

# DANAM CONFERENCE 2006

## SESSION Yoga 2

*Theme: Yoga Philosophy and Its Implications in Dharma Traditions*

*Sub-Theme: Yoga and Ecology*

**Christopher Chapple**, Loyola Marymount University, *Convener*

**Daniel Michon**, Loyola Marymount University, *Presiding*

## ABSTRACTS

**Knut Axel Jacobsen**, University of Bergen

*The Disharmony of Interdependence: Samkhya-Yoga and Ecology*

This paper explores the Samkhya-Yoga view of nature and the principle of non-injury (ahimsa). According to Samkhya-Yoga the world is not a harmonious functioning whole, but a disturbed realm. In the material world all is connected to all, and interdependency therefore means mutual causing of pain to each other. Samkhya-Yoga sees nature also as a process of mutual aid and service, but since this process also implies constant injury of living beings, one should minimize one's activities and ultimately try to become liberated from materiality. Complete withdrawal from materiality is therefore the ultimate act of non-injury. The ethical doctrine of non-injury can be understood as an attempt to transcend the ecological processes of nature. At the same time the peacefulness of the yogin is thought to transform his natural surroundings, and places of yogins are often described in the Hindu texts as places of extreme natural beauty.

**Christopher Chapple**, Loyola Marymount University

*Connecting Body, Senses, and Elements: Yoga and the Process of Ecological Restoration*

This paper will explore the proto-history of nature imagery in Yogic artifacts, Vedic passages on the sanctity of nature, and exhortations in the Upanisads and Samkhya to see the importance of the mind and senses as instrumental in the process of understanding the relationship between consciousness and the material world. The classical phase of Indian philosophy places great emphasis on the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, space). In the medieval, puranic phase of Indian thought, the Yogavasistha develops stories that provide a narrative understanding of the earth-human and macro-micro continuum. By reviewing this array of early, classical, and medieval sources, one can detect a theme wherein nature is valued and revered, rather than negated. The paper will conclude with examples of how Yoga and meditation may be interpreted not as world rejecting, but as tools for enhancing an affectionate connection with the earth and nature, predisposing one to environmental awareness.

**Vijaya Nagarajan**, University of San Francisco

*Yoga as Metaphor: Ecology, the Feminine, and the Kolam*

The kolam—rice flour designs drawn on thresholds—a female ritual practice performed at dawn by millions of Tamil women, I argue, can be interpreted as a parallel women's ritual form to the traditional male-centered yoga practice. Using ethnographic fieldwork conducted primarily in Tamil Nadu, this paper will explore at the conceptual, metaphorical, and design levels, how the kolam can be argued as a 'yoking of mind and body.' First, this paper will look more closely at how and why women could compare the kolam to yoga. Second, I analyze the links between yantras and kolams. Thirdly, I will look how Chandralekha uses the kolam, the yantra and yoga in

her dance performances, especially her dance piece, Prana. Fourthly, I will look at the ways the bindi and the kolam can be linked to yogic discourses. Finally, these four ways will be examined through the multiple Hindu conceptions of "nature."

**Laura Cornell**, California Institute of Integral Studies

***A Model for Eight Paths of Green Yoga***

This presentation will explore the development of a new movement within modern yoga that focuses on the issue of religion and ecology as seen through the practices of Yoga. Knowledge (Jnana Yoga) and a reverential mindset (Bhakti Yoga) form the foundational entry point for the Green Yoga. The practitioner then establishes and maintains a relationship with nature (Aranyaka Yoga), heals the physical and energy bodies (Hatha Yoga), and purifies the mind (Raja Yoga). Action to heal the world (Karma Yoga) becomes natural and joyful, prompting one to enter into community (Sangha Yoga). Realization of one's non-separation from nature (Tantra Yoga) grows out of the sum of all the other practices. This presentation will also include a narrative description of the establishment of the Green Yoga Association, a non-profit organization involved in a grass roots transformation of the modern Yoga community toward an awareness of ecological issues and suitable responses.

**Suzanne Ironbiter**, SUNY Purchase College

***Yoga and Nature: Vital Concentration in Atharva Veda***

Several Atharva Veda hymns celebrate and inventory the mystical correspondences of external and internal nature, and of universal and personal order. As in Rig Veda's psychocosmogonic hymns, the sequence of verses generates a dynamic series of focuses for intuitive concentration and meditative practice. This paper proposes to examine a proto-yogic Vedic example of spiritual union in the context of nature through a discussion of Atharva Veda X.7, on Skambha. The discussion will include the relation of the hymn's outer/inner image journey to Vedic, indigenous, and tantric conventions of mystical correspondence, to the goal of classic yoga interpreted as visionary freedom within nature rather than freedom from nature, and to contemporary implications of the poet's meditative ritual for a yoga practitioner's ethical relation to nature, health, ecology, and community.