



biology

Special Issue: The Physiology of Contemplative Experiences and Practices

Dear Colleagues,

We are the editorial team of a special issue in *Biology* consisting of Aviva Berkovich-Ohana (University of Haifa, Israel), Marc Wittmann (Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology, Freiburg, Germany), and Shahar Lev-Ari (Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel Aviv University).

This Special Issue of *Biology* focuses on recent advances in the field of physiology of contemplative experiences and practices. Important advances in neuroscience, psychology and clinical medicine suggest that contemplative practices and experiences may change the brain and body (both function and structure) and could potentially help to improve health problems, enhance well-being and promote healthy behaviors. Contemplative practices vary and emerge from diverse traditions. As disciplines of body and mind, they share a number of features, including cultivation of altered state of consciousness (ASCs), or expanded consciousness, generally aiming at a holistic approach to well-being. Contemplative experiences include either psychologically (e.g. meditation, sensory deprivation, contemplative inquiry) or physiologically (e.g. psychedelics) induced ASCs. Their measurable effects can be during the experience (short-term, state effects) or lasting (long-term, trait effects). Physiological measures can include neuroscience (central nervous system, peripheral physiology) and clinically relevant biological measures. One of the major proposed mechanisms that underlie such beneficial effects might be related to a shift in self-consciousness, especially a reduction in the central focus on self-consciousness, e.g. experiences of volitionally reduced self-boundaries, meditation induced selflessness or psychedelic induced ego-dissolution. Our goal is to stimulate interdisciplinary research by closing the gap between theoreticians and experimentalists in the field of contemplative type practices and to foster collaborations that will strongly benefit both communities and that will improve our understanding of mechanisms the underlie the clinical effect of contemplative practices on health. Potential topics include but are not limited to: 1. Clinical work – biological measures of contemplative type experiences, related to physical and mental health and well-being. 2. Basic science – relating contemplative type experiences to physiological measures of (self) consciousness. 3. Theoretical contributions related to the above clinical work and basic science, including physiological measures.

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