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Ayurveda and Yoga Conference Highlights and The Integration of Ancient and Modern Science

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Introduction

The 11th International Conference on Ayurveda and Yoga was held at the Art of Living Retreat Center in Boone, NC from July 4th to 6th, 2014. Hosted jointly by AAPNA (Association of Ayurvedic Professionals of North America) and Simplified Kundalini Yoga (SKY) founded by Shri Vethathiri Maharishi (It was the second International Conference on Ancient Science for SKY [1]), the organizing committee consisted of Dr. Shekhar Annambhotla (President of AAPNA), Dr. Shanmugamurthy (Shan) Lakshmanan [Founder of the SKY USA, Research Scientist at Harvard Medical School, Vice-President for International Research at World Institute for Scientific Exploration (WISE) and the Chair and Research & Development Director of AAPNA] and Ashlesha Raut (Secretary of AAPNA). The 3-day event was attended by 470 people from all over the world; the audience comprised of several notable experts, scientists, scholars, leaders,

practitioners and volunteers. Featuring 7 keynote presentations, 15 general lectures, 30 workshops, live demonstrations, exhibits and sattvic vegetarian meals, the conference proved to be an effective forum to discuss and share scientific perspectives bridging ideologies of Ancient and Modern Science. The success of the conference can also be attributed to the presentations given by dignitaries such as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Dr. David Frawley, Yogi Amrit Desai, Dr. Shan Lakshmanan, Dr. John Reed, Yogini Shambhavi Chopra, Acharya Shunya Pratichi Mathur, Dr. Vivek Shanbhag and Dr. Suhas Kshirsagar.

As mentioned in Dr. Shekhar Annambhotla's welcome speech, AAPNA has been conducting the conferences since 2002, the year it was founded. The primary goals for this particular conference were:

- i) World-wide dissemination of information and awareness about Ayurveda and Yoga, especially in the West.
- ii) Connecting experts and professionals in the field to collaborate and thrive.
- iii) Functioning as a catalyst to narrow the gap between Ancient and Modern Science

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Conference Highlights

To begin with, the event was inaugurated by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar - humanitarian leader, spiritual teacher and an ambassador of Peace. His vision of engendering a world without stress or violence has connected millions of people across the globe through many service projects and courses conducted by Art of Living Foundation. In his inaugural speech, he applauded the organizing committee for marching towards its noble vision. He also asserted that *Ayurveda* is a time-tested system which was once acquired by the “*rishis*” after sitting in deep meditation and downloading the information from the Cosmos [2]. Not only did Sri Sri Ravi Shankar highlighted the significance and effectiveness of *Ayurveda* and Yoga, but he also encouraged modern researchers to continue reinventing the techniques followed by ancient Indian traditions. It is lucid that ancient science needs to be amalgamated with modern science to uplift the quality of human life; to facilitate that, he called out the experts in both the fields to conduct - research, scientific analysis and document the benefits and science behind *Ayurveda* and Yoga. He expressed, “Life needs to be taken with a holistic perspective. Americans should not be deprived of this wonderful system.” Another notable aspect of the conference was the nomination and appointment of Sri Sri Ravishankar in the National Advisory board to the World Institute for Scientific Exploration (WISE) by Dr. Shan Lakshmanan.

Gracing the event as the Guest of Honor was Dr. John Reed, Founder & President of World Institute for Scientific Exploration (WISE). Dr. Reed, a practicing physician from Baltimore and an affiliate of John Hopkins University elucidated the mission of WISE; he also elaborated on the steps taken by WISE to bring ancient science to the forefront, and explained about efforts to make it accessible to the common people in the West. He appealed to the audience to collaborate with WISE and promote research on *Ayurveda* and Ancient Indian Science. Following Dr. Reed’s speech, an awards ceremony was held. Nominated by Harvard University, the prestigious *Aryabhatta* Award was awarded to Dr. Shan Lakshmanan for his outstanding contribution to research in *Ayurveda*.

After the ceremony, Acharya David Frawley, director of the American Institute of *Vedic* Studies, teacher and practitioner of *Ayurvedic* medicine and *Vedic* astrology delivered a keynote presentation on Interrelationship & Continuity of *Veda*, *Raja Yoga* and *Ayurveda*. He adeptly explained the interrelationship and called out people to revive, share and integrate the teachings of the *Veda*, Yoga and *Ayurveda* to the modern world [3]. The next keynote speaker, Yogini Shambhavi Chopra, is considered to be one of the most prominent women teachers of various aspects of yoga such as *Bhakti Yoga*, *Jyotisha* (*Vedic Astrology*) and *Mantra Yoga*. In her keynote presentation on “*Yogic* Art of Restorative Healing”, she dexterously elucidated how one can use the inherent *Shakthi Power* within to attain bliss of well-being through *Vedic Upaya*, rituals, *mantra* and

meditation.

