Hope, Profit and Collective Contemplative Practices for Peace: An Exploratory Study
by Rev. Dr. Margo Ruark

I. ABSTRACT

Using the Social DNA hypothesis as developed by Pentland (1) and evidence from the ethnographic data spanning 10,000 years (2), we understand that collective contemplative peace practices affirm both the social need for community and spiritual need to connect with something larger than one's self. An exploratory study was conducted to test the hypothesis among religious educators. An online survey tool was designed to measure key motivators. The increase in collective practices for peace led by spiritual entrepreneurs presents a new set of motivators. Being a "true believer" was the key motivator in the sample who also indicated that more entrepreneurial skills-building would greatly empower them to be more impactful peacemakers.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Question: What is driving the increase in collective contemplative practice - hope or profit? Are there overlooked opportunities for religious educators to further impact peace in their communities?

B. Literature: Contemplative peace practices are on the rise in a variety of settings creating changes in how services are marketed, delivered and priced.
   1. Public schools (3)
   2. Big events (4)
   3. Lifestyle choice (5)
   4. Academic research (6)
   5. Social change activism (7)

C. Why is this research important? The research identified:
   1. Motivators for leading contemplative group practices
   2. Influx of entrepreneurial motivations
   3. Strengths and weaknesses of religious educators in changing marketplace
   4. Opportunities for religious educators to expand their role as peacemakers

III. Methods

A. Online survey explored values, beliefs and motivations of religious educators.

B. Secondary data on marketplace changes was incorporated

IV. Selection Criteria

A. Participants recruited from interest group pages on social media and email list

B. Participants self-selected participation based on meeting BOTH the following:
   1. Are active religious educators (been teaching in the last two years); AND
   2. Facilitate contemplative peace practices with groups of two or more.

V. Results

A. Key measures:
   1. Results confirm ethnographic data and the Social DNA hypothesis.
   2. Basis of motivation is 34% spirit driven, 24% social, 20% emotional, 12% entrepreneurial and 10% egocentric.
B. Observations:
   1. 84% of participants rated themselves competent or very competent to teach collective peace practices
   2. Key strengths are social media savvy and willingness to continually learn
C. Limitations:
   1. Participants self-selected through public notices.
   2. Final sample set of 25 is less than anticipated.
   3. Incorporating secondary data limits findings to an exploratory study.
D. Graphics: Three charts- motivations; ongoing learning; correlating education to peace
E. Opportunities identified:
   1. Religious educators desire more entrepreneurial skills building.
   2. Collective practice and the spirituality of the future.

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VII. Literature Cited
HOPE, PROFIT AND COLLECTIVE CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES FOR PEACE:
RESULTS FROM AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
Abstract

Collective contemplative practices to effect a change in the human condition have been showing up in the ethnographic data over 10,000 years in a wide variety of forms. Using the Social DNA hypothesis as developed by Pentland, the motivations to engage in collective practices would arise from both the social needs for harmony, peace and community and spiritual needs to connect with something larger than one's self. In addition, neuroscience has discovered the active structures of the human brain that support collective contemplative practice as part of our physical DNA, if not the mental and spiritual basis of civilization. When seen through the lens of hope, collective contemplative peace practices offer essential sustenance for current and future generations.

In recent years, however, another motivation has overtly shown itself - entrepreneurial opportunity for innovation and financial sustainability. Are the entrepreneurial motivations of new entrants into the spiritual marketplace a threat to hope? Or are they a healthy injection of new ideas and approaches that just might work? Could opportunities for religious educators be identified to further impact conditions towards harmony and peace in communities?

An exploratory study was conducted to test the Social DNA hypothesis in the context of religious educators' motivations to lead contemplative group practice for the specific intention of peace. Analysis was also conducted to identify opportunities for religious educators in light of the entrance of spiritual entrepreneurs into the marketplace. Overall, study results confirmed the ethnographic data and the Social DNA hypothesis that the motivations of religious educators are primarily spirit- or social-driven. In order to be more effective, respondents also indicated a need for more entrepreneurial skills-building. The opportunity to offer more entrepreneurial skills building is discussed along with observations regarding the spirituality of the future.

Review of the Literature

In her overview of collective meditation, Ruark documents and summarizes over four dozen religious and secular collective contemplative practices. These practices, which vary widely from seated silent meditation to high-spirited dancing with loud music and chanting have been part and parcel of human culture since the beginning of recorded history, and span the world's major religions. The common denominator in all this human contemplative activity is the spirit- and social driven motivations behind it.

