men focuses on accusations of being cult leaders and rumors of polyamory, leading to conflict with their local communities (as was also the case with the Rajneeshes).

While there are also significant differences between Massaro and Eaker—for example, Massaro seems much more active in accruing large amounts of currency than Eaker—both are young, attractive, charismatic men with followers (especially female followers) who elevate them. They have high opinions of themselves as spiritually and intellectually advanced. Both men exempt themselves from consumption restrictions common in New Age spirituality, for example Massaro smokes cigars, and Eaker is seen in YouTube videos smoking cigarettes. This behavior is justified by claiming that they are in alignment with such activities, and therefore not harmed by them. Indeed, the need to make rules against specific behaviors is portrayed as a sign of spiritual immaturity; those who have a sufficiently high vibration do not need to make or follow rules. Both men advocate fasting as a way to break illusions of materiality and advance spiritually. Fasting is a way to learn that one does not really need food, that physiological needs are not really needs, and that with spiritual advancement, such needs can be overcome and transcended.

This promise of transcendental enlightenment overcoming the fleshly realities of the body is nothing new. Religious studies scholar Arthur Versluis provides a revealing history of North American gurus that explains the historical and cultural derivations of most of the key principles

that Massaro and Eaker offer as fruits of their personal enlightened wisdom.<sup>45</sup> Versluis proposes that “immediatism” is the central organizing principle of the category of “American guru,” which he defines as independent spiritual teachers in America who were influenced by Asian traditions without being part of those traditions. American gurus claim immediate, spontaneous, direct, and unmediated spiritual insight or enlightenment. They also claim as personal inspiration a collection of principles that have characterized the offerings of gurus in the United States since their emergence. The sudden personal enlightenment experience, without a long period of study or discipline in a specific tradition, is at the foundation of both Eaker’s and Massaro’s claims to legitimacy. The historical roots of what Versluis calls immediatism flourished after the counterculture of the 1960s, which encouraged long hair, nudism, vegetarianism, organic food, sexual freedom, wandering in nature, use of psychedelics, and experimentation in art and literature. Gurus emerged, such as Franklin Jones/Adi Da (1939–2008), Richard Alpert/Ram Dass (b. 1931), Tony Parsons (b. 1933), and Osho/Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931–1990), offering Americans a mix of Asian religions, Western Esotericism, and occultism. Immediatist spirituality is not the same as New Age, but there are multiple areas of overlap, and New Age spirituality has many teachers who easily fit into Versluis’s category of American guru. Bentinho Massaro is mentioned by Versluis as one of the “immediatist wave” of similar teachers in the early twenty-first century.<sup>46</sup>

In justifying the practice of fasting as spiritually elevating, both Eaker and Massaro make gestures toward vague, unspecified “Eastern religions” and the importance of fasting therein. However, the cultural context for fasting in America is very different from the contexts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, or any other “Eastern religion” that they may have had mind. Consequently fasting has a different level of social acceptance and aura of authenticity in the United States.<sup>47</sup> Bentinho Massaro’s promotion of dry fasting was seen as alarming, suspicious, and dangerous. It was part of what made him seem like a “cult leader.” The cultural norms are very different too; detachment from society, as Hindu and Buddhist renunciates do, is not an American norm.

## CONCLUSION

The family is the basic unit of American society, based on symbols of blood and law.<sup>48</sup> If a religion challenges or undermines the bonds of family, such as when a group is perceived as isolating its members from their biological family, then that religion has the potential to be seen as a “cult.”<sup>49</sup> Eating creates relatedness because food is part of what constitutes blood, which is a central concept in kinship.<sup>50</sup> Sharing a meal is

a sharing of substance, most often partaken of among the immediate kin group. Eating together and sharing food implies trust and intimacy. Fasting cuts the ties of commensality, rejecting those with whom one habitually shares food. Fasting with a group of likeminded people under the direction of a guru creates a new bond, which threatens normative kin relations in American society. It is then demonized by those who dislike the guru as unhealthy and dangerous, both physically and mentally, alleging that those who participate in it are vulnerable to dangers ranging from hair loss to brainwashing.

