

**Esotericism in the Mirror of COVID-19:  
Gregorian Bivolaru, MISA, and the Pandemic**

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**ABSTRACT:** Despite the legal prosecution of its founder, Gregorian Bivolaru, the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA) remains one of the largest international spiritual movements based on esotericism. During the COVID-19 crisis, Bivolaru delivered several lectures on the epidemic. He contested the monopoly of science in offering answers to the crisis, and emphasized the importance of natural remedies, particularly phytotherapeutic, for an effective prophylaxis. Ultimately, however, he taught that an adequate response to COVID-19 should also rely on esoteric exercises based on meditation, blessings, and the use of mantras. The paper discusses MISA's answer to COVID-19 within the framework of the existing literature on esotericism, healing, and science.

**KEYWORDS:** MISA, Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute, Gregorian Bivolaru, Esotericism and COVID-19, Alternative Medicine and COVID-19.

*Gregorian Bivolaru and MISA: Although Persecuted, They Are Very Much Active*

In 2017, Gregorian Bivolaru, the founder and leader of MISA, the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (Introvigne 2017a; Zoccatelli 2017), was accused of sexual abuse and included, at the request of the Finnish authorities, in the European list of wanted fugitives.

Bivolaru, who was born in 1952 in Tărtășești, in the Romanian region of Muntenia, had been arrested in 1994, and sentenced in 2013 in Romania for an alleged sexual relation with a 17-year old pupil. The age of consent in Romania is 14, but Bivolaru was regarded as the “teacher” of the girl, since he had allegedly been teaching her yoga, and teacher-student sexual relations are a crime in the country. The Supreme Court of Sweden, however, determined that Bivolaru's

prosecution was politically motivated and part of a campaign against MISA as a “cult,” and granted him political asylum in 2006. Nonetheless, Bivolaru was arrested when visiting France in 2016, extradited to Romania, and detained (Di Marzio 2017).

Freed in 2017, he was accused of having sexually abused female Finnish disciples in France. Although he never set foot in Finland, he was accused of having “brainwashed” devotees of the MISA ashram in Helsinki through videos, so that, by the time they met him in Paris, they had been led to consider sexual intimacy with Bivolaru as desirable. While he denies all allegations, Bivolaru is regarded by the Finnish authorities as a fugitive. However, he continues to teach from an unknown location, primarily by sending audio records and texts to his disciples.

MISA became a target of the anti-cult movement, both in Romania and internationally, because of its rapid growth, criticism by the Romanian Orthodox Church, and its teachings on sacred sexuality (Introvigne 2017b; Zoccatelli 2017; Introvigne, Zoccatelli, and Di Marzio 2017). Although sexuality is but a part of Bivolaru’s Tantric teachings, it is the most emphasized by opponents and the media. It is rooted in both Hindu Tantrism and Western esotericism (Melton 2017), and focuses on male continency, i.e. the practice of orgasm without ejaculation. It also celebrates the beauty of the female body in forms that opponents regard as pornographic—although, paradoxically, MISA proposes a structured criticism of pornography, and regards sacred eroticism as an antidote to it (Introvigne 2017c).

The persecution caused MISA to lose some members, but did not destroy the movement. It still maintains some 1,000 full-time members and 20,000 “students” internationally. During the COVID-19 pandemic, its activities moved online. The annual meeting normally held in Herculane, Romania in May—one of two such meetings, the other taking place in Costinești in August—was held online, and thousands participated via the Web. Although the peculiar atmosphere of the gathering cannot be easily reproduced online, I attended the Web event, and found that the offer of courses and lectures (including by Bivolaru) was as rich as usual.

## *Conspirituality*

“Conspiracy theories” has become a convenient label to dismiss unpopular positions. In this sense, it belongs to the same category as the word “cult.” The expression “conspiracy theories” has a tradition of respectable academic use, including in the study of new religious movements (Barkun 2003; Robertson 2016; Dyrendal, Robertson, and Asprem 2018). Theories about conspiracies are enthusiastically embraced, often combining political and religious motivations, and this at both ends of the political spectrum (Asprem 2020). But there are also cases where “conspiracy theory” is used as a four-letter word and as an offensive tool against opponents.

The ambiguity of “conspiracy theories” is that they are often at the border of the sacred and the secular. Religious affirmations about human events, such as “The world is governed by Divine Providence,” are not open to empirical disconfirmation, yet are passionately believed in by religionists. If we define “conspiracy theories” as views about history that cannot be empirically proved or disproved, we can call these statements “conspirationist,” but it is unclear whether defining religion as a vast conspiracy theory adds anything useful to its study (see Aupers and Harambam 2018).

In the tradition of Western esotericism, claims about conspiracies and spirituality appear to be chain-connected. In 2011, Charlotte Ward and David Voas coined the term “conspirituality” to define a spirituality that is inherently conspirationist (Ward and Voas 2011). Conspirituality is typical of the esoteric tradition (Asprem and Dyrendal 2015, 2018). Discussing Bivolaru’s teachings, Sara Møldrup Thejls argued that “conspiracy theory is inherent esoteric in its epistemology,” so that it is not surprising to find it in an esoteric group such as MISA (Møldrup Thejls 2015, 72).

More generally, esotericism and science may directly compete when an esoteric group or author offers a factual statement that also enters the domain of science. For example, Italian esoteric master Giustiniano Lebano (1832–1910) famously argued, developing an unpublished manuscript inherited by his master and father in law, Domenico Bocchini (1775–1840), that the strand of cholera that had killed three of his children between 1865 and 1868 and driven his wife to madness (Casale and Avvisati 2015, 48–51) had been created in a laboratory by “Chinese magicians and priests” (Lebano 1884, 61). In view of the 2020

controversies about Chinese laboratories, the claim looks surprisingly modern, but is open to empirical disