



ISCR 2023

# Post Conference Report

March 10th 2023



INTERNATIONAL  
SOCIETY FOR  
CONTEMPLATIVE  
RESEARCH

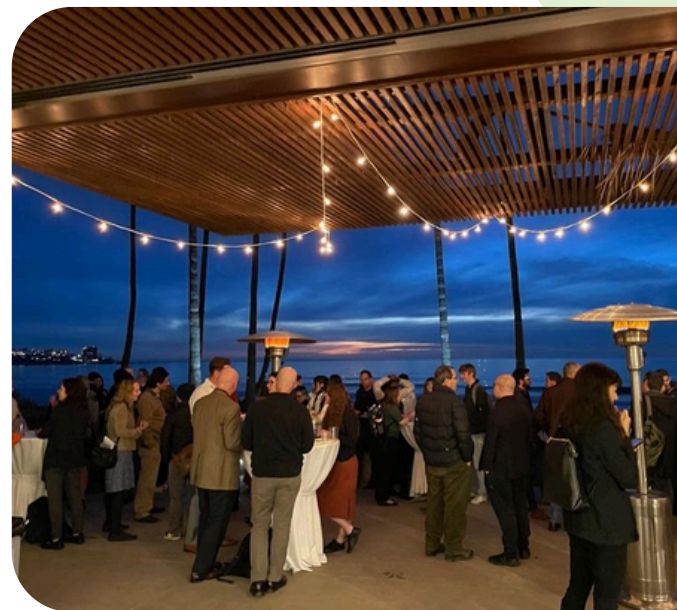
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual  
Conference

June 19 - 23, 2024  
Padova, Italy

# Inaugural Conference a Huge Success!

The International Society for Contemplative Research (ISCR) held its inaugural conference in San Diego from February 2-5, 2023. The conference promoted interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration amongst diverse fields including Neuroscience, Psychological and Social Sciences, Education and Developmental Sciences, Philosophy, Religion and the Humanities, Social and Environmental justice, Medicine and Healthcare. Experts and trainees from around the world came to share the latest findings and insights from the intersection of contemplative practices and scientific research. Over 300 attendees from more than 18 different countries were represented.

The conference was organized into several different types of sessions, including keynote talks, interdisciplinary panel discussions, symposia, poster sessions, and workshops. In addition, there were several special events, including pre-conference workshops, and an opening ceremony featuring the Danza Mexicayotl Aztec Dancers in full traditional regalia, offering a blessing and setting a sacred space for the conference at the beautiful Scripps Seaside Forum in La Jolla.



# Pre-Conference Workshops

Pre-conference workshops included using virtual reality in mindfulness and compassion training, exploring “Theatrework” as a contemplative practice and research method, a panel of distinguished experts from the wellbeing mobile app industry, including science leads from **Calm**, **Headspace**, **Healthy Minds** and **RoundGlass**. There were also workshops on using contemplative practice in higher education and for equity and justice, the science of yoga, conducting research with BIPOC communities, the neurobiology of emotion, and new perspectives on meditation-related unusual and adverse experiences.

## Keynotes

The conference was also hosted at the Price Center in the heart of the campus of University of California, San Diego, and sponsored by the **UCSD Sanford Institute for Empathy and Compassion**, in addition to the **Mind and Life Institute**, **Naropa University** and corporate sponsor, **Spatial, Inc.**

The keynote talks were given by prominent figures in the field of contemplative studies and pedagogy, clinical science, indigenous traditions, neurophysiology, and psychedelic medicine.

**William Edelglass** explored how the field must remain sensitive to culture and context of contemplative and other mind-body practices to benefit the health and wellbeing of all.

**Michael Yellowbird** discussed colonization and decolonization, contemplative practices, and the impact of each and their interactions on mind and body.

**Kakali Bhattacharya** provided a more profound perspective on the influence of contemplative practice on social systems via disruption of interconnected power structures and empowerment of individuals.

**Jack Feldman** gave a tour de force lecture in which he discussed the complexity of respiration and its reciprocal influence on behavior, including delving into the question of whether mice could meditate!.

# Symposia

Invited interdisciplinary symposia provided a platform for experts from different disciplines to exchange ideas and perspectives at the intersection of contemplative practice, theory and research, with a focus on improving human well-being in various domains.

**William Mobley, Judith Simmer-Brown, Jin Park** and **Thupten Jinpa** discussed the role of compassion on social justice and the interpersonal influence of compassion-oriented practices for human flourishing.

