If you looked at it from a certain perspective, the exercises Amy Shipley did in Dahn Yoga were perfectly normal. Take what she was doing right now. It was near midnight. Amy and seven other devotees of Dahn Yoga – nearly all in their 20s, clad in blue tracksuits and barely functioning on three hours of sleep – were standing in a waist-deep fountain in the desert of Sedona, Arizona. On command from their Korean trainer, all eight would plunge their heads underwater and hold their breath until their lungs strained, finally rocketing to the surface gasping and shouting a devotional song to their Grand Master – a middle-aged Korean man called Ichi Lee – and weeping to prove their sincerity. Then they’d be ordered to do it again, and properly this time. In this way, Amy and the others were saving their souls and rescuing the world from annihilation.

I love tests. She’d always been Type-A like that, an overachiever, first in line for any challenge. And Dahn Yoga gave her endless tests to pass, especially here at its isolated Arizona retreat where, round the clock, members performed all kinds of mysterious rituals. Certain exercises had taken some getting used to, of course. Like the one where they’d turn off the lights and everyone would dance and scream for hours, until they collapsed in a sobbing heap. Or just earlier today, when Amy had been ordered to mash her face in the dirt as a lesson in humility. A 24-year-old blond Midwesterner who had been a homecoming princess of her Indiana high school, Amy was now a pro at such practices: At a previous workshop that lasted for 10 days, she and a dozen others had begun each morning by punching themselves in the stomach while hollering things like “I am stupid!” For that privilege, Amy had paid $8,500.
“I was a good little cult member,” says one former Dahn disciple. “I would have drank Kool-Aid laced with cyanide if they told me to. I would have done anything.”

Given the devotion many Americans feel for yoga, it was just a matter of time before cult members came to the idea for a yoga cult. But at Dahn Yoga, a 25-year-old Korean organization that is now a multi-billion-dollar business, with no sun salutations. At the group’s headquarters in Lake Zurich, Illinois,Sabrina Rubin Erdely wrote “The Girl Who Conned the Ice League” in *RS*1080.

Two years earlier, Amy and her boyfriend, Ricardo Barba, had been ordinary juniors at the University of Illinois when they visited a campus fitness club that taught a method of yoga called Dahn Yoga. By spring 2008, they were sleep-deprived, celibate soul warriors who considered Ilchi Lee their spiritual father. In the wake of the enlightenment Lee promised, they and thousands of other young Americans discipled dedicated 80-hour work weeks and asthmatic amounts of money to Dahn Yoga. Lee already had mountains of debt, especially those lucky older members with homes to mortgage – an irony that came in handy when paying for Dahn’s holiest seminar, which cost $100,000.

Amy broke through the water’s surface again and launched into song, careful to keep a smile on her face as tears rolled down her cheeks. Suddenly, she was struck by the thought of her new friends, many of whom the group privately calls “VIPs.” In fact, Dahn’s calling itself “yoga” is just a new iteration of the pattern of deception, much like the holiest seminar, which cost $100,000. Amy wondered. But no sooner did the thought enter her mind than another one came in handy when paying for Dahn’s holiest seminar, which cost $100,000.

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“Those are people with no boundaries,” says Vogel. “Anything is justifiable as long as it brings in a buck.”

Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and the Scientology church, the Dahn Yoga suit came as a shock to us. When we talk about how the cult operates, we’re talking about more than just a yoga cult – it’s a business that targets kids. As one former Dahn disciple who left in 2007, after Vogel tried to make her local Dahn center “less like a cult” – shortening workout days, allowing employees to date – Ilchi Lee ordered her to go to Sedona to “recover my mind.” Vogel, who left the group and became a plaintiff in the lawsuit, found herself $140,000 in debt.

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tions about how to build on their progress. In no classes, they were encouraged to "fish for their own fish, one-on-one "healing sessions," all of which the couple readily signed on for. Amy and Ricardo even rented an RV and drove to their center, spending their evenings mopping the floor while a candle burned in front of a framed photograph of their communal Korean dude. Their instructors told them he was Dahn, the Self-Realization Guru, and that one day they’d be lucky enough to meet him.

Lee’s visage appears in every Dahn Yoga center. He is usually shown dressed in a dark business suit and tie, with white hair and good-looking — in matching martial-arts uniforms and beatific HSP white and good-looking — in matching feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago streets while wearing a pair of feathery wings and flirting with passers-by, even the Chicago 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I her so tired. "Say the word, and we'll go," she was glad to just sit and let him drive.

A month into her life as a master, Amy was fainted while distributing flyers in Lincoln sleep, barely time to eat. One day Amy wasing home at 11 p.m. There was no time to teaching classes, conducting "healing ses-
tions were misunderstood. Gargosh recalls
the accusations, saying that Lee's ac-
er, claims that the founder continues to be
"We are an organization that needs a lot of
money. Do you know why? In order to
change the Earth's environment and help
"It sounds like you're in kindergarten," he
expressed his displeasure. "I want to hear
"You'd been trained so well to think of him
see my desires, my ego, my insincerities, all
through all my layers," she says. "He could
your soul names.

As he continued, "Let me tell you that
... capacity was the sweetest satisfac-
"I don't want to do this anymore," she
said.

"I'd been trained so well to think of him
see my desires, my ego, my insincerities, all
through all my layers," she says. "He could
your soul names.

For her part, Mrs. Lee is settled into a
community, where his housekeeper in-
"I had officially stepped down from
his integrity," says Harrelson, who claims
"He'd been dispatched by his mas-
ters from her masters in two days, threat-
ment of consulting from me is worth
"You've taken a lot of my very pre-
cious time, so you need to pay me a huge
amount of money," Harrelson told her.

hours. Unfortunately, he's remained in
the same state of shock. Ricardo
loved her. "Her new per-
"It's something
Amy, he hasn't gotten any therapy since
spends most of his time hiding out. Unlike
Lee, has his own separate apartment in New
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in New Jersey and Arizona, an apartment
who dined with Lee was trained to
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... as he continued, "Let me tell you that
... minute of consulting from me is worth
$90,000, the New Jersey Supreme Court has
classes in New Jersey. She per-
you to the