The family is often the group who shares meals. Bynum interprets medieval fasting women as rejecting commensality; this is through rejecting the meal as a symbol of the familial bond and refusing basic support provided by the mother (in cooking) and the father (in providing).<sup>51</sup> Both Peter and Alice were distant from their immediate kin, and Peter's fast presaged a further distancing from his kin network. Both Massaro and Eaker advocate living within a group of like-minded spiritual seekers rather than with biological family, unless this family agrees with them spiritually. Fasting is part of a rupture with American norms of commensality and kinship that paves the way for the creation of the new society, purified of the corruptions of the old. Sharing food is a way of building community intentionally among religious groups, especially small ones isolated from their wider society.<sup>52</sup> Both Quinn Eaker and Bentinho Massaro advocate, and are taking steps to build, self-sufficient communities that are separate from wider American society. In doing so, they are creating new kin groups, made of those spiritually in tune with one another, and separating from families created through normative American symbols of blood and law.

In a 2013 performance at the Sedona Creative Life Center by Chris Spheeris (b. 1956), a composer in the New Age music genre, he recited a poem that parodied the extreme diets people use to be "spiritual." Spheeris related how he had performed coffee enemas for two weeks and a juice fast for twenty-nine and a half days. He felt "sparkly, ethereal" during the first week of the fast, and he lost some weight, but then on the twenty-ninth and a half day he was at Walmart, "possibly hallucinating," and he smelled popcorn. He described this as an epiphany that kept coming as he watched "chubby people" come out of the door, surrounded by happy families, smiling and looking so joyful. In contrast he was "this jaundiced dude," trying to be healthy but feeling miserable: "I'm trying to do something that I thought was a good idea, and I'm punishing myself... and that's when the juice fast ended." People laughed and applauded.

In New Age spirituality, there are many different ways to fast, whether eating only one specific fruit, restricting food and drinking, or foregoing all food and drink entirely. The period of fasting can be days, weeks, or even months. What matters is the effect of fasting, which is cleansing the

body of toxins. This is only the first, most immediate effect, however. Fasting in New Age spirituality has a higher, spiritual aim, which is to detach from the need to eat food. This is said to increase spiritual awareness by allowing one to realize that as a being of pure consciousness, food is not necessary. The physical body is an illusion, a consequence of living in the third dimension which is characterized by density. The transformation of food into bodily sustenance is only necessary for those who have not attained the level of spiritual development to realize that both the food and the physical body are energy. The truly enlightened do not need to eat at all, or conversely, they can eat anything, even smoke cigars or cigarettes, because they are in total alignment with the energy of all things and can therefore control the effects experienced. It is asserted that fasting leads to a transcendence of dense, third-dimensional reality by raising one's vibration through consumption practices. This mediates relations with other species by denying the violence of everyday acts of consumption.<sup>53</sup> These New Age spiritual gurus teach that both the body that requires food, and the bodies that become food, are merely illusions that can be overcome.

New Age fasting practices do not exist in a cultural vacuum. New Age spirituality is not given a privileged position in American society, and those conducting extended fasts are not held up as exemplars of non-detachment. Instead, they are viewed with suspicion, and their practices are analyzed in a medical frame and condemned as dangerous. Chris Spheeris's epiphany turned on a realization that a regimen ostensibly meant to improve his wellbeing was experientially a form of punishment. Fasting in New Age spirituality does seem to have aspects of self-punishment, akin to the medieval female fasters described by Bynum. Food restriction in a society marked by obesity is a mark of virtue, helping to cultivate normative (smaller, thinner, leaner) bodies. Spheeris's epiphany was perceived as funny because he realized the body he was cultivating through punishing fasts did not make him happy. New Age fasting is also, as Bynum suggests for medieval female fasters, a direct confrontation with cultural norms of commensality. Spheeris went to Walmart, but he only smelled the popcorn, he did not join in with the happy fat shoppers. New Age fasters reject mainstream American society through its food practices; they do not share its substance. Instead they turn to like-minded seekers, in some cases creating communes, to forge a new praxis of kinship and community as part of the "new paradigm" society they anticipate in the new spiritual age that is dawning.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Graham Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life* (Durham, England: Acumen, 2013), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers*, 211.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 97–112; Jeremy R. Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4–6; Kimberly J. Lau, *New Age Capitalism: Making Money East of Eden* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 11–16; Michael York, “New Age Commodification and Appropriation of Spirituality,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16, no. 3 (2001): 361–72.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Prince and David Riches, *The New Age in Glastonbury: The Construction of Religious Movements* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 94; Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 484–487; Benjamin E. Zeller, “Quasi-Religious American Foodways: The Cases of Vegetarianism and Locavorism,” in *Religion, Food, and Eating in North America*, eds. Benjamin E. Zeller, Marie W. Dallam, Reid L. Neilson, and Nora L. Rubel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 294–320; Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003), 157–158.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, v. 2 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 71–73.