In the last ten years, studies indicate that contemplative peace practices are on the rise in a variety of new contexts. Researchers in Chicago, for example have provided both qualitative and quantitative evidence of the benefits of incorporating peace education (aka emotional and

According to Durlak, social and emotional learning that includes contemplative group practices develops five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. School-based peace education helps students succeed not only academically, but personally as well.

Large scale contemplative public events have received recent media attention, because they either a) provide a social component or b) feature an 'on demand' online approach that appeals to the millennial generation. Contemplative collective practice is now seen as part of a lifestyle choice, similar to choosing to be a vegetarian, as evidenced by designer "meditation bars" cropping up in major metropolitan areas.

The body of knowledge on the benefits of collective practices on society has grown significantly since the first studies were published by the Transcendental Meditation organization in the 1980s-90s. A recent Google search of "academic studies of meditation" yielded 265,000 results, demonstrating that we now have more robust support of the power of meditation on groups and individuals. Brain scan technology such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and EEG devices (electroencephalogram) that measure brain wave activity support the theory that consciousness, thoughts, and prayers actually have an impact outside of the brain.

Of significance to religious educators is the resurgence of collective practices aimed at social change that are powered by entrepreneurial motivations and crowd-sourced funding. Peace Centers International, Inc. for example, an Illinois nonprofit organization, promotes a spirituality based "social enterprise" model to amplify peace on the local level. Others, like the California based Subtle Activism movement, use a consciousness-based approach that affirms the power of global meditation to support social and planetary transformation. Similarly, the "Global Coherence" theory espoused by The HeartMath Institute focuses heavily on training facilitators regardless of spiritual path. Other entrepreneurial initiatives embrace a reality TV approach, live-streaming the activities of meditators at the front lines of conflicted areas.
These spiritual entrepreneurs have not all necessarily trained previously as religious educators or clergy. Those that are not previously trained come from an assorted background as motivational speakers, doctors, neuroscientists, political activists, internet marketers, lawyers, musicians, filmmakers, and others who see growth opportunity in the spiritual marketplace.

Spirituality is a $114 billion industry in the US - and that only accounts for $85 billion in religious giving, $27 billion for all things yoga, and $1 billion for meditation. All that cash floating around makes Spirituality a profitable industry that is attracting more new entrants looking for a piece of the pie. Making it even more attractive are its low barriers to entry – the initial capital investment is negligible; there are no required economies of scale, no standardized products or services, and no relevant advantages gained from location. With the entrance of spiritual entrepreneurs, we are therefore bound to witness changes to existing service quality of meditation and spiritual education programs, a plethora of new web-based delivery systems and new pricing standards.

What is driving the increase in collective contemplative practice - hope or profit? With growing competition in the spiritual marketplace for the hearts, minds and wallets of spiritual seekers, and the shift away from the church as the leading supplier of spiritual education it behooves religious educators to examine the drivers as well as the value that we bring. By doing so, we can uncover the strengths and weaknesses religious educators encounter in the changing marketplace as we also identify opportunities to expand capacity to create positive change in our communities.

**Methods**

In addition to the ethnographic and secondary data that had been gathered and summarized over the last three years, a web-based survey tool was developed. The purpose of this tool was to gather data on values, beliefs and motivations of facilitators of contemplative group peace practices for testing the hypothesis.

Participants were recruited from interest group pages on social media and from targeted email lists. Participants self-selected participation based on meeting BOTH the following criteria:

1. Are active religious educators (been teaching in the last two years); AND
2. Facilitate contemplative peace practices with groups of two or more.

A total of 25 participants met both these criteria and were included in the study. Demographic data were also collected.

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Results

Demographic summary

Participants typically had six or more years teaching contemplative group practices and 14% had 1-5 years experience. No participants in the study had less than one year experience. More than half (57%) of participants indicated they facilitated contemplative group practice upon invitation only. The remaining replies were equally divided between a few times per year, once a month, and once a week. The majority of participants (82%) led groups of primarily middle-aged members with 18% leading groups of persons under 30 years of age. The majority of facilitators (63%) were themselves between ages 60-69 with the remaining groups being equally divided between persons in their 40s, 50s and 70s.

