

# **Wellington Meditation Centre**

*(registered as "Wellington Study Group Incorporated")*

## **A Brief History - 1954 until now**

*As in a great braided river, water flows down in  
tributary streams from hidden springs of  
longing that merge in a deep current of unity  
nearing the ocean....*

## Introduction

Longing to understand the truth about ourselves and our full potential in the universe in which we live has always been an undercurrent that brings us together in the Wellington Study Group (WSG)\*. Drawing at various times from differing *tributary streams*, today there runs through the WSG a *unified current* of spiritual resources explored over some 60 years.

The WSG offers authentic spiritual **knowledge**, **meditation** and **dervish turning**. It brings together individuals who feel drawn to realise in their lives an inner unity and rest, and want to meet others who may share the longing for ‘something more’.

In this brief history we will describe how the WSG came into being many years ago and the tributary streams that have contributed to our unified spiritual current.



*\* To better reflect its activities, since 2020 the WSG has used the name “Wellington Meditation Centre”. In this booklet however, the legal name abbreviated as “WSG” is used throughout.*

## The 'Western System'

The earliest *tributary stream* that left spiritual concepts with us was a body of ideas (later called “the Western System”) taught by a Russian philosopher P D Ouspensky<sup>1</sup>. In around 1915-21 he derived this system of esoteric knowledge in an already formulated form from G I Gurdjieff who had obtained it from unverifiable sources. Ouspensky began to hold lectures, and formed a group in London working with these ideas from the early 1920s until the outbreak of WWII and again from its end until his death in 1947.



***Pyotr Demianovich Ouspenskii (known in English as Peter D. Ouspensky) 1878 - 1947***

Put crudely, this System saw the quality of every action in the universe and of a human being as resulting from the order of interaction of three primal forces, and that successions of events universally unfolded in accordance with a law of seven stages or “octaves”. Humanity was

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<sup>1</sup> Ouspensky was born in [Kharkov](#), today modern day Ukraine, in 1878. He travelled widely, met with Gurdjieff in Moscow in 1915, and associated with him over 10 years. He was the author of several books, including *The Fourth Dimension*, *Tertium Organum* and *In Search of the Miraculous*. He moved to England in 1921 and his lectures in London were attended by such literary figures as [Aldous Huxley](#), [T. S. Eliot](#), [Gerald Heard](#). Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P. D. Ouspensky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P._D._Ouspensky)

essentially “asleep”, living “mechanically” and oblivious to the operation of these universal laws.

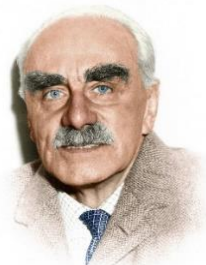
Through personal inner work in a “School of the Fourth Way” under the guidance of a teacher who had awoken, a person could awaken to higher levels of consciousness and see things as they are. However, ordinary individuals did not possess a soul, and needed to generate one through intense “internal friction between “yes” and “no””, and crystallise astral and mental bodies more fine and permanent than the physical body. Living “consciously” and awake to reality would then be possible.

Mr Ouspensky recorded the ideas of the System for private use by those working in a School in his book “In Search of the Miraculous – Fragments of an Unknown System”.

### **The Study Society**

Dr Francis C Roles, a neurologist, joined this group in 1932 and became a close confidant of Mr Ouspensky. He was present when, very near the end of his life in 1947, Mr Ouspensky “abandoned the System”- he recognised that

it was incomplete, and should not be taught any more. He charged Dr Roles to find a simple method of work on one's *being* (which was missing from the System); in finding that he would find people who were already 'awake' and the source of the System, and the Doctor was to reformulate it anew.



*Dr Frances C Roles*

In 1951 Dr Roles and others (mainly former students of Mr Ouspensky) founded the Society for the Study of Normal Psychology ("the Study Society") to fulfil these tasks. For 12 years (1947 to 1959) Dr Roles and those around him searched for someone teaching a genuine simple method of work on one's *being*; none measured up.

### **Wellington Study Group – then "School of Philosophy (Wellington)"**

Meanwhile, our present Wellington Study Group arose from another, quite different, *tributary stream*. Prior to WWII a society called the School of Economic Science (the "SES") was established in London by Andrew MaClaren basically to promote the "single tax" ideas of

Henry George<sup>2</sup>. In the early–1950s, Andrew’s son Mr Leon MacLaren (now the leader of the SES) met Dr Roles and became interested in the Western System to which Dr Roles introduced him in detail. As a result, from about 1954 Mr MacLaren’s SES taught essentially the Western System to the public through advertised lectures on ‘Philosophy’ (it continues advertising ‘Philosophy’ lectures to the present day).

A young Wellingtonian, Nolan Howitt, attended these lectures in London, was fascinated, and on returning to Wellington gained permission to advertise a course of these Philosophy lectures to the public from 1956. These proved very successful, and by 1959, there were about 100 people enrolling in the course three times a year.

