

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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LOVE, PEACE & GRATITUDE

10 TIPS FOR YOGA TEACHERS

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Music & healing

Ears are considered to be an organ for spiritual perception. If we learn to listen, we can hear the primal sounds, specific frequencies and vibrations that permeates the space and emanate from objects all around us, and we can perceive sound as the medium that connects everything and makes us aware of our place in the continuum of creation. The world is sound, the frequencies, vibrations and melodies have always been there and they form the landscape of consciousness, Nada Brahma^[1]. This eternal truth was known to the sages and seers who perceived melodies all around them and brought these melodies together in praise of natural powers that create, sustain and destroy (only to re-create) the creation. These primal, pre-historic melodies are included in *Samaveda* (the Veda of melodies), and both classical Hindustani and Karnatic music traditions from India, trace their origin to *Samaveda*. It is known that *Samaveda* contains a creative synthesis of music, sound, meaning and spirituality^[2] and India, a country recognised as the site of origin of the Vedas, has absorbed music into its very fabric. In India, while devotional classical music is still going strong, in the contemporary times, music from Bollywood films is known for addressing a colourful rainbow of emotions that make the listeners shed tears of sadness or compassion, or feel love for their country, a child, a mother, or a beloved. Film music created some 70 years ago continue to be enjoyed even today.

Being aware of the sacred, pre-historic roots of Indian music and its wide-ranging expression in the day to day life, Dr Vastala Sperling wondered whether classical music can be used for healing. With this curiosity, she spoke with Dr. Rajan Sankaran^[3]. YOGA Magazine takes pleasure in presenting this conversation to you.

VS: Can music be used for healing our emotional state?

RS: YES. To explore the healing potential of classical music, I did proving of *ragas* from classical Hindustani music^[4]. The proving outcome revealed to me that each *raga* produces a certain effect that is different from the effect of other *ragas*.

But can a random *raga* help, or, is there a possibility of matching a person's emotional state with the *raga* and have him listen to specific *raga* that might lead to a therapeutic experience? To answer this question, I looked into, "Like cures like"^[5], a principle based on matching of frequencies. Ill-matched frequencies lead to disharmony. Well-matched frequencies express harmony. My research of over three decades is based on the paradigm that within us, a tune is playing, that I have named as "the other song"^[6]. This tune, an energy pattern that we borrow from the natural world, is the loudest when we are unwell. When we find an energy pattern that is a match for the 'other song' playing within us, we experience healing, and in the current

context, I am exploring Hindustani classical music *ragas* as a source of matching energy patterns.

VS: What are *ragas*? How to find an energy pattern from the *ragas* that matches our emotional state?

RS: A *raga* is an energetic expression of a certain musical note in a certain harmonic pattern. Differences in patterns differentiates one *raga* from the other. Based on my research, I am proposing that a specific type of person must have an affinity for a specific type of *raga*. When a *raga* is selected per the principle, like cures like, this specific *raga* is able to elicit a healing response. You can find matching *ragas* in my Raga App.

VS: How is the healing effect of *ragas* different from the healing effects of mantras? Mantras are in Sanskrit language. They have deep meanings and they serve a specific purpose. Can mantras be prescribed just like *ragas*?

RS: *Ragas* and mantras are fundamentally different. Mantras do have a universal healing effect because they cross the limit of individuality. The spiritual effect of the mantras is undifferentiated and non-specific and they address the illness common to the entire humanity – which is identifying oneself as individual body-mind. Mantras help transcend this limit and help us connect with the universal spirit.

Ragas, or melodies of the Indian classical music, are wordless, pure sounds. Unlike mantras, *ragas* on the other hand, have an individual effect. This means that *ragas* address the innate pattern of the individual. That is why different melodies or *ragas* match different states of people. *Ragas* help heal our individual patterns of expressing disease states and in this task, they are better suited than mantras. One aspect of the *ragas* is that they allow the mind to become silent and meditative. When a *raga* is rendered in a melodious style, it cancels out all the chatter and noises and allows the mind to get focused.