Yogi Amrit Desai, a forerunner in teaching yoga in the West, took on the topic of “*Yogic Healing*” [4]. He stressed that the purpose of *Ayurveda* is to restore *Dosha* balance in our bodies, which we label as good health; he also mentioned that this cannot be achieved in the field of duality. He explained how *Amrit Yoga* allows one not to fight but to go to edge. He requested everyone to look beyond their ego minds, dismantle their fears, worries and jealousy; that will enable one to retain a quintessential well-being. The following keynote presentation was by Acharya Shunya Pratchi Mathur, the current President of the California Association of *Ayurvedic* Medicine (CAAM). Elaborating on the topic of “*Ayurveda* Psychology - Invitation to Self-Mastery and Self Transformation” for an hour, she adroitly illustrated the Ancient Science of *Ayurvedic* Psychology –its core

philosophy, principles and practices based on *Vedic* Sciences. *Ayurveda* Psychology, as she defines, is more than maintaining a stable mental health; it is also about discovering the Self and Divine within. By studying *Ayurveda* Psychology, one will learn to introspect and awaken the inner psyche; he/she will not only be able to control emotions, but he/she will also be able to overcome mental delusions that hinder him/her from attaining the highest state of Consciousness (AAPNA, 2014).

Subsequently, Dr. Vivek Shanbhag - a licensed Naturopathic doctor, *Ayurvedic* Practitioner, Professor & Author, gave a comprehensive presentation about how “*Ayurveda* & Yoga are our User’s Manuals and Maintenance Schedule for Life.” According to him, *Ayurveda* and Yoga are fundamental to human life, just as maintenance schedules and manuals are essential for machines to operate. He elaborated this analogy by asserting that one needs to maintain a daily health routine as well as a seasonal health routine in order to obtain optimum health of the body, mind and soul. These routines are comprised of *Ayurvedic* approaches, such as maintaining a balanced diet, proper posture and exercise. In his speech, he presented 3 simple steps that will enable one to establish wellness in 3 weeks by following his prescribed daily 25 minute routine; he also exemplified how he applied these steps with his own family and friends. To conclude the keynote presentations, Dr. Suhas Kshirsagar, an eminent leader in the Ancient Science of *Ayurvedic* Medicine who has travelled worldwide to spread his knowledge of *Ayurveda*, had an impactful presentation on “*Ayurveda* and Yoga for Blissful Mind.” He clearly defined the aspects of holistic health and articulated about Mind-Body healing through *Ayurvedic* approaches. Dr. Suhas Kshirsagar also demonstrated ways to maintain health and well-being by integrating *Vedic* ideologies with modern methodologies.

Apart from the above-mentioned keynote presentations, the conference also hosted 15 general lectures. “*Ayurvedic* Approach to Pharmacogenomics” by Padmaja Mummineni. She introduced the concept of applying *Ayurveda* to Pharmacology

and Genomics. “Formless to Form and Form to Formless- Yoga Sub-atomical Transformation” was discussed by Dr. Shan Lakshmanan. Dr. Lakshmanan delivered the paradigm shift nature of *Ayurveda* and its connection to Ancient Origin Theory [5]. He emphasized the separation of religion from ancient science but keeping the spirituality intact based on the proposal he submitted to the Indian Government and World Leaders [6] “*Mantras - A Significant Chikitsa in Ayurveda*” was presented by Dhanada Kulkarni, who described the significance of *mantras*. “*Ayurvedic & Yoga Practitioners: How to Attract a Steady Flow of Clients, Without Having to Do As Much Marketing*” by Chen Yen. This was a very informative presentation as the audience learned alternate ways to lure in clientele. Dr. Jagdish Kohli talked about “Interconnected Perception- A way to Blissfulness & Enlightenment.” Explaining bliss to be a state of thoughtlessness, he elaborated on how the changing states of matter relate to the various states of human thought. He also highlighted on the importance of living in the moment. “*Ayurvedic Eugenics - Seeding for Optimal Health*” was approached by Dr. Ashlesha Raut who emphasized the health benefits of *Ayurveda*. Radjendirane Codandaramane addressed “The Art of *Karma Yoga - Desire Management*” [7] and he explained that *Karma Yoga* is a type of yoga where one’s pragmatic actions are purified and synchronized with nature to lead a healthy yogic life. This talk presented a case study on how desires can be recognized, and showed methods to conclude them without harming self or others, by a simple process called “Introspection.”