A charitable society, School of Philosophy (Wellington) Inc. (SOP) was formed and incorporated in 1961. It changed its name to Wellington Study Group Inc. in 1974 as will be explained below; under that name we continue to the present day.

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<sup>2</sup> See the *Henry George School of Social Science* – – which was founded in 1932 as part of a reform movement that sought to establish fundamental economic justice and sustainable prosperity for all. The movement’s primary goal was to bring about the land value tax or single tax advocated by George in his classic work, **Progress and Poverty**. Source: the website <https://www.hgsss.org/about-us/>

## Meditation leading to the connection with ‘the Shankaracharya’ and non-dualism<sup>3</sup>

It was in 1959 that the two *tributary streams* – (1) the Study Society led by Dr Roles and, through him, (2) the SES in London and the SOP here in Wellington led by L MaClaren - encountered what proved to be (for us) *the mainstream*. That year an Indian yogi (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi<sup>4</sup>) visited London, offering to the public a method of mantra meditation.



*Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*

Dr Roles and those with him learnt the method; they immediately realised that this was a simple method of work on *being* for elevating one’s consciousness that they had sought for over so many years. Dr Roles was authorised to teach this meditation; and soon this meditation was introduced to members of the SES and those drawn to a newly founded ‘School of Meditation’.

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<sup>3</sup> *In spirituality, non-dualism, also called non-duality, means "not two" or "one undivided without a second". Non-dualism primarily refers to a mature state of consciousness, in which the dichotomy of I-other is 'transcended', and awareness is described as 'centreless' and 'without dichotomies'. Wikipedia*

<sup>4</sup> *Maharishi Mahesh Yogi was an Indian guru, known for promoting ‘Transcendental Meditation’ worldwide, including to some celebrities such as the Beatles. He was the guru of a movement characterized in multiple ways including, somewhat contradictorily, as a new religious movement and as non-religious – from Wikipedia.*

In 1961 at Maharishi's invitation Dr Roles went to Rishikesh in north India to a consortium of 'meditation guides'. It was here that Dr Roles was introduced by Maharishi to the head of his ancient non-dualistic tradition, His Holiness Shantanand Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of North India (the Shankaracharya).



*HH Shantanand Saraswati,  
Shankaracharya of North  
India: 1953 – 1980, died 1997*

From observing how he moved and the universality of his discourse, Dr Roles recognised that here was an enlightened self-realised person speaking of higher consciousness from experience. Dr Roles came to the view that the system from which the Shankaracharya spoke and the Western System had originally come from a common source, but that contact had been lost over the intervening millennia. The method of meditation and the knowledge of Self-realisation that came through the Shankaracharya and his ancient tradition fulfilled what Dr Roles had been asked to find and provided what had been lost from the Western System.



After that, everything changed. Dr Roles was invited to visit the Shankaracharya for discourse which he did in 1962. From then on there were visits in most years through to Dr Roles' death in 1982 and by his successors in the Study Society through to 1993 before the Shankaracharya's death in 1997.

Gradually the understanding brought through the Shankaracharya and the meditation - **that at the centre of every human being there is unchanging pure consciousness and happiness** - turned on its head the old 'bottom-up' *System* idea of having to work to create a soul and gain higher consciousness.

The 'work' which we continue in our groups to the present day, is to clear away the 'clouds' of ignorance and habitual thinking that obscure realising who we really are.

The advent of the meditation and the 'new' knowledge over time transformed the approach here in the SOP. Dr Roles visited Wellington in mid-1961 soon after his first visit to the Shankaracharya, and introduced some 100 members to the meditation. It remains the cornerstone of our personal spiritual endeavour.

### **'Different channels' 1964 - 1972**

By 1964 Mr MacLaren was leading the SES into an approach different to that of Dr Roles and the Study Society. Dr Roles then introduced Mr MacLaren to the Shankaracharya by letter so that MacLaren could visit him directly and continue to take guidance independently. This Mr MacLaren periodically did through to his death in 1994.

So the two *tributary streams* went in different channels for some eight years, from 1964 to 1972. The School of Philosophy (Wellington), being a SES off-shoot and following Mr MacLaren's approach, did not have effective contact with Dr Roles and the Study Society again until 1972. That year communication was made directly with Dr Roles once again, and the link with Mr MacLaren and the SES was ended.