<sup>6</sup> This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork undertaken for 13 months in Sedona and 9 months in Valle, Arizona, for my doctoral dissertation in anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, July 2012–April 2014. This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

<sup>7</sup> Adrian Ivakhiv, *Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 147. In this article, I am using the term “New Age spirituality,” although I am aware of the debates over whether New Age is an appropriate term and whether spirituality should be plural (see Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Sælid Gilhus, “Introduction: Thinking About Religion in Relation to New Age Spiritualities,” in *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, eds. Steven J. Sutcliffe and Ingvild Sælid Gilhus [Durham, England: Acumen, 2013], 1–5). In the field, my informants would rarely use the term New Age and instead would simply talk about spirituality. In this article I add the modifier New Age for clarity, as spirituality has a wider purchase on an analytical level. For different emphases in the definition of New Age see Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*, 4–6; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 520–521; and Nicholas Campion, *The New Age in the Modern West: Counterculture, Utopia and Prophecy from the Late Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 4–9.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Ivakhiv, “Red Rocks, ‘Vortexes’ and the Selling of Sedona: Environmental Politics in the New Age,” *Social Compass* 44, no. 3 (1997): 367–84.

<sup>9</sup> Susannah Crockford, “After the American Dream: The Political Economy of Spirituality in Northern Arizona, USA” (Ph.D. dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017), 106–134.

<sup>10</sup> Susannah Crockford, "How Do You Know When You're in a Cult?: The Continuing Influence of Peoples Temple and Jonestown in Contemporary Minority Religions and Popular Culture," *Nova Religio* 22, no. 2 (2018): 93–114.

<sup>11</sup> Rachel Hosie, "Breatharian Couple Claim They Live a 'Food-Free' Lifestyle and Haven't Felt Hungry Since 2008," *Independent*, 16 June 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/breatharian-couple-food-free-lifestyle-diet-not-hungry-2008-camila-castello-akahi-ricardo-ecuador-a7792841.html>; "Let Them Eat Air . . ." *The Guardian*, 28 September 1999, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/sep/28/millennium.uk>.

<sup>12</sup> Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers*, 215.

<sup>13</sup> Janet Carsten, "The Substance of Kinship and the Heat of the Hearth: Feeding, Personhood, and Relatedness among Malays in Pulau Langkawi," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (1995): 223–225.

<sup>14</sup> This name is a pseudonym.

<sup>15</sup> Certain types of chocolate were considered "raw" if they were produced without heating above 115°F/42°C. Annie Blazer, "Hallelujah Acres: Christian Raw Foods and the Quest for Health," in Zeller, Dallam, Neilson, and Rubel, *Religion, Food, and Eating*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> Hari Nam Singh, "Recipe: Banana Fast," Hari Nam Singh: Healing Heart Center, 15 December 2014, <http://www.harinam.com/banana-fast/>. For a history of the transmission of modern postural yoga to America see Elizabeth De Michelis, *History of Modern Yoga: Patañjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004), 190–193.

<sup>17</sup> These were the associations that Alice gave to me when I knew her in Sedona, and they represent her personal understanding of Ayurveda. The doshas are usually described as *pitta* composed of fire and water, *kapha* composed of earth and water, and *vata* composed of ether and air, with a number of further associations concerning body type, personality, and preferences.

<sup>18</sup> Kenneth Gregory Zysk, "New Age Āyurveda or What Happens to Indian Medicine When It Comes to America," *Traditional South Asian Medicine* 6 (2001): 13; Nazrul Islam, "New Age Orientalism: Ayurvedic 'Wellness and Spa Culture,'" *Health Sociology Review* 21, no. 2 (2012): 230; Sita Reddy, "Asian Medicine in America: The Ayurvedic Case," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 583 (Sept. 2002): 97–121.

<sup>19</sup> *Rasayana* is the Ayurvedic term for things that promote rejuvenation and wellness in contemporary American terms. Suzanne Newcombe, email message to author, 10 May 2018.

