

## **YOGA AND SOCIAL COGNITION: CLINICAL APPLICATIONS**

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*(Summary of Theosophy-Science Lecture delivered on 31.12.2017)*

Yoga, which was earlier considered by many as a spiritual or religious ritual, was accorded world recognition as a practice for better physical and mental health by the United Nations when 21 June was declared as the International Day of Yoga (IDY) starting from 2015. It was Swami Vivekananda who introduced the concept to the West in the late 19th century.

Now yoga is taught in many universities at the graduate and postgraduate levels and even exclusive yoga universities have been set up. Scientific journals, professional societies, and regular conferences have all sprung up around yoga. The Indian government has legitimized it as a serious component of integrated medicine, and has also set up funding, through its various arms, for yoga research and promotion.

Two of the most popular mental effects or benefits of yoga are considered to be bringing its practitioners to a state of 'being relaxed' and

'being connected'. Being relaxed means being free of anxieties, worries, and aggressive tendencies, and helping greater concentration, clarity of thought, and ability to solve problems. Physically, the muscles are relaxed, and at the same time ready to spring to action more efficiently. Scientific research has shown that anxiety and stress produce the hormone, cortisol, which causes all the negative mental and physical effects associated with them. And now researchers have found that cortisol levels in the bloodstream drop as a result of yoga practice. This has helped to alleviate a myriad of problems like lifting depression, lessening stress, reducing alcohol dependence, and so on. An interesting observation by re-searchers is that this effect is caused by "OM" chanting, one of the many components of most yoga practices, which was hitherto considered to be a religious ritual.

Next, how does yoga help in

promoting the feeling of “being connected” to the people with whom one interacts re-gularly? Schizophrenia and autism are conditions where patients feel disconnected with others, with less capability of understanding others’ emotions and interests, and tending to withdraw from people and responsibilities. In both cases, it is found that the deficiency of a hormone, oxytocin, is implicated. Researchers have observed that oxytocin levels in the bloodstream are elevated as a result of yoga practice. Thus yoga

facilitates social connectedness, and ultimately connects one’s personal consciousness (*ātmā*) with the cosmic consciousness (*paramātmā*), which fact is borne out by the etymo-logy of “yoga”, the Sanskrit *yuj*, meaning “to unite”.

Though yoga has been experientially found to be promoting relaxation and connectedness, furnishing biological evidence for the same is expected to “convince” mental health professionals who go strictly by the evidence-based approach, thereby extending its benefits to a wider community.



## LOOKING WITHIN TO REACH OUT

**Deepa Padhi**

*(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 1.1.2018)*

It is a paradox that what we know as real outside of us is not real. It is like the Socratic paradox: “All I know is that I know nothing.”

Most of the people are contented with their life “as it is” having total faith in their five sense organs through which they look at the world outside and identify themselves with their “artificial personalities” — name, form, position, status, and so on. But when they are faced with some challenges or something adverse happens in their lives — when they find that science, religion and rituals, cannot solve their problems — they feel a yearning to look within. This is the first step of a spiritual journey.

“Looking within to reach out” is a process as well as a goal. It is a quest for knowing “who am I”, the “Self” beyond the boundaries of physicality.

It is not intellectual knowing. It is absolutely experiential.

Like any other field of study, there is a methodology consisting of various stages of “looking within” for transformational practices which results in a magnificent transformation of the seeker. There are also levels of transformations as indicated by H. P. Blavatsky (HPB).

Only a prepared mind, free of all pre-conceived ideas, false notions, and superstitions, can concentrate and use the technique of meditation. It starts, as HPB says, to expand the individual consciousness to conceive of Unity, and ends up in merging with the Universal Consciousness, the all embracing Oneness when one identifies oneself with every being and thing.

It is essential for each one of us as a Theosophist to look within for self-

transformation. The best way to ensure definite progress, as Annie Besant says, is to meditate on a quality and live it. Theosophy is very much practical. With the experiential awakening of the “Self” as nothing but the encompassing One-

ness, when hands are extended to reach out to render service to others, it becomes purely selfless, altruistic. In fact, “looking within to reach out”, is a journey from exclusiveness to inclusiveness, from selfishness to unselfishness.



## MEDITATION, SELF-STUDY AND THE THERAPEUTICS OF SPEECH

**Jonathan Colbert**

*(Summary of Short Lecture delivered on 1.1.2018)*

We live in an information age, but alas, in a time of little real communication. Intimate, meaningful, beneficent speech infused with loving kindness (*dana*), like silence, is all too scarce. Sensing that there must be a deep mystery in the simple utterance of words, we ask: how might the true, healing magic of the Word be restored? How are we to become responsible trustees of this sacred potency? Is it in our power in the Kali Yuga to increase the ratio of thoughtful and uplifting speech, while decreasing the ratio of careless and oftentimes debasing speech?

