

YOGA RESEARCH

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Can Yoga Help Elimination of War?

A Talk by Swâmî Kuvalayânandaji delivered August 21, 1953

Before taking up the subject of my lecture of this evening for discussion, I should like to make a few points clear. When I speak of Yoga, I do not refer to the miracles that are associated with this name, but I want to take my stand strictly on those Yogic practices which are within the reach of every individual.

I do not believe in some perfect Yogi changing the psychology of the whole humanity and thus eliminating war overnight by his supernatural power. History does not know of any such feat. So I again say that when I speak of Yoga, I refer to those Yogic practices which have a biological, physiological and psychological value and my treatment of this evening's subject will be strictly along the lines of biology and physiology.

Another point to which I request your attention is the limited scope of my question. My question is not "Can Yoga Eliminate War?" but it is "Can Yoga Help Elimination of War?"

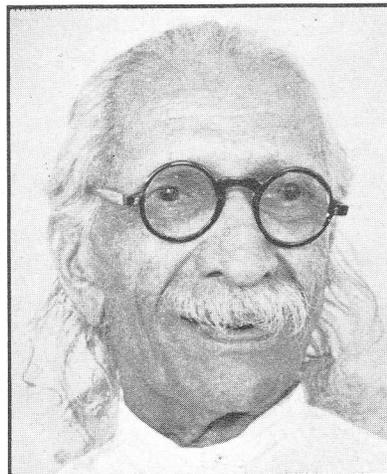
If I ask "Can Yoga Eliminate War?" it would mean that I want to know whether Yoga alone unaided by any other means, is capable of eliminating war. But when I say "Can Yoga Help Elimination of War?" I admit that there may be many means of avoiding war and I want to find out whether Yoga can be one of them.

Every one of us knows humanity is sick of war and that honest efforts are being put forth to liquidate it. The attempt to establish real democratic Governments in every nation, the establishment of the U.N.O. and the endeavours to bring into existence a World Government are all political measures conceived to banish war from this globe.

I know that Prof. Sorokin of the Harvard University in his valuable book on *Reconstruction of Humanity* calls these political measures "Quack Lines for War and Important Plans for Peace." Prof. Sorokin is at the head of the Creative Altruism Centre of the Harvard University

and his views do deserve our consideration; and I also know that there are others of Dr. Sorokin's persuasion.

But I, not as a politician but as a humble citizen of the world, do feel that there is so much of an honest effort in these political efforts to eliminate war and that these efforts, howsoever inefficient, are in the right direction.



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So my question is to know whether Yoga can be attempted as one of the means for elimination of war. Having explained to you the limited scope of my question and the scientific matter of my discussion, I shall now go to my subject proper.

If I want to know scientifically whether Yoga can help elimination of war, we must also scientifically know why man goes to war at all.

For getting a reply to this question, we must consult two sciences; namely, biology and physiology. And if these two sciences can reveal to us the elements in human constitution which drive man to war, we

may be in a position to find out whether yoga can counteract the influence of those elements and thus help to banish war from this earth.

Here the very scientific character of physiology and biology themselves may be challenged. It may be pointed out that the principles of physiology are changing. For instance, the theory of respiration has undergone a revolution during the last fifty years. Previously it was thought that O₂ governed respiration; but now it is established that it is CO₂ and not O₂ in the blood that regulates the respiratory activity.

With biology, it is still worse. Biology has not been able to consistently explain its theory of evolution. As is admitted by Julian Huxley, a great biologist, in his *Evolution and Ethics*, there are two major breaks in the evolution (p.120). Now, these breaks are given a scientific name called mutation; but the name does not carry any scientific explanation with it. Besides, at the highest levels of evolution there are many missing links and, although some of them have been recently found, as stated by the great scientist, J.B.S. Haldane in his *Science and Everyday Life* (pp. 100-102), the question of missing links yet stands unsolved.

Nobody can deny these drawbacks existing in physiology and biology. But it is also to be admitted, that the overwhelming number of truths that these two departments of human knowledge are able to explain—rationally and experimentally—entitle them to be acknowledged as established sciences.

So, now let us find out whether biology and physiology tell us why man goes to war.

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**There never was a good war,
 or a bad peace.**

Benjamin Franklin



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According to biology, survival of the fittest is the principle mainly responsible for the evolution of species which reaches its highest level in man. This principle was first discovered by Wallace and taken up and developed by Darwin and other biologists (*The Miracle of Life*, p.16).

Now, according to the great biologist Joseph Nedham, the only way in which the concept of fitness was used by Darwin was to indicate such organisms as left the greatest number of offspring to perpetuate their type in posterity (*The Nazi Attack on International Science*, p. 39). This is true.

But the struggle for existence which every species had to put up—not only against nature and other species for its survival, but also against its own members for food and for the satisfaction of the biological instinct of reproduction,—involves physical fighting.

In fact, as said by the eminent physiologist Dr. W. B. Cannon, (*Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, etc.*, p.377)

"The business of killing and avoiding death has been one of the primary interests of living beings throughout their long history on the earth."

That is, for millions and millions of years, life has been fighting for existence and naturally it has developed a mechanism in the body which would fit it for fighting.

This mechanism has reached extraordinary perfection and completeness in man, the highest biological product. With this mechanism, man has also inherited the combative instinct and its accompanying emotion of anger.

In addition to this, man also gets the heritage of the acquisitive instinct and its accompanying emotion, the feeling of ownership. So, the biologists say that, so long as the fighting mechanism is efficiently working in the human organism and the two biological instincts actively operating, war cannot be banished from the globe.

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Nay, some physiologists are of the opinion that as the other mechanisms in the human body, such as the reproductive mechanism, the respiratory mechanism, the digestive mechanism, also physiologically clamour for satisfaction, this fighting mechanism also clamours for satisfaction and conflicts on an individual, a racial or a national scale are the result.

So from the biological and physiological points of view, war cannot be liquidated unless man is able to render the fighting mechanism and the combative and acquisitive instincts tolerably harmless. Can Yoga control the fighting mechanism and these two instincts? *...to be continued*

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