Participants in this study are themselves avid ongoing learners and practitioners of collective contemplative practice. Table 1 below indicates the number of activities related to contemplative group peace practices participants attended on their own volition in the last two years. Everyone in the study had read a book pertaining to group contemplative practice, 75% had walked a labyrinth with others, and 63% had attended another group's practice that was different from their own.

Table 1: Mark the activities you have attended in the last two years related to collective contemplative peace practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read a book</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walked a labyrinth</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried another groups' peace practice different from my own</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logged on to a webinar or podcast</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in a global synchronized online meditation</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joined a Facebook or Meet-Up group</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended an event featuring a spiritual celebrity</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended an informational lecture</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in Big gathering of 1,000 people or more</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 compares the study sample to the social media habits of the general population. Overall, participants are social media savvy where social media usage is more than double that of the normal population – 49% of the adults online say they do not use social media compared to 22% of our study sample. The study sample is leveraging Facebook, Twitter and You Tube at about the same rate as the normal adult online population. Over half of the study sample (56%) author E-blasts connecting to social media. Approximately one fifth are active bloggers, which is about twice the rate of the online adult population. Google Plus users among our study sample are ten times that of the adult online population. Eleven percent of the group creates podcasts or

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webinars, and utilizes, Instagram or LinkedIn. No one in the study sample subscribed to other popular social media as MeetUp, Pinterest, Tumblr, Reddit, Flickr or Vine.

Table 2: Which social media do you use to get the word out about your group?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Study sample</th>
<th>All online adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-blasts (email newsletter)</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogging</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube Channel</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating podcasts</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosting webinars</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Plus</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't use social media</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group peace practices taught

It was important to determine the diversity of situations facilitators use their skills. Eighty-eight percent of respondents teach some form of seated collective meditation; 52% facilitate prayer groups for peace and 36% facilitate group mindfulness based programs. At the lower end of the scale were leading peace marches involving chanting (4%), and yoga (4%). Write-in comments included visioning practices for peace, restorative justice circles, and a book study group. A complete answer set is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Group peace practices taught
Sources of Training

Respondents were asked where they received their training to lead collective peace practices. Sixty-six percent of participants indicated there was more than one place they received training. Of those answering with just one source of training, the responses were equally divided between "Ministerial school or seminary" and "I have no special training."

Half of all respondents indicated their primary source of training was seminary or ministerial school. One third received their primary training from a workshop or spa type program, and 28% indicated they received most of their training through their denomination or through their professional association. Equally many indicated they received their training from the Internet as indicated they were trained in a college undergraduate program. Only 4% responded to the question "I wish I had more training." Figure 2 shows the complete answer set.

Figure 2: Where did you train to lead collective meditation for peace?

Setting

As can be seen in Figure 3 below, more often than not collective peace practices are held in conjunction with a worship service or larger gathering of seekers. This provides an excellent opportunity for peace meditators to become integrated into the greater spiritual community, if they are not already affiliated.
Figure 3: How often is your group meditation practice held in conjunction with a worship service or other larger gathering?

Confidence

Overall, religious educators are very confident in their skills to facilitate group peace practices as shown in Figure 4; 84% rated themselves competent to teach collective meditation for peace; 16% consider themselves beginners. No one rated themselves as 'Poor' or 'Fair/Average'.

Figure 4: Confidence levels of religious educators to lead group contemplative peace practices.
Fees

The vast majority (80%) of respondents replied "No" to the question Do you charge a fee for your meditation group? This question generated the most free text comments of the entire survey with half of the respondents using the free text space to explain their answer. Write-in comments can be summarized in the following two camps:

- Of those that did charge for their groups, the fees ranged from $25 for a 3 hour seminar, to $15 to $20 for one hour sessions to $15 per 1 1/2-hour gathering
- Those that did not charge did not do so because they were either paid through their organization or they took up a love offering for the event instead of charging a fee.

Motivations

The key measurement of the survey is Why do you teach group contemplative peace practices? Prior to launching the survey, all responses were coded to aggregate to one of five major motivations: social, emotional, spiritual, entrepreneurial, and self-interest. Social motivation includes the search for community, making the world a better place, being of service to others, etc. Spiritual motivation is the extent to which participants cherish peace, "walk the walk," follow a calling or are motivated by their values and beliefs about peace. Emotional motivation is directed by the feelings, perceptions of being appreciated, or giving and receiving hope and inspiration. Egocentric motivation is based in self-interest or personal well being, or lifestyle choices. Entrepreneurial motivations include being drawn to the challenge of carving out a new niche, staking a claim in the marketplace, financial sustainability and so on.