Nolan Howitt and the Wellington society renewed a strong association with Dr Roles and the Study Society, and in 1974 the society decided to change its name to the name it currently has: Wellington Study Group (Inc.)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Not long after this, Terence O'Neill-Joyce went to live in the Auckland region and drew together a group called the 'Auckland Study Group' also closely linked to Dr Roles and The Study Society. As other individuals moved out, some found ways of continuing to pursue the same approach together."*

Back in 1972, however, within a couple of months of ending the link with Mr MacLaren, a number of members reverted to guidance from Mr MacLaren - this led to their establishing the School of Practical Philosophy linked to the SES. After our society's name change in 1974 to Wellington Study Group, this new society adopted the old name of School of Philosophy (Wellington). It continues under that name from its Aro Street premises with operations linked to those of the SES to the present day.

### **Mevlevi dervish turning & Rumi**

In London in 1964 during the period that the meditation



and link with the Shankaracharya was being established, another *tributary stream* had entered the *mainstream* in a remarkable way. A teacher from the

Mevlevi Dervishes<sup>6</sup> ('whirling dervishes') tradition from Istanbul taught some 60 members of the Study Society

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<sup>6</sup> *The turning ceremony is called the Mukabeleh, which means "coming face to face with the beauty of God". This is a religious ceremony for all religions. The turners are commonly known as the "whirling dervishes" and the tradition was evolved by Rumi the Sufi mystic and poet in the 13th century.*

how to 'turn' and celebrate the authentic Mukabeleh ("face to face") ceremony.

In 1925 Mr Ouspensky had written in his book "New Model of the Universe"<sup>7</sup> how seeing the ceremony in Istanbul on two occasions had impressed him deeply as 'miraculous' and full of intense intellectual effort. A remarkable 'chance' meeting in England nearly 40 years later with a member of that tradition and a member of the Study Society ultimately led to a request to Istanbul for the tradition to be taught in London to society members. The training started there in 1964 and has flourished there ever since.

Two members of the WSG had learnt 'turning' in this tradition in 1973 while living in London. In 1982 while revisiting London, one of them, Gillian Harris, was given authority to teach the whirling dervish tradition in Wellington, and she did so - teaching some 23 members - in 1983. The tradition continues here with periodic training sessions to this present time.

The tradition was founded through Jalal u'din Rumi, the 13<sup>th</sup> century middle-eastern philosopher/poet; and his

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<sup>7</sup> *Routledge & Kegan Paul 1931, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp385-389*

extraordinary spiritual understanding contributes much to the depth of our *mainstream* spirituality.

### **The present – and the future?**

Today those who participate in the different current activities of the Wellington Study Group are able to draw on a long line of exploration into teachings and practices that enable individuals and communities to expand beyond their own limitations into fuller realisation of their potential as human beings.

Doctor Roles and others from New Zealand and London introduced through him visited HH the Shankaracharya on some 28 occasions over 32 years. The written transcripts of the conversations on all sorts of spiritual matters that took place during these visits have left for all who are interested an extraordinary resource (referred to as ‘the Record’). This is freely drawn upon in our discussion meetings.

In our **discussion meetings** participants may draw on the wisdom of long-established teachings that have proved their value as well as the challenges presented through modern day teachers on non-duality. Each person can

explore in their own way through practice, and pool their experiences with others in good company. This, with meditation, offers a way to inner peace and lasting happiness.

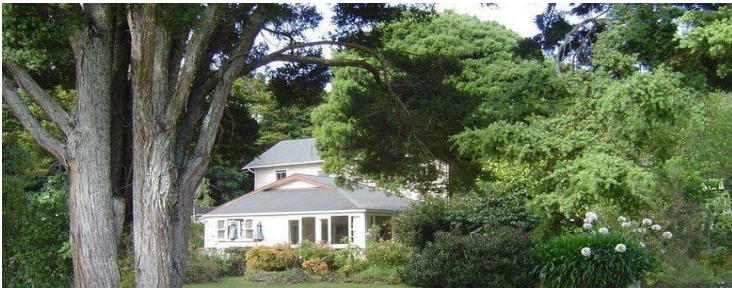
**Meditation** in the mantra form taught through the ancient tradition of Shankaracharya is offered on a one-to-one basis to anyone who wishes to learn and practice it.

The **Mevlevi dervish turning** ('whirling dervishes') can be viewed on regular occasions by anyone, and classes teaching it are arranged according to demand.

The WSG also has regular **meditation retreats** at Strathean<sup>8</sup>, a beautiful retreat centre near Otaki. From 1964 until 2017, this retreat centre was owned and operated by the WSG; and we still use the facility on a regular basis.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://stratheanretreat.nz/>



*Strathean Retreat Centre near Otaki*

The present members offer an open invitation now and in the future to anyone to see if the activities and interests available through the Wellington Study Group have appeal for them. You are welcome to come and see! <sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See our website <http://www.wmc.nz>



**Wellington Study Group Inc**  
now called **Wellington Meditation Centre**

31 Hobson Crescent  
Thorndon  
Wellington, NZ

<http://www.wmc.nz>

Contact:

Lucette Kuhn 02102574238

Michael Harris 021424419