Apart from *ragas*, music has other aspects too. One aspect of music is that it can bring a community together. Group singing of *bhajans*, choirs etc. are an example. Group singing is done all over the world, in all cultures. It brings people together, helps dissolve the individual identities and help people connect with the group identity. Another great aspect of music is rhythm. It is used in group drumming when a large number of people can come together and get beyond the individual identities. They can become one with the rhythm.

Movement – communal dance – serves the same purpose. By moving to individual rhythm, one can connect with the universe. In our experiment, we found that rhythm is the common connecting thread between people and universe. Everything has a rhythm... waves of the ocean, trot of a horse, beat of a heart, revolution of the earth, cycles and seasons, day and night, flapping of a bird's wings, the angular movement of fish – all of these and everything else in nature is rhythmic. When we play a specific beat, ask people to shut their eyes and move to the rhythm, they shape shift into anything! They become a horse, a cloud, a flower, a wave...rhythm can be common to them and to something in nature. They experience unification with the universe through rhythm and they feel oneness with all creation. The spectrum of music is very large. We can specifically use music *ragas* for healing. Along with movement, art, and meditation, we are offering music as a tool of healing at our retreat center^[7].





VS: How did you create a Raga App?

RS: During the pandemic lockdown, for 26 days, I gathered volunteers from around the world over zoom and sang to them a *raga* each day. I sang solo at a particular speed or tempo, with just one string instrument. The listeners wrote down their response at the physical, emotional, imagery and sensation levels, and if they experienced speed, vibration, thermal sensitivity, perception of colours etc. The common theme emerging from these responses was considered as the essence of the *raga*. The result of this research is distilled in my *Raga* App.

VS: Please describe your Raga App.

RS: The *Raga* App includes 26 of the most well-known *ragas*. Simple questions spread over a few frames allow you to identify your emotions and choose a *raga* that matches your emotional state. You listen to the *raga* singing for the next uninterrupted fifteen minutes or so, you get to rate it and click on the effect the *raga* has on you. You can also send a detailed feed-back to the email address provided with the App.

VS: What feed-back has come in so far?

RS: Some people had brief relief, but many others experienced lasting improvement and deeper healing after listening to *ragas* that matched their emotional state.

VS: What is coming next?

RS: My further research is aimed to identify the healing effects of more *ragas*. *Ragas*, as pure music, do not have coherent words. They do not engage the mind in deciphering any meaning. Mind is free to experience the sound of the *ragas* as energy signature. When chosen per 'like cures like' the energy signature of the *raga* can mirror the innate energy pattern of an individual and initiate healing.

If we see disease and healing as a dynamic process, then, freedom from disease must come from deploying energy as a healing agent. Energy cannot have a better representation than music. Music cannot have a better representation than a *raga*, which is pure energy. Energy medicine is the future of medicine, and *Raga* therapy is a step in that direction.

NOTE

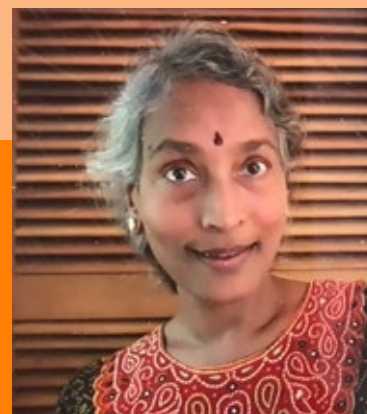
The *Raga* App is free for download.

Link for Android phones
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.unthinkable.raga&hl=en_IN&gl=US

Link for Apple phones:
<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/raga-therapy/id1553586373>

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Dr. Vatsala Sperling, PhD, was the Chief of Clinical Microbiology services at a children's hospital in Chennai, India, when she conducted research with WHO, Denmark. On moving to the USA, Vatsala studied Homeopathy at Misha Norland's school. She is an author of ten books including her latest '*The Ayurvedic Reset Diet*' (www.InnerTraditions.com).

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