The panel on contemplative pedagogy included **Beth Berila, Ram Mahalingam, Yuria Celidwen, Kamilah Majied,** and **Laura Rendon,** and discussed the ways in which contemplative practices can help individuals and communities develop a deeper understanding of systemic oppression and inequality, and how this understanding can inform and inspire action for social change.

**Linda Carlson** moderated the panel on contemplative approaches to mental health confronting the “valley of death” and related challenges in the translation and adoption of contemplative-oriented clinical applications that are pragmatic, non-inferior to gold standard therapies and authentic to tradition.

**David Creswell, Cheryl Woods Giscombé,** and **Willem Kuyken** provided rich perspectives from both positive and negative clinical trials that focused on incorporating mindfulness into a variety of clinical and education contexts.

**Eric Garland, Hal Roth, Lorillai Biernacki,** and **Fadel Zeidan** all discussed the concept of self-transcendence and non-duality from both and neuroscientific humanistic perspectives.

Finally, **Chuck Raison** moderated the final conference panel with **Sahib Khalsa, Rachel Yehuda, Robin Carhart-Harris** and **Anja Loizaga-Velder** concerning the critical nature of set and setting in integrating psychedelics, mindfulness meditation, and flotation modalities for targeted mental health therapeutics.

In addition to the invited symposia, there were several other symposia and thematic talks that focused on specific areas of contemplative research across academic disciplines that fostered interdisciplinary dialogue. Datablitz and poster sessions provided an engaging platform and opportunity for researchers to share their latest findings and discuss their work with other attendees. There was also a panel including program officers from the **NIH** and the **Mind and Life Institute,** as well as successfully funded researchers, to discuss strategies for funding contemplative science. There were also several opportunities that provided hands-on experiential sessions in various contemplative traditions, including mindfulness meditation, loving-kindness meditation, Qigong, yoga, and Zen practices.

**Josipa Mihaljčić** from the University of Zagreb presented "Mindfulness and Positive Youth Development," where she detailed her research on the impact of contemplative education on youth. Mihaljčić emphasized the critical role of self-compassion and mindfulness practices in preventing behavioral problems and promoting mental health among children and adolescents.

In his talk, "Heart Openings: The Experience and Cultivation of Love Across Religions," **Christian Suhr** from Aarhus University explored how Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic traditions cultivate love and compassion. Using audiovisual and multimodal methods, Suhr vividly illustrated the sensory and emotional dimensions of these religious practices.

Independent philosopher **Andreas Weber** delivered a thought-provoking presentation titled "Enlivenment: A Poetic Approach to Understanding Life." Weber proposed a re-evaluation of our relationship with the biosphere, advocating for viewing all organisms as subjects within a meaning-creating reality. His work encourages a deeper appreciation of life's interconnectedness and its poetic nature.

Lastly, **Shirley Telles** from the Patanjali Research Foundation presented her keynote, "Physiological Benefits of Yoga and Meditation." Telles shared her extensive research on the health effects of yoga practices, discussing how specific yogic techniques can enhance both physiological and psychological well-being. Her numerous studies and publications provided robust support for the benefits of these ancient practices.

The diverse perspectives and profound insights shared by these keynote speakers significantly enriched the intellectual and contemplative landscape of the ISCR2024 Conference, leaving a lasting impact on all who attended.



# Conclusion

The conference concluded with a closing panel with all executive committee members that included a guided meditation and reflection on the themes and insights that emerged throughout the conference. The panel also provided an opportunity for attendees to connect and reflect on their own experiences and insights from the conference. Overall, the inaugural ISCR conference provided a rich and diverse exploration of the role of contemplative practices promoting positive action in the world and basic science supporting mind-body practices. The conference brought together an interdisciplinary community of researchers, practitioners, and educators, and provided a platform for sharing knowledge, insights, and experiences in the field of contemplative research.

Check out the [Photos link](#)

## Committee Update

Thank you to everyone who expressed interest in joining one of the ISCR committees. If you haven't yet, you should be contacted soon by the committee chair to schedule a first meeting. These meetings will be to get to know everyone, then work on goals of the committee and develop terms of reference (how often to meet, committee membership, terms, mandate, etc)

## Future Events/Conferences

We are still working on setting locations and dates for future events. Our criteria include maintaining affordability and interdisciplinarity, reaching our international and European membership and convening on an annual or bi-annual basis. Stay tuned for more info and announcements soon!