Figure 5 shows the basis of motivation is 34% spirit-driven, 24% social, 20% emotional, 12% entrepreneurial and 10% egocentric. This presentation is consistent with the Social DNA hypothesis. Also consistent with the hypothesis are the top two spiritually motivated reasons given by sample: I am a true believer in the power of collective intelligence (60%), I practice meditation in my own life (56%). The third most common response, I want to help people (48%), is socially motivated.

Twenty eight percent of respondents offered free text comments. These pertained equally to the social and spiritual aspects:

- Desire to cherish peace.  
  *One must know oneself in order to experience Peace within. Meditation, prayer and contemplation are the perfect combination to get to know oneself.*
- Desire to serve God  
  *The Universe opens spaces and sends those to be with me, both individually and for groups.*
- Desire to uplift others and experience connectedness.  
  *[I am] constantly reminding others about peace and the benefits of uplifting the energy.  
  *To touch another's heart, and know how I touched their hearts.*

Table 3 shows all motivations in rank order.
Figure 5: Motivations by aggregate grouping

Table 3: Why do you teach group contemplative peace practices? By aggregate grouping – ranked from highest to lowest percentage of responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am a true believer in the power of collective intelligence.</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have practiced meditation in my own life</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to help people</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people seem to benefit from what I have to offer.</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is what I want to do</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I saw a need in the community for it</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is rewarding work for me personally</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know a lot about spiritual practice</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am gifted at holding space for people to go deep into contemplative practice</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To deepen my own practice</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a built in community for my own practice</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It complements the other classes and groups I facilitate.</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was asked to do it</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know a lot about peace</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People need hope and I give it to them</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have insights my group members do not have.</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel appreciated in this line of work</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a “niche market” that is trending in my area for this type of service</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need the money</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contribution

When asked whether the groups they led served the growth objectives of the host organization, religious educators deferred to their intuition or they did not know. The most
popular response is a personal perception of the facilitator as to "vibe," as opposed to a direct measure such as increases in attendance or revenues. Further, almost one fifth of respondents either did not know the answer or did not respond to the question. No one indicated "The group has negatively impacted the organization's reputation in the community." Or that "The group has created an unpleasant "vibe" within the organization." Table 4 shows responses in rank order from highest to lowest number of responses.

Twenty-six percent of respondents provided additional comments concerning the aim of this question, that is, whether the organization is there to serve the people or if the people are there to serve the organization's objectives.

- We do this to enrich others.
- We do this to create a safe space to de-stress
- It's not about the growth of the organization, but about the organization serving as a platform to further the spiritual attention to global matters via individual and group work.

Table 4: Perceived ways contemplative peace group contributes to host organization's growth objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By creating a more pleasant &quot;vibe&quot; within the organization.</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By attracting new people to the organization.</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By generating interest in the other activities of the organization</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By positively impacting the organization's reputation in the community</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By generating additional revenue for the organization</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group has made no noticeable contribution to growth of the organization.</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is Training the Masses the Solution to World Peace?

Among "true believers," who are avid learners themselves, is there a comparable conviction for training as many people as possible in collective peace practices? Do religious educators think what they have to offer provides a plausible solution for world peace? As shown in Figure 6, there was a prevalence of disagreement (56%) and strong ambivalence (24%) of whether or not it does.
Opportunities

Finally, religious educators were asked to indicate which areas they would benefit as leaders of contemplative group practices from more training. The top skills selected by participants had little to do with supporting, extending or fortifying the "true believer" values indicated in Table 3. Rather, the top choices were entrepreneurial in nature, or for personal enrichment. As shown in Table 5, the top need identified was training in how to organize and mobilize people to come together for peace (54%), followed by up-leveling the quality of one's own spiritual practice (33%), and effective marketing (33%).

One third of respondents offered other comments, mostly re-iterating their confidence, competence, and satisfaction in their leadership abilities:

- I feel quite satisfied with the work…
- I feel pretty competent in these areas
- I am really comfortable in leading group contemplative practices

Those that did offer areas that they would be interested in learning more about included:

- More Mindfulness training as a non-secular adjunct to spiritual principle and practice.
- Deeper listening skills.

