



All Party Parliamentary Group on

## Yoga in Society

Meeting, Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June - House of Lords, London

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**Co-Chairs:** Chris Ruane MP, Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe

**In Attendance:** Dr. Sue Carter, Dr. Stephen Porges, Dr. Amit Bhargava, Heather Mason, Jonathan Lord MP, Tim Loughton MP, Jeff Smith MP, Baroness Harris of Richmond, Baroness Healy of Primrose Hill, Baroness Tyler of Enfield, Lord Stone of Blackheath, Ann-Marie Haycox, Jyoti Manuel, Kristin Polman, Emma Hogan, Olivia Clark, Elaine Collins, Paul Fox, Emily Brett, Tamara Russell, Julia Dunncliffe, Craig Hasted, Aylish O'Driscoll, Anne Langley, Elizabeth Mpyisi, Jutta Tobias-Mortlock, Maya Campbell, Dana Zelicha, Tessa Watt, Dina Gray, Indra Adnan, Robin Monro, Pascal Rees, Veena Ugargol, Shweta Panchal, Liz Oppedijk, Trudi Edginton.

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### 1. Welcome

The chair welcomed attendees, noting the meeting agenda and overview of the year ahead. Chris speaks about how there are 250 people in Parliament now trained in mindfulness. The importance of mindfulness in the workplace is underlined.

### 2. Introduction – Heather Mason

Heather Mason welcomes everyone and introduces the concept of mind-body connectedness and stresses the importance of continuing to discuss yoga and mindfulness within society. The speakers for the day are introduced, including the topics that they will present.

### 3. Polyvagal Theory – Dr. Stephen Porges

Dr. Stephen Porges presents on the Polyvagal Theory. Stephen begins by discussing how removing threat is not the answer within society, but that instead giving people the resources to deal with emotions and stressful situations is much more useful. People need to become more in charge of their physiology as this is linked to our ability to cope and whether we feel safe. Yoga and mindfulness is linked with being valuable as a 'neuro-exercise of the social engagement systems'. By practicing such exercises, Stephen proposes that we are not only helping our brains, but our entire body. The mind-body connection is emphasized throughout the presentation. Stephen concludes with addressing how the mind-body connection is often ignored, but by giving people tools to connect these again (such as breathing techniques) this can help regulate physiology and help reduce issues within society and individuals, such as addiction.

To see more details about what was presented, the presentation slides can be found at: <https://www.yogainsociety.co.uk/reports>

### 4. The Healing Power of Connections and Love – Dr. Sue Carter

Dr. Sue Carter speaks about the role of oxytocin and its associations with feelings of connectivity and safety. A study is referred to about how people living alone after a heart attack were far more likely to

die earlier than those living with others following a heart attack, thus highlighting the importance of social connectedness for our health. Sue distinguishes the two systems of connectedness and fear, and outlines the biological underpinnings related to these. The importance of oxytocin is addressed, and the ways the presence of this is becoming reduced within society due to reasons such as high rates of C-sections, leading to more chronic feelings of fear. The underlying physiology to feeling safe and positive is related to the practice of mindfulness and yoga. Concluding remarks include statements about how the physiology behind yoga and mindfulness needs to be further explored to aid current issues.

To see more details about what was presented, the presentation slides can be found at: <https://www.yogainsociety.co.uk/reports>

#### **5. Comments from Heather Mason**

Heather Mason gives a brief summary about the connections between the Vagus nerve, yoga and mindfulness, and social connectedness.

#### **6. Mind-Body Practice and Social prescribing – Dr. Amit Bhargava**

Dr. Amit Bhargava presented on the subject of mind-body practice in Social Prescribing, noting the potential for the application of Mindfulness and Yoga within the NHS. Possible treatment options could include meditation, gentle movement and breathing exercises. The NHS is currently under strain as a result of fewer clinicians, higher health burdens and less public resources - the system is no longer creating safety for those who need it. This could be improved by providing body-mind practices to staff, creating a healthy and resilient workforce; also by increasing positive wellness and agency for patients, including social interactions and improved self-regulation. Many hospital visits are related to stress and anxiety; this can be directly improved with Yoga and Mindfulness. It is important that any policy for Social Prescribing creates consistency for patients and in delivery of services, and creates equality of service nationwide.

#### **7. Breathing Practice – Heather Mason**

Attendees were invited to take part in a 3-minute coherent breathing practice.

Further comments from Lord Stone of Blackheath- speaks about the Importance of fear of separation that is widely felt within society.

#### **8. Comments**

Lord Stone of Blackheath – commented on the importance of fear of separation, and how this is acutely felt in wider society at present.