Next, Art McOmbar from Legally Mine, Inc delivered a speech on “Utilizing Medicolegal Tools: The Key to Lawsuit Prevention and Tax Reduction.” “Effective Role of *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* on Compression Caused Brain Tumor (Optic Chiasma) and its Rehabilitation” was then elaborated by Dr. Suresh Swarnapuri, BAMS. Dr.Suresh explained how *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* can be used as a rehabilitation therapy for Optic Chiasma. Professor Ravindran Kannan presented on the “Identification of God alone can Lead to Unification of Beings.” He talked about how many countries and groups of individuals are fighting and killing each other in the name of religion or GOD, and discussed Vethathiri Maharishi’s revolutionary insights about the space, the concept of gravity, evolution and self-transformation [8].

“*Naadi Pariksha* (Pulse Diagnosis)” was elaborated by Thomas Mitchell. Dr. Pratibha Shah articulated on “A Holistic Approach to the Management of Depression-Migraine Complex, a case study.” Dr. Shah elaborated on methods to take care of the mind and body to manage depression and migraine. Manisha Kshirsagar’s presentation on the “*Netra* (Eye) *Yoga*” introduced the audience to yoga techniques for the eye. “Importance of *Satwik* Diet in Modern Times” discussed by Harpinder Kaur Bhoji described on what a *Satwik* Diet consists of and highlighted its significance. Then, Dr. Jaya Gopal Parla spoke about “Physical, Psychological and Metaphysical Understanding of *PRANA* for Enhancing *Yoga*

Practice, Health and Wellbeing.” “Role of *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* in Promoting Digestive Health” was presented by Dr. Anupama Kizhakkeveetil, who talked about how *Ayurvedic* practice benefits our digestive abilities, and enhances our health. “Achieving Optimal Wellness with Holistic Approaches” was addressed by Dr. Samina Ahmad. Linda Gobindoss’ presentation on “The Power of Breathing: Yogic Practices, an *Ayurvedic* Point of View & Some Useful Applications” was very informative, as the audience gained knowledge about various breathing techniques and their significances.

Following the above mentioned lectures, Professor Chaudhry accentuated on the power our Consciousness holds on one’s holistic health with his “Impact of Consciousness on Mind and Body” presentation. “*Ayurvedic Psychology - Pragyparadha, the Language of Emotions. The mechanisms by which the Awareness of Awareness itself, Rebalances our Psychophysiology*” was emphasized by Carlo Monsanto.[9] Dr. Dara Ghahremani adeptly explained the impact *Yogic* breathing has on our brains and how it can alter our behaviors with the speech on the “Effects of *Yogic* Breathing on Brain and Behavior” “Healing as a Writing Coach: Using *Vedic* Practices to Dissolve a Client’s Stress” was guided by Dr. Elizabeth Herman. Then, Dr. Ram P. Agarwal spoke about “*Yoga as a Therapeutic Tool: An Overview of Current Status.*”

Workshops

The following 20 workshops on several aspects of *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* were also conducted. “Green Therapies (GT) and Good Living Practices (GLP)” was held by Dr. Rammohan Rao. Juanita Manis focused on “*Turyatita* and *Trika* Navigation.” The audience learned about the various elements and planets, the meditation technique, and its benefits from Priadeep Shunmugam’s “Five Elements & Nine Planets Meditation (*Panchamahabhutas* and *Nava Grahas*)” workshop. “Sustainability and Adaptation of *Ayurveda* in the West” was conducted by Vishnu Dass, who gave an overview of the assimilation of the *Ayurvedic* practices in the West. “*Ayurveda* as *Yoga* Therapy” was demonstrated by Dr. Vijay Jain, who stressed on the health benefits of *Ayurveda* and highlighted its therapeutic effects. Dr. Manjul Kant Dwivedi conducted the “*Vastu & Vibrational Meditation*” workshop. “Wellness through Acupressure-Ancient Science and Wisdom of India”[10] was demonstrated by Prema Mysore. She started off by expanding on the definition of Acupressure and short circuit of Bio-magnetism. Then, she adeptly demonstrated thirty eight pressure points and how they are related to physical and mental well-being. Dr. Paul Dugliss then illustrated the “Healing Light *Yoga* Therapy.” “*Ojas* Enhancement and *Simplified Kundalini Yoga*” was presented by Priyatarssini Balamurugan, who beautifully explained the science behind *Kaya Kalpa Yoga*—how it integrates the body, mind, biomagnetism, vital fluid and life force. She also talked about the exercises, instructions and benefits of this *Yoga* [11].