<sup>20</sup> "My 7-Day Banana Island Experience (Banana Only Diet)," Rawsome Healthy, <http://www.rawsomehealthy.com/banana-island-experience1/>, accessed 25 May 2018; "A Woman Ate Only Bananas for 12 Days and Look What it Did to Her," *India Times*, 28 March 2018, <https://www.indiatimes.com/health/healthyliving/a-woman-ate-only-bananas-for-12-days-and-look-what-it-did-to-her-244237.html>; Kristin Shorten, "Loni Jane Anthony: 80:10:10 Diet Saved My Life," *news.com.au*, 12 November 2013, <http://www.news.com.au/loni-jane-anthony-801010-diet-saved-my-life/news-story/f1909ad71a203dab42d9c6bfb54bd4b1>; Loni Jane, "About Loni Jane," *Feel the Lean*, <http://www.feelthelean.com/about-loni-jane/>, accessed 25 May 2018; Claire Lampen,

"The Paradoxical, Off-the-Grid Life of Freelee the Banana Girl," *The Daily Dot*, 16 May 2018, <https://www.dailydot.com/irl/freelee-the-banana-girl/>; F R E E L E E, <https://www.youtube.com/user/Freelea>, accessed 25 May 2018.

<sup>21</sup> On the Omega Institute, see Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 435.

<sup>22</sup> There are numerous critiques of the New Age use of Native American rituals from scholars and activists, see: Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 154–180; Lisa Aldred, "Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dances: New Age Commercialization of Native American Spirituality," *American Indian Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2000): 329–52; Alice Beck Kehoe, *Shamans and Religion: An Anthropological Exploration in Critical Thinking* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000), 82; Susannah Crockford, "Shamanisms and the Authenticity of Religious Experience," *The Pomegranate* 12, no. 2 (2010): 139–58.

<sup>23</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 2–3.

<sup>24</sup> Michelle Mary Lelwica, *Shameful Bodies: Religion and the Culture of Physical Improvement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 17–29.

<sup>25</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 762–763.

<sup>27</sup> Lelwica, *Shameful Bodies*, 32–34.

<sup>28</sup> "Our People," The Garden of Eden, <https://www.intothegardenofeden.com/our-people.html>, accessed 25 May 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Quinn Eaker discusses the raid on Adam Kokesh's *The Freedom Line* YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJNFTIWZpY>, accessed 22 April 2019; property owner Shellie Smith talks about the raid on the Garden of Eden's YouTube channel, "Shellie Smith Interview about the SWAT Raid at The Garden of Eden," 13 November 2013, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55UHUH2MTLo>; Radley Balko, "Texas Police Hit Organic Farm With Massive SWAT Raid," *Huffington Post*, 15 August 2013, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/texas-swat-team-conducts-\\_n\\_3764951.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/texas-swat-team-conducts-_n_3764951.html).

<sup>30</sup> Jack Douglas Jr. and Jason Allen, "Controversial Group Leader Denies Fringe Ties," CBS 11 News, 14 November 2016, <http://dfw.cbslocal.com/2016/11/14/controversial-group-leader-denies-fringe-ties/>; Sarah Angle, "Drinking the Kool-Aid at the Garden of Eden," *Texas Observer*, 13 November 2017, <https://www.texasobserver.org/drinking-the-kool-aid-at-the-garden-of-eden/>.

<sup>31</sup> "GoE Now For Sale," The Garden of Eden, <https://www.intothegardenofeden.com/eden-2-0>, accessed 25 May 2018. A press release on 3 June 2018 notified supporters that Quinn Eaker had been stabbed by a homeless man after an altercation between the two at the Garden of Eden, see "Garden of Eden Founder Quinn Eaker Stabbed Multiple Times On His Own Land," Steemit, <https://steemit.com/news/@truthproductions/garden-of-eden-founder-quinn-eaker-stabbed-multiple-times-on-his-own-land>, accessed 24 August 2018. The sale of the land preceded this event; however, the move added urgency as Eaker was arrested after the incident, and the press release states that their resources are now solely aimed at releasing Eaker from jail and fighting the charges against him,

which they denounce as “appalling and unjustified.” The only publicly available report from the Arlington Police Department for that date concerning Quinn Eaker states that Sara Miller reported that Eaker was a victim of theft of \$200 when a “known male took items from a trailer without the effective consent of the owner.”

<sup>32</sup> Quinn Eaker, “Preparation for Fasting, Insight and Wisdom,” YouTube, 19 Dec. 2013, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqBjFV889s>.

<sup>33</sup> Quinn Eaker, “Fasting,” New Paradigm Eden, 21 January 2014, <https://newparadigmeden.wordpress.com/2014/01/21/fasting/#more-309>.