The profound partnership between the twin practices of meditation (*dhyana*) and self-study is vital to the salve of healing, regenerative speech. True insight (*prajna*) unveils the emptiness of existence apart from the whole. Heart-threads of interdependence are discovered. Gratitude pervades. Compassion clarifies. From the inner strength realized in meditation, we can perform detached (*viraga*) yet sincere (*viryā*) self-examination from

above below, from within without. The deep patience (*kshanti*) yielded from such practice effects gentle, reliable speech, aligning thought, word and deed (*shila*).

Reverence for silence is another important element in creative, healing speech. Just as it is by fearlessly facing death, that we can truly begin to live — so it is by becoming at home in the gestating potency of silence itself, that each person can truly express the manifesting power of the *Verbum*. Rooted in the theurgic exchange between the higher and the lower, between meditation and self-study, each word uttered becomes a healing messenger of hope and grace. The organ of speech can be used as an instrument to dispense the regenerative therapeutics of a higher Logos. Krishna resides in the heart of every man and woman. Each person, offering a compassionate word of encouragement to a friend in need, can convey the medicinal melodies of the flute of Krishna with noetic timing, precision and beneficence.



## THEOSOPHY AROUND THE WORLD

The highlight of the year's activities was the 38th **European Congress**, held in Barcelona, **Spain**, from 21 to 26 August on "Theosophy: a Way toward Universal Consciousness". The Congress was organized by the European Federation and the Spanish Section of the TS, with more than 200 attending from 18 countries. I gave the opening lecture on the theme, and other lectures were given by several General Secretaries, officers of the TS, and President of Point Loma Theosophical Society in The Hague, the Netherlands, Herman Vermeulen. A session of questions and answers preceded the closing. The whole program is available on the websites of both the Federation and the Section. Earlier on 25 June the General Secretary of Spain, Mrs Angels Torra, gave a lecture during the French Convention on "What is Spirituality?" During the year, several silent meditation retreats were organized, which were well attended and highly motivating.

In the **Austrian** Regional Association three new members joined during the year, for a total membership of 58. All three Lodges offer weekly lectures during the study year, and study subjects are based on classical Theosophical teachings and related subjects. Offered lectures are regularly placed on the TS Austria website, and their members receive the periodical magazine, *Adyar*, from the German Section three times per year.

The TS in **Belgium** has 78 members in 8 active Lodges. The Section's acti-

vities continued throughout the country, mostly centered in the North and the capital of Brussels. During the year they welcomed Ms Tran-Thi-Kim-Dieu in Brussels for a well-attended and appreciated two-day seminar on the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, which dealt with the Ageless Wisdom approach to self-development. Another highlight was their New Year's reception featuring a video of Vicente Hao Chin, Jr's lecture during the International Convention on "The Religions of the Future". During the same event, the long-expected website of the Belgian TS <[www.ts-belgium.be](http://www.ts-belgium.be)> was launched, along with the launch of a new general brochure to help them increase their presence in Belgium.

The National President of the TS in **England**, Jenny Baker, reports that in October 2016 David Nieuwejaers led an introductory course on the ancient theo-sophy of Plotinus on "The Return of the Soul to the One", which was one of the year's highlights. Also in September the History and Archives Group of their Section organized a successful International Conference exploring the life and works of Annie Besant, with guest speakers from many countries, including the USA, France, Italy, The Netherlands, and England. Leslie Price and Janet Lee and others continue to catalogue and conserve the extensive archives. Mrs Baker spoke at several Lodges throughout the year and attended the 38th European Congress in Barcelona. At the closing ceremony she

was presented with the EFTS Banner, as the English Section will be hosting the 39th European Congress in 2020.

The **Finnish** Section's Annual Convention was held in Tampere on 8 April. The Summer School in June was at Kreivilä, with Mr Hao Chin, Jr, as their guest speaker, who had a real success with his "Self-Transformation" (ST) seminar. Nine persons expressed their wish to become ST facilitators. For the first time they used simultaneous translation equipment, and it was much appreciated. A new study group called the "Self-Transformation Study Group" was started in October 2016 in Helsinki. It based its studies on Mr Hao Chin, Jr's book *The Process of Self-Transformation*. A revised Finnish translation of *The Secret Doctrine* (SD) was published in June jointly by Kalevala and Minerva Lodges. In Estonia the Lodges arranged Summer School in June with the theme "Possibilities of Human Life". They also had a winter seminar in Tallinn in January, (SD)study days in Tartu in May, and an autumn study camp in August. The Section has 379 members.