After that, Dr. Richaritha Gundlapalli demonstrated the “Mechanics of Movement and Its Impact on Human Biofield.” “TAPASYA—The Trinity of Agni, Prana, Ayurveda, Soma and Yoga” was illustrated by Indu Arora. Dr. Amitabh Gumman conducted a workshop on the “Yoga of Marma and Acupressure for Multidimensional analysis and Synergistic Healing.” Sundar Kaliyaperumal elaborated on how the “Simplified Kundalini Yoga (SKY) Exercises” addressed all key points of holistic health, such as physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional health [12]. He then demonstrated the various components of the SKY Exercises (the Hand, Leg and Eye exercises, Neuro-Muscular breathing exercises, Kapalabhati, Makarasana, Massage, fourteen point acupressure and their benefits. Barry Rosen introduced the audience to a type of yoga in which one tries to alter his/her planetary imbalances with his presentation on “Planetary Yoga: Using Hatha Yoga to Remedy Planetary Afflictions and Imbalances.” Then, “Clinical integration of Ayurveda and Yoga in the Management of Chronic Degenerative Disorders” was demonstrated by Jayarajan Kodikannath, who spoke about the assimilation of Ayurveda and Yoga with clinical approaches to treat chronic degenerative disorders. Satya Kalra’s presentation on the “Experience the True Yoga by Energizing and Healing Your Chakras” allowed the audience to gain additional knowledge on the chakras and methods to galvanize and heal them. “The Science of Happiness” was discussed by Dr. Amit Gupta, and “Connecting Yoga and Ayurveda seamlessly into Western models of care was emphasized by Lissette Holland.

There were also 10 workshops on morning meditation, yoga and chanting. “Chanting & Meditation for Optimum Health and Wellness” by Ravindra Khadilkar; “Hrid Guha Dhyam—Meditate in the Cave of your Heart with Indu” by Dr. Indu Arora; “Mantra, Mudra, Meditation” by Kathleen Lohr; “Pranayama, Yoga and Meditation to Balance the Doshas” by Nancy A. Smith; “Anandam Meditation” by Satya Kalra; “Accessing the Inner Healer, Purusha, the Source of Pranic Intelligence” by Neva Ingalls; “Dosha Balancing Yoga” by Lucia Jones; “Introduction to Sri Sri Yoga” by Sejal Shah; “Heart Chakra Yoga and Meditation” by Ana Maria Lugo.

Establishment of Ancient Science University

A Group of scientists joined Sri Sri Ravi Shankar in a discussion to establish a world-class University and Research centers in USA on Ancient Indian Sciences. The group was headed by Dr. Shan Lakshmanan. Present were Dr. Srinivas V Koduru (Scientist at Yale Cancer Center, Yale University and Founder, CEO & Managing Editor of VRI Press, Vedic Research Inc. USA), Dr. John Reed (Director, WISE), Dr. Pushpa Kumar (Harvard Law School fellow), Dr. Jay Kapraff (Scientist at NJIT), Dr. Rohit Karnik (Scientist, MIT) and Dr. Ravindran Khannan (Yantra Foundation).

Establishment of Ancient Science Research Collaboration

Dr. Lakshmanan brought about his government proposal about separating ancient science from religion and bridging with modern science. He insisted that an International conference themed “Identifying the Holistic Science of India” be organized in India bringing many of the sage-scientists and the politicians (including Prime Minister of India) on Board. He has explained his views of establishing a research center exclusively devoted to Ancient Science in Harvard. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar asked the committee to prepare a detailed proposal for submission to higher authorities in India and USA, and that he will collaborate with the team. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar was very supportive of Dr. Shan Lakshmanan’s proposal and he also wanted to be part of the proposal. Dr. Reed discussed his latest developments in WISE and also establishing a WISE Wiki, a digital library to give specific information about Ancient Science. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar also invited Dr. Shan Lakshmanan to visit India for AIMS conferences at Bangalore and New Delhi to discuss about it further. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar valuable suggestions and cooperation was remarkable.

Conclusion and Future Initiatives

To recapitulate, the international conference on Ayurveda and Yoga, organized by AAPNA, was a phenomenal success and accomplished its stated mission. The insightful presentations, lectures and workshops on various aspects of Ayurveda, Yoga and Meditation, enlightened the audience by providing a comprehensive knowledge about the Modern Science behind these ancient practices. Proving the efficacy of these practices with scientific research evidence, the experts in the various fields shed light on how practicing these archaic Indian techniques will enable one to be physically and mentally healthy. The distinguished leaders of various notable organizations emphasized the necessity to bridge the gap between Ancient Scientific ideologies and Modern Scientific methodologies; they also expressed the need to make such valuable research available to everyone.

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