Table 5: Religious educators indicate where more training would be beneficial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizing and mobilizing people to come together for peace</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-leveling the quality of my own spiritual practice and level</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective marketing</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public speaking</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading online practices</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group dynamics</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate communication skills</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading transformational workshops</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The science behind collective intelligence</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putting together an effective meditation script or prayer</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice teaching</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress management skills</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic group facilitation skills</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

While results confirmed the ethnographic data and the Social DNA hypothesis, there were some clear limitations on the study. First, the sample is not a representative cross-section of the universe of religious educators. The participants self-selected through public notices on social media and through emails to selected mailing lists. Because the survey was launched on social media, the survey delivery mechanism itself excluded those who do not use social media. Second, the age range of participants being 40 years or older may not be representative of the field. It would have been desirable to have more input from participants under age 40. Third, the sample set of 25 qualified respondents is less than anticipated. While many a breakthrough study have involved fewer subjects, it is difficult to draw conclusions based on a sample size this small. Finally, incorporating secondary data into the design and analysis of the research limits the findings to an exploratory study.

The two key strengths identified among religious educators in the study were that of social media literacy and willingness to coordinate community efforts. On the whole, study participants have twice the propensity to leverage social media to market their programs and services as their peers in the general population. Willingness to coordinate community efforts was noteworthy. Sixty seven percent either agreed or strongly agreed that they are interested in coordinating their peace practices with other groups in their geographic area, even if very different from their own. Sixty three percent had actually already visited other groups in the last two years who had practices very different from their own. This willingness to reach out is a significant advantage to galvanize community involvement in peace initiatives vis-a-vis entrepreneurs who may have small networks or limited investor funds.

It would be worthwhile to further explore the question in a focus group or open discussion setting: *If the world needs peace education are religious educators equipped for the job?* In this regard, the following issues arose worthy of discussion. The first issue is that 57% of trained religious educators wait for the invitation to do so. Why is that? The second issue is the 80% refusal to require a fee for their services. Is this a sustainable model? Finally, the disagreement and ambivalence over people needing training to experience peace was unexpected considering the "true believer" contingent. Why weren't more professional religious educators supportive of the idea that education is the way to more peace in the world? If 84% of
participants rated themselves competent or very competent to teach collective meditation, then why are the needs for training so many and varied?

Several conclusions might be drawn here:

A. *Other people don't need to learn peace, but I need to learn more.*

B. *I would follow my curiosity for more peace training for personal growth, but not to extend to the larger community.*

C. *I am confident I am a good peace educator, but I don't know what to do with it.*

Of the three options, Option C might bring us closer to answering the question of whether hope or profit is driving the renewed interest in collective contemplative practices. In the shifting landscape of the "nones," the "dones," and the millennials, religious educators have their work cut out for them. Since the data show that educators' desire for more training leans heavily toward *entrepreneurial skills building,* perhaps the best answer is both hope and profit.

**The Spirituality of the Future**

Author David Bryce Yaden, a PhD Student in Psychology at The University of Pennsylvania, paints an optimistic picture of the spirituality of the future that includes both hope and profit. Instead of asking the question *How can we get more people into the church pews?* the question becomes *How will current trends eventually transform spiritual practice?* As part of our social and physical DNA, the desire to come together and pray for peace doesn't go away just because of marketplace changes.

We will see more seeking and sharing of spiritual experiences in the future. Beyond feeling good or 'blissing out' at the individual level, we will feel more compelled to transform these experiences into service. Volunteering for example will be as important as going away on that meditation retreat. Service opens the door to being more socially inclusive and respectful for the values we share with others, as well as those that are different from our own. We will also see more inclusion in the collective spirituality of the future.

With more scientific studies showing the benefits of spirituality, meditation, especially group prayer and other collective contemplative practices, it is entirely possible that mental health professionals will soon be prescribing "go have a spiritual experience" to their patients rather than "take this pill."

Finally, perhaps we can begin to reframe our collective peace practices as a public service to intentionally create more peaceful harmonious communities for all. Just as blood donors give voluntarily to help complete strangers, those who gather together to meditate for peace become PeaceDonors. And like blood donors, PeaceDonors can rest assured that what is given on behalf of others by nature and without much effort on our part always replenishes itself.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


