

**Symposium on:  
Understanding Consciousness: The science of yoga and meditation**

**Consciousness, meditation and wellbeing**

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*Abstract of Talk*

Consciousness is a topic that presents a paradox. It is deeply intimate to our experience and yet it is difficult to arrive at a consensus on how to define and understand it. Meditation techniques provide an interesting opportunity to examine consciousness as they permit voluntary alteration of the conscious experience. The seasoned meditator chooses to practice a particular technique and wilfully departs from the routine day to day experience into a more sublime experience that usually consists of peace and tranquility, sometimes deep insights and realizations, and occasionally various mystical experiences.

The nature of the experience depends on the type of practice, but a wide range of experiences are routinely reported by meditators. Beginners usually encounter significant difficulties in managing a wayward mind and often feel discouraged and discontinue their practice. Those who sustain their meditative practice usually begin to see a range of positive outcomes, typically resulting in improved wellbeing. The journey to higher wellbeing is different for each individual practitioner and depends on many factors. Nevertheless, long term proficient practice usually yields predictable benefits in wellbeing that are apparent even when the practitioner is not actively meditating. These are trait changes that reveal alterations in the way the practitioner perceives the world and engages with the world. In essence, the journey of proficient meditation practice leads to changes in the conscious experience, and over the years, transforms the individual.

We present evidence from our studies in the field of cognitive neuroscience of meditation that attempt to explore the intersection of consciousness, meditation and wellbeing.