SOAS BWY Summit Explores Yoga's Impact on Mental Health and Prison Reform

Monday 18 November, 2024

The recent summit, hosted by SOAS University of London (SOAS) and the British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) on Saturday 2 November, brought together leading experts to discuss yoga's impact on mental health and prison reform.

If you missed the live event, recordings of all sessions are now available for purchase on the event page of the BWY website for £40, offering exclusive access to expert discussions, research presentations and yoga practice sessions.

Headlining the event, Dr Sat Bir Singh Khalsa PhD of Harvard Medical School, shared his latest research highlighting yoga's transformative benefits for mental health, especially its efficacy in managing insomnia, generalised anxiety disorder, and PTSD.

Professor Rosie Meek from Royal Holloway University and Rose Parkes from the Institute of Law in Jersey, examined yoga's role in prison reform, advocating for more inclusive prison structures to support rehabilitation. Reflecting on her yoga and meditation review, due for publication in early 2025, Rosie Meek said:

"My review highlights that yoga and meditation significantly improve sleep, a major issue in prisons today. Yoga provides people in prison with a sense of autonomy in an environment where they have very little control. It empowers them to practice independently in their cells or in small groups, helping them to manage their stress and regulate emotions."

Dr Um? Dinsmore-Tuli PhD, founder of the Yoga Nidra Network, gave insights into Yoga Nidra (yogi sleep), discussing how commercialisation has distanced this ancient practice from its roots. Carola Chiarpenello from King's College London presented her research on Yoga Nidra's neurological effects and called for a better research structure.

In-person and online audiences joined yoga sessions led by yoga teachers Ranju Roy and Jo Bogacz.

BWY Chair Diana O'Reilly said: "The day highlighted the power of yoga, not only as a tool for individual wellness but also as a vital resource for community health and equity. Our goal at BWY is to bring these insights into community spaces, ensuring yoga is accessible for everyone."

Professor Ulrich Pagel, Chair of SOAS Centre of Yoga Studies, said: "As a centre dedicated to the study of yoga traditions, we are proud to support events that explore the profound cultural and therapeutic dimensions of yoga. Yoga holds significant potential for advancing mental health and social wellbeing, and we're thrilled to be the catalyst for these important discussions."

To purchase the recording, visit the event page, select the *Book Now* button, creating a free account if you're not a BWY member. Recordings can be accessed through the event in your dashboard calendar under the *Resources* tab.

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About BWY

The British Wheel of Yoga (BWY) is committed to sharing yoga's transformative power and rich heritage through events and education. Guided by yoga's principles and traditions, BWY's mission is to enrich lives through yoga, increasing accessibility and inclusivity. Established as a registered charity in 1965 and recognised as the National Governing Body for Yoga by Sport England and Sport Wales, BWY serves more than 5000 members and is supported by a 100-strong local volunteer network and a small central team.

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