A man with dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and tan pants, sits cross-legged on a city sidewalk with his eyes closed in meditation. The background is a busy urban street with tall buildings, a street sign for 'Howe St', and blurred figures of pedestrians. The overall tone is contemplative and serene amidst a modern city environment.

# Spirituality at Work

Three Vancouver professionals define what it means to be spiritual in the workplace, fusing Eastern theologies with modern occupations.

STORY **ANTHONY NERADA**

PHOTOS **FRANCIS GARRUCHO**

It was an epic battle between good and evil, and yet the young prince, Siddhartha Gautama, did not raise a finger against Mara, the wicked one, casting chaotic storms and temptations at him. Instead, Gautama sat beneath an ancient bodhi tree, deep in meditation on his path to understanding suffering. He placed his right hand upon the Earth to witness his defiance of Mara. It was then, underneath that sacred fig tree during a full moon in May, that Siddhartha Gautama became Buddha, 'the enlightened one,' and Buddhism was born.

According to the most recent census on religion, the majority of Canadians ages 15 to 29 and nearly 60 per cent of citizens in British Columbia have no religious affiliation or have not attended a religious service in the past year. In a world becoming

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Kai-Lin Yang helps clients find peace in the Vancouver area every day. With a background in Integral Psychology, Yang incorporates both cognitive therapy and Buddhist philosophies into his practice.

more secular each day, many people try to incorporate spirituality into their daily lives, looking to reconnect with their holy selves. Buddhism has progressed outside the traditional confines of temple walls. Sprouting in the most unlikely of places throughout Vancouver, Buddhism has become more of a way of life than a religion. A psychologist, dance teacher, and restaurant owner would normally have little in common, but throw in the teachings of an ancient prophet, and you have a modern twist on religion.

Sporting hemp-based clothing and emerald green Crocs, Kai-Lin Yang walks through life with Buddhism close to his heart. A life coach and psychotherapist with an MA in Integral Counseling Psychology and a Registered Clinical Counselor since 2005, Yang has established practices in both Vancouver and Burnaby. Born in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, Yang has incorporated Buddhist and Taoist teachings into his practice and uses self-help principles to motivate his clients to realize their potential.

Yang sits back in his chair, hands gently resting on his lap as he contemplates every question asked. After earning an associate degree in engineering, Yang began to doubt his Taoist and Buddhist upbringing and asked himself where he fit in the world. "When I was younger, I followed what my mom believed, but I didn't know what I was doing. It was very hard for me to figure out what it was all about." After enrolling at the California Institute of Integral Studies, Yang knew he had found his calling. "In my program, I relearned and reconnected with my faith and was able to create my own definition of what it meant to be spiritual." Very much a fusion of Western and Eastern traditions, Yang credits his education in Integral Psychology as "a necessary path to understand the meaning of life."

Yang works with people of all ages and learns from each one of them. "Most of my clients suffer from anxiety, depression, and relationship issues. I tend to focus a lot on emotions because they connect

with our neural system, our bodies, and our memories. When emotions become too intense, they become the master and we become the dog." However, Yang stresses the importance of love and compassion. "Buddha's Ultimate Truth is that everything changes and there is only now. The other thing that goes hand in hand with change is that, when it happens, love and compassion become a part of it."

When asked about the Tibetan amulet hanging from his neck, Yang rubs it as if for good luck. "This was given to me from a friend to ward off evil demons inside, to get rid of that voice that always judges and criticizes us," he says. "I often tell my clients that if they want to live a happier life, they have to, no matter what, not let that voice in their head take over."

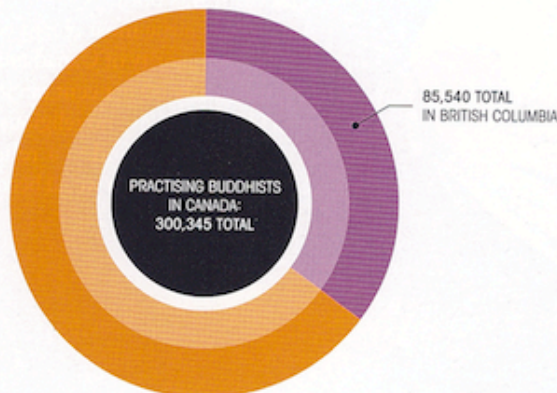
Kai-Lin Yang is someone who found his connection to spirituality amid the clamour of the city. While helping his clients achieve a happier life, he established his place in the world with a contemporary take on divinity.

Bettina Rothe is a mother of two with rich auburn hair and a warm smile. Her place of worship is the dance floor. There she transcends rigid ways of thinking and expresses her individuality and freedom through the movement of her body.

Raised just minutes from the Berlin Wall in Germany, Rothe grew up hardwired for success. "My upbringing was very academic, very political. My father was from East Germany and both of my parents were children of the war. I grew up as a go-getter. You go figure out the system and make the system work for you. From a very young age I was programmed to achieve, and that life just didn't work for me."

After studying Psychology, Rothe traveled to California to further her studies at Esalen Institute, a community and retreat center focusing on the union between psychology and spirituality. Here she met the late Gabrielle Roth, a teacher she credits for changing her life. "Gabrielle believed that spirituality is not something we do in the closet; it is something we live and breathe

*I often tell my clients that if they want to live a happier life, they have to, no matter what, not let that voice in their head take over.*



Buddhism has come a long way since Gautama chose to walk away from a life full of luxury to discover the road to human happiness. Over 300 million people identify themselves as Buddhist, making it one of the largest religions in the world behind Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Countries with the largest national Buddhist populations

include China, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Buddhism has found ground in Canada, according to reports from the 2001 census by Statistics Canada, which stated 300,345 people are practising Buddhists in the country, or roughly one per cent of the population. Of that small group, 85,540 live in British Columbia.