

The Yoga Fellowship of Northern Ireland

Chairperson's Report for AGM - Saturday 10 June 2023

On behalf of the Fellowship and the Committee, I would like to welcome you all here for our 2023 AGM.

It is hard to believe that this will be our 45th AGM and serves to remind us of the longevity and enduring power of the Yoga Fellowship, despite all the challenges in recent years, including the post- pandemic phase which, in many ways, has changed the Yoga world and the way we do things.

Our workshop last June with Swami Krishnaprem was the first in NICVA in the previous two years, and ushered in a series of wonderful monthly workshops from an eclectic variety of teachers, as you will hear in the Secretary's Report to follow.

These workshops remind us that Fellowship events are all about the communal spirit, coming together to participate in our mutual love of Yoga and its healing and nurturing benefits.

An opportunity to meet old friends, make new ones and fresh connections, in our growing Yoga community.

Yoga remains 'the essential need of today' and is establishing itself as a major cultural force in the West, and of course here, in Northern Ireland, where we have a vibrant and growing Yoga community.

The visionaries who framed our constitution- put together a comprehensive suite of objectives.

When I read the constitution recently, I was struck by how many of these

objectives had been attained, and how they continue to remain relevant today. Let me read a few of them to you and see if you agree.

The Yoga Fellowship did the 'heavy lifting' and nurtured the growth of Yoga in our community. Now Yoga is a healthy thriving part of our day-to-day culture; and there is a diverse spectrum of independent autonomous Yoga teachers, Yoga centres, training organisations etc meeting the demand for the proven wellbeing Yoga brings.

I took a walk in Musgrave Park in Belfast the other evening and there was a large group of people enjoying a Yoga class on the grass, near the football and other activities; and it struck me how natural it all was, hardly eliciting a second look by passers-by, of what a couple of decades ago would have seemed an exotic sight. I also saw Facebook postings of Yoga being practised on our beaches and in our woodlands.

How true the prophetic words of Swami Satyananda, founder of the Bihar School of Yoga, who visited Northern Ireland some fifty years ago and inspired many of the founders and pioneers of the Yoga Fellowship, when he declared: 'Yoga is not an ancient myth buried in oblivion. It is the essential need of today and the culture of tomorrow'.

There is always room for improvement and scope to do things better, to raise the training standards, to promote a greater understanding of Yoga in all its breadth and depth; to ensure that the benefits of Yoga- and its safe practice- as a holistic science of wellbeing are made available to every strand of our society, especially the marginalised areas; to communicate its benefits in a professional manner to the health and education sectors and other public bodies.

The Yoga Fellowship can continue to play its part in these aims and initiatives, but it acknowledges that the entire diverse Yoga Community

has a role and responsibility likewise and, all in all, the future of Yoga in Northern Ireland is in safe hands.

And, you know, much as I value our members, who are the backbone and lifeblood of the Fellowship, I like to think that the entire Yoga community is a de facto part of our Fellowship and have also played, and continue to play, an important part in delivering our objectives.

After all, our constitution encourages us to achieve our objectives in a 'common effort' and to 'promote and organise co-operation in the achievement of our objectives'.

And so, its central mission accomplished, the Fellowship is now content not to place any onerous burdens on itself and to continue- with the blessings of our membership - as we resolved at our last AGM- as a 'Sangha', a community of seekers and Yoga devotees, with our members' interests at heart.

We will continue to be an organisation with great experience, sound corporate principles, and a respected mentorship role in the Yoga community; a voluntary not-for-profit organisation of friends, yogis and seekers with a vision of making the world a brighter and more wholesome place.

We are not saying that we are the best at what we do, but we are the only ones who do what we do.

As I have said, our pledge is to go forward as a community, a 'Yoga Sangha' to support and guide our membership and to promote the gift of Yoga 'to enhance physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing'.

That remains our vision and our communal 'sankalpa', and it need not be

stressed that membership, support and commitment are necessary whatever course we chose to follow.

As ever, we are open to expressions of interest from those members who wish to be considered to join the committee or to volunteer their skills and time to support our work.

And if that is not possible, we urge members to show their support by coming along to our events, bring a friend, and play a part even at that level.

Before I close, I would like to wholeheartedly offer my gratitude to our small Committee for its hard work and tireless commitment over the last year, particularly our Treasurer, Eileen Morgan and our Membership Secretary, Maria McCarter.

I would also like to acknowledge the committed service of our Committee members who moved on in the last year- Anne Furgrove, Sue McBride, Hilary Taggart and Maura Parkhill, who of course we welcome as our new President.

And let me take this opportunity to extend every good wish and gratitude to Frank Moylan our former President.

Thank you and Namaste.

Michael McCann

(Chairperson, Yoga Fellowship of Northern Ireland 2022//2023)

