

# Science of Survival in the Ancient Traditions and Cultures: Hands on experience with the Traditional Techniques of Survival

**By Emily Snyder**

On April 30 and May 1, a group of eclectic people gathered in the club house of East Brook Town Homes in Brighton, New York for a meeting of the International Center for Cultural Studies. The group spent the two days listening to lecture after lecture on different aspects of ancient cultures and their modern applications, and reaffirming the foundation of their cause: We are all the same. In each ancient culture, one can find elements of all the others. In the end, people and their societies are all very similar.

The weekend began with the lighting of an altar in honor of the Hindu god Ganesh, set up by the event's coordinator, Jennifer Polan. The altar remained lit throughout the day. The first event of the conference was a keynote address by Dr. V. V. Raman. The professor, an author of several books about science and religion, described his theories on the nature of ancient cultures. He mentioned what he believes to be the three dimensions of culture: Religion, language, and race. As he described it, the three can be dividers or unifiers, and have worked as both throughout history. He finds three different kinds of ancient culture: Those that are extinct, like the Mesopotamian culture, those that are continuing, like the ancient Greek culture, and those that are dormant, like the Ancient Indian culture. He describes dormant cultures as being those whose wisdom has always been an underlying source that is now coming to the surface to enrich today's cultures. He noted his belief that a culture that does not transform is doomed, for there is more than one path to the divine.

After the assertion that every path to the divine is equally valid, a presenter from a completely different religion gave some insight to the group. Kelly Randall presented a lecture about the Wiccan Wheel, the current Pagan idea of the cycle of the year. She first described Wicca as not a religion, but the process of living a spiritual experience, and of knowing the plurality and duality of life. She talked about the life of a Wiccan, or a Witch, being a journey of self-discovery, learning, and growing, all guided by an omnipresence. "Happiness is letting yourself happen," she stated. It is an experience that cannot be described because it is one that is absorbed over the course of a lifetime.

A Wiccan lifetime explained, she went on to explain a Wiccan year, describing each holiday in detail. Each one centers around some cycle of the year. It was at this time that the occupants of the room started discovering similarities between different ancient cultures. Though the group was interested in many different things, the large majority was Hindu, with a few Wiccans mixed in. Since each holiday is centered around the seasons of the Earth, and our relationship to the Earth, it seems that members of the two religions can understand one another based on the theories of that relationship. The theory was proven during Jennifer Polan's subsequent lecture on the holidays of South India. They, too, revolve around the cycle of the planet.

A delicious lunch followed. Food was contributed by attendees and organizers of the conference.

The next bit of ancient knowledge was imparted by Louisa Ong-Lee, Rochester's own Feng Shui master. She taught the group about the basics of both kinds of Feng Shui, form and compass. At 4000 years old, it is among the oldest of the arts that were discussed during the weekend. The historical and cultural aspects of Feng Shui were discussed, as well as the new developments brought about by the modern culture. Louisa went over its place in the I-Ching, and brought in yet another similarity between ancient

cultures—just like the Chinese culture placed strong emphasis on the four cardinal directions and their influences, so do the Indians and the Wiccans.

Sonam Targee arrived next to teach some of the secrets of Aryurvedic medicine. He again brought in the four elements, and their direct involvement with the human body when he described how people can be characterized in both personality and physical attributes by their individual combination of elements. He presented a quick overview of how the body reacts to too much of what is attracted to a certain element, and how different ailments may be indications of a concentration of a certain element.

Once we had an idea of which foods were bad for us, Dr. Ashok N. Shah enlightened the group on eternal values of a changing society. He spoke on the fact that “diseases” like boredom, emptiness, and emotional imbalance are products of a new kind of society, with germs like pollution, a neurotic, fast-paced life, and the increase of broken homes. He distinguishes two different kinds of values: Obligatory, and assimilated. In other words, those that, when met, make you feel good on the inside, as opposed to bringing outward gain. He claims that in the end, all anyone is looking for is freedom.

As the last lecture of the first day, Kelly Randall came back to talk about the 22 cards in the Major Arcana of the Tarot deck. She went through each card in detail, describing its meaning and its place in the journey that is represented by the progression from the first card to the last. The word Arcana means “profound secret,” and each card holds a meaning deep inside everyone. They represent inherent parts of human nature, naturally reaching across the borders of culture.

Kelly Randall began the second day of the conference with a Beltane ritual. The holiday represents the new life of spring and the joy of renewed life. The ritual was a reenactment of a wedding, and Kelly recommitted herself to the Goddess who is so strong on this holiday.

As the first lecture of the day, Azad K. Kaushik spoke on ancient wisdom in the modern world. His lecture started at the beginning of human civilization, when nomadic tribes with no cultural borders interacted freely with one another. He theorized spirituality as food for our souls, and that our deeds, which are intricately linked to our thought process, are what counts. He examined the four states of human consciousness, including the Supreme. The way we reach the supreme state, he said, is by doing everything for everyone but ourselves, and congratulating ourselves on our good deeds. He also suggested thanking Mother Earth every day for allowing us to put our weight on her. Kaushik went on to describe different aspects of modern society that can also be found in societies that are much, much, older: The Hippocratic oath, for example, is the modern version of an Aryurvedic oath.

Next, Chand Metha spoke on Yoga and Yogic breathing. He started by making sure everyone present knew that Yoga goes much deeper than the Yoga classes taught in America today. Not only is it somewhere between five to ten thousand years old, but it was created as a way to meet and know God. He explained that the breath of each person can explain the way his or her mind works, and suggested learning to balance the breathing through each nostril. He also explained that the two principles of Yoga are non-violence and speaking the truth. Chand spoke on the different kinds of Yoga: Mantra, and Karma, for example.

The day finished with a wonderful singing bowl meditation, led by Reetha Kazel. She brought her seven enormous silicon bowls, each with a different pitch, and each matched to a different Chakra.

The weekend ended with a discussion on what was learned and discovered over the course of two days. It was generally concluded that a lot was learned, and that it is safe to assert that people are the same in any ancient society. What is important is to celebrate our similarities and to learn from our distances.