<sup>34</sup> Janet Marchant, “About Bentinho Massaro,” Bentinho Massaro, <https://www.bentinhomassaro.com/biography/>, accessed 25 May 2018.

<sup>35</sup> Marissa Ginty, “Bentinho Massaro. Health: It’s Not About What You Eat,” YouTube, 12 June 2016, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqDRiWGFzIU>.

<sup>36</sup> The first Sedona retreat was held in October of that year, called “the Eye of the Vortex.”

<sup>37</sup> “The Sedona Experiment,” <http://www.sedonaexperiment.com/>, accessed 25 May 2018. The Master Fast System is run by a separate corporation, offering fasting protocols through a private membership club, “Master Fast System,” <http://masterfastsystem.com/>, accessed 25 May 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Be Scofield, “Tech Bro Guru: Inside the Sedona Cult of Bentinho Massaro,” *Medium*, 1 December 2017, <https://medium.com/@bescofield/tech-bro-guru-inside-the-sedona-cult-of-bentinho-massaro-a56314f830ef>, accessed 28 May 2018 [content no longer available]; Be Scofield, “Tech Bro Guru: Behind the Scenes,” *Medium*, 28 December 2017, <https://medium.com/@bescofield/tech-bro-guru-behind-the-scenes-2d832e199cab>, accessed 28 May 2018 [content no longer available].

<sup>39</sup> “Our First Official Response to the Cult Accusations,” Bentinho Massaro, 3 December 2017, <https://www.bentinhomassaro.com/read/our-first-official-response-to-the-cult-accusations>, accessed 28 May 2018 [content no longer available]; Alexander Vera, “Cult Mania: Inside the Attack on Bentinho Massaro,” parts 1 and 2, *Medium*, 29 January 2018, <https://medium.com/@avera.media/cult-mania-inside-the-attack-on-bentinho-massaro-part-1-881b5628b89a> and <https://medium.com/@avera.media/cult-mania-inside-the-attack-on-bentinho-massaro-part-2-3e4409de46b6>, accessed 22 April 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Crockford, “How Do You Know When You’re in a Cult,” 106. The group has since moved to Tubac, in southern Arizona.

<sup>41</sup> Alden Woods, “Bentinho Massaro’s Sedona Experiment: How the Search for Enlightenment Led to a Digital Cult,” *The Republic*, 10 May 2018, <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-best-reads/2018/05/09/bentinho-massaro-sedona-experiment-how-search-enlightenment-led-digital-cult/487923002/?from=new-cookie>. The officers were likely alluding to a previous incident in which a participant of a Dahn Yoga retreat died in Sedona while hiking with rocks in her backpack in the desert heat.

<sup>42</sup> Email announcement to mailing list from [contact@bentinhomassaro.com](mailto:contact@bentinhomassaro.com), 14 May 2018.

<sup>43</sup> “The Keys to Gaia - Thank You, but Thank You No More,” Bentinho Massaro, 14 May 2018, [https://www.bentinhomassaro.com/read/ten-years-and-two-billion-dollars?mc\\_cid=965d524834&mc\\_eid=ea51b025c7](https://www.bentinhomassaro.com/read/ten-years-and-two-billion-dollars?mc_cid=965d524834&mc_eid=ea51b025c7).

<sup>44</sup> Eugene V. Gallagher, *The New Religious Movements Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), 102–116; Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Versluis, *American Gurus: From American Transcendentalism to New Age Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2–5.

<sup>46</sup> Versluis, *American Gurus*, 229.

<sup>47</sup> Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 27–29.

<sup>49</sup> There are many examples of this occurring in relations between new religious movements and their surrounding communities, and it is particularly acute when children are involved. NRMs are often portrayed as unhealthy environments for children, they are investigated for child abuse allegations, they are blamed for cases of family breakdown and used as negative testimony in custody cases, see Amanda Van Eck Duymaer Van Twist, *Perfect Children: Growing Up on the Religious Fringe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3–101.

<sup>50</sup> Carsten, “The Substance of Kinship,” 224.

<sup>51</sup> Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 59; Benjamin D. Zablocki, *The Joyful Community: An Account of the Bruderhof, a Communal Movement Now in Its Third Generation* (Baltimore: Penguin Books 1971), 38–39.

<sup>53</sup> Harvey, *Food, Sex and Strangers*, 101.