The **French** Section reports that they reached the targets for the year of (1) training workers to participate in administrative tasks; and (2) continuing training students to be speakers. Courses were offered free of charge every fortnight. Video projections of J. Krishnamurti's talks took place quarterly. Public lectures were given quarterly with minimal or no charge. The work of Lodges continued steadily with meetings taking place once a month and stress given to basic theo-

sophical subjects. There was a revival of the Lodges in the Congo, Africa, and the French Adyar Editions sent them several introductory theosophical books. All programmes of the Section were published on its website and in the Section's magazine, *Le Lotus Bleu*.

The Northern **German** meeting in May was very well attended in Travemünde, near Lübeck, with Gabriële Franklin, Assistant General Secretary, as the organizer. Manuela Kaulich, gave a lecture on "The Power of Thoughts and Thought Forms". They held elections this year and Mrs Kaulich, the only candidate, was re-elected for another three-year term as General Secretary, a post she has held since 2008. The theme of this year's Summer School was "Is humankind steering into a blind alley? What does Divine Wisdom / Theosophy have to counteract this?" It was very successful, with 29 average attendees. Their magazine, *Adyar*, continued to be published three times a year and is well received. Membership increased from 119 to 126.

In the **Greek Section** their translation of *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* was published recently and they will send a copy of the book to the Adyar Library soon. Also the series by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater on *Talks on the Path of Occultism* are also being translated into Greek and will be published in three volumes. Their membership stands at 147. Their quarterly magazine, *Ilisos*, is posted to about 250 subscribers in Greece and abroad, and is given free to all members.

The TS in **Hungary** held their

General Meeting on 1 October 2016, when the new Presidential Representative, Mr János Szabari, and the Executive Committee were elected. They have 33 members in three Lodges, one in the countryside and two in Budapest, but only one of them is active. They organized one public lecture monthly from September to June on weekdays with 15–25 participants. The main subjects applied theosophical teachings to deal with daily problems.

The annual **Icelandic** Summer School was a success in every way for the fourth year in a row, held in the NLF Spa and Medical Clinic, with excellent meeting and health-related facilities. The theme this year was “Together to the Same Goal”. Their lecturers are often members of the TS, but various scholars, writers, university professors, and so on, are also invited. The titles included: “A Date with the Universe”, “Self-image, Life, and Happiness”, “J. Krishnamurti and Music”, and “*The Voice of the Silence*”. At their Annual General Meeting last May Halldór Haraldsson withdrew as GS and Kristinn Ágúst Fridfinnsson was elected as the next General Secretary. Their membership has risen to 283 from 262.

On 27 May the All-**Ireland** Convention was held in centrally-located Dublin, which was very well supported by members from the Belfast and Phoenix Lodges. They had Gerard Brennan as their guest speaker, a visiting Australian member, also affiliated to TS Ireland. The theme was “The Journey of the Wild Swans”, and his talk was profound, inspiring, and very well received and

appreciated by those present. The Organizing Secretary, Mrs Marie Harkness, had frequent contact with all Irish members during the year through her circulars with TS news and quarterly study notes. They have had a successful year with growing membership.

The 27 groups and 27 study centers of the TS in **Italy** carried out “members only” meetings and public conferences. Being the largest Section in the European Federation, it owns open-to-public seats and libraries in many cities, including Milan, Vicenza, Florence, and Rome. Their website <<http://www.teosofica.org>> attracts over 4,000 visits per month. A dedicated section contains videos of theosophical conferences taken during congresses and seminars, and another is fully dedicated to the Theosophical Order of Service (TOS). They publish their monthly magazine, *Rivista Italiana di Teosofia*, with 1,150 printed copies and over 1,000 subscriptions. They have 925 members, a slight decrease from last year.

**The Netherlands** reports there were 7 national activities in the International Theosophical Center (ITC) in Naarden during the year, including two in English: one with Fernando de Torrijos (USA) from 23 to 28 June on “Mindfulness”; and the other on 3 September, where I held a lecture in the morning for members, and another in the afternoon for the general public. Their quarterly magazine, *Theosofia*, is also published on the internet: <[www.theosofie.nl](http://www.theosofie.nl)>. Many different activities were presented in the Lodges and centers

with lectures, meditation, and study. Films of J. Krishnamurti were also shown on a regular basis. They have 323 members in 9 Lodges.

The post of Organizing Secretary for the **Norwegian** Regional Association was transferred from Mr Saleh Noshie to Mr Andreas Mikael Isberg last April. Until August of this year there was only one active Lodge in Norway, which had had programs every month of lecture and dialogue. This year they welcomed 5 new members. In February a new Lodge was formed and they now have a program of guided mindfulness meditation, lecture, and dialogue. Their website <[www.teosofisksamfunn.no](http://www.teosofisksamfunn.no)> has been regularly updated.

The **Portuguese Section** reports that the highlight of their year was my visit to Lisbon and Porto in August, right after the 38th European Congress held in Barcelona. In Lisbon, I had a private meeting with members and then gave a public lecture there and also in Porto. Although it was a short visit, it was a pleasant experience for all involved. The Section keeps busy every fortnight with a public session in different formats, all of them well attended. Four members, including the General Secretary, Ana Maria C. de Sousa, attended the European Congress. They continue publishing regularly their magazine *Osiris*, either on paper or online. The Lodges in Lisbon, Porto, and Évora, and also the Study Group in Azores and Setúbal go on working with enthusiasm, some of them attracting new sympathizers. The Section has 114 members, a slight increase from the previous year.

The TS in **Russia** reports that this year a theosophical publishing house was created, Russian-Ukrainian relations were strengthened, and construction of the Siberian Theosophical Center in the Altai continued. Their website <<http://ts-russia.org>> is administered by the former and current Presidential Representatives, Pavel Malakhov and Alexey Besputin. They now have 133 members, a drop of 37 from last year, with 8 very active Lodges and one study center.

The Regional Association in **Slovenia** has 55 members in 4 Lodges. Their quarterly newsletter, *Theosophical Thought*, was published regularly, and all memorial days of the TS were celebrated.

The **Swedish** Section has 151 members in 6 Lodges and one study center, and their magazine is issued 4 times per year. They have arranged minischools at the headquarters in Stockholm twice a year with about 20 participants each. Their Summer School featured Vicente Hao Chin, Jr, from the Philippines, on the theme: “Transform Yourself — Transform Your Life — Modern Insight”. The Finnish Section members helping them at Kreivila were very good organizers. Their website is at: <[www.teosofiska-samfundet.se](http://www.teosofiska-samfundet.se)>.

On 17 June the TS in **Switzerland** had a new Presidential Representative, Mr Andrea Biasca-Caroni, in the place of Mrs Eliane Gaillard, who did valuable work for 12 years. The Agency has 27 members (an increase of 4 from last year) in 2 Lodges and 2 study centers. Its activities are as follows: One Lodge had meetings in Ascona and, the

other, courses on Theosophy in Geneva; the Lugano study group met fortnightly, and the new study group met in Zurich.

In September, Svitlana Gavrylenko was re-elected as Organizing Secretary of the TS in **Ukraine** for another 3-year term. The 100 members in 6 Lodges and 3 study centers met regularly to study classic Theosophical literature. Their annual Convention was held in Kiev in November on the theme "Compassion and Universal Responsibility", with more than 40 participants from 8 cities including Moscow. Their Summer School was held in Odessa in July on

"Creativity as a Spiritual Path", with more than 30 participants from 6 cities. Their electronic magazine, *Svitoch*, was issued 6 times during the year.

The **Welsh** Regional Association membership now stands at 68 in 4 Lodges and one study center. The Lodges have been holding monthly study meetings for their members. They have been discussing the basic Wisdom Teachings as presented in Tim Wyatt's *Cycles of Eternity*, said to be a simple and practical 100-page application of the Ancient Wisdom. Every member in Wales received a free copy of the book paid for by the TS in Wales.

## **THE BHARATA SAMAJ TEMPLE**

Theosophy is a way of life that helps elevate the quality of life of the human being. It proclaims Truth as the highest way of life, and greater than all the religions. At the same time, it acknowledges that all religions practised in the world have their relevance, and hence importance, to various segments of society and humanity. Therefore, every major religion has its own temple or church consecrated in the Theosophical Society Adyar campus.

The temple of Sanātana Dharma, or Temple of Light, as it is generally known, is located between the Library Gate and the Bhojanasala. Dr Annie Besant laid the foundation stone of this architecturally beautiful, non-sectarian shrine in 1922, and J. Krishnamurti inaugurated it in 1925. It is called the Jyotirālaya or "Temple of Light" as it contains no idol, only a flame. The puja is performed daily at sunrise around 6 a.m. There is no specified priest; any sincere and knowledgeable member can perform it and return with renewed solar energy.

It is a simplified and compact form of nature-worship. The Sanskrit scholar Pandit A. Mahadeva Sâstri rearranged the Vedic mantras of the *sandhyâ-vandana* and added a few from the worship practised in Hindu temples. Nature is highlighted, not any god or goddess; the Gâyatri mantra is chanted, not *stuti*-s to personal gods. It is an ode to Nature and the environment. It first invokes the Fragrant Smoke, then the Fire-god Agni, Water, Light in the form of the Sun, and then the Supreme Spirit (Purusha). It ends with blessings to all and a short meditation session.

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**Number of delegates registered as on Saturday, 31 December: 907**

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