

her life. "So if we were talking about strength that month, I'd tell a story about a time I had to be strong, like through my miscarriage," she explained to me in an interview. "Then the incantations would say, 'I can do hard things. I am better than before. I am born to drive. I'm glad I'm alive!'" She spits a sequence of rhyming mantras like spoken word poetry.

At first, Moreno's students rolled their eyes at the idea of "incantations." The tough-as-nails Manhattanites weren't interested in a talk therapy session; they wanted their asses kicked. Wasn't getting shouted at about their muffin tops the only way to achieve that? Natalia was one of those world-weary New York trainees—that is, until a few weeks in, when she found herself earnestly shouting "My body is my temple. I am the keeper of my health. I am love in action. All is well" at every intenSati class she could make time for. By then, she was a convert.

SoulCycle, too, concocts specific movement-language pairings to metaphorically catapult riders toward their dreams. Every SoulCycle "journey" follows a similar course, its climax falling on a strenuous "hills" odyssey narrated by a hair-raising sermon. Riders turn up their bikes' resistance and climb with all their might to the symbolic finish line as their instructor douses them in verbal inspiration. SoulCycle instructors are trained to wait for these moments, when students are so physically beat that they'll be more receptive to kernels of spirituality, to deliver their best lines.

One SoulCycle star known far and wide for her "hills" monologues was Los Angeles-based Angela Manuel-Davis, Beyoncé and Oprah's Spin instructor of choice. A proud evan-

gelical Christian, Manuel-Davis wielded explicitly religious verbiage on the bike—talk of genesis, angels, and miracles. “‘Enthusiasm’ comes from the Greek word *enthous*, which means ‘in God,’” she’d preach, thrusting her arms toward the heavens. “Divine inspiration. Divine inspiration. I want you to be enthusiastic and excited . . . about this opportunity to close the gap between where you are in your life and where you were called, created, and intended to be. . . . Every single one of you was created in purpose. on purpose, for a purpose.” With a deep understanding of religious speech’s performative power, Manuel-Davis told audiences, “Life and death is in the power of the tongue. You have the ability to unlock somebody’s greatness by your words . . . not only to the people in your life, but to yourself. You are who you say you are.”

These are some hard-core evangelical buzzwords, but Manuel-Davis attested she wasn’t using them to create insiders and outsiders, or to make others conform to her ideology. “I give people room to make it about what they need,” she told Harvard Divinity School. “This is about individual faith and spirituality.” Those who weren’t feeling it didn’t have to take Manuel-Davis’s credo with them outside the studio, or even come back at all—but a whole lot of people did. Manuel-Davis’s classes were known to sell out within minutes.* “I

* Then in 2016, an attendee got injured in Manuel-Davis’s class and filed a lawsuit. To the devastation of her many acolytes, Manuel-Davis resigned from SoulCycle in 2019 to launch a boutique fitness cult of her own called AARMY, in partnership with another former SoulCycle idol named Akin Akman, whose loyal gaggle of fiendish riders were known as “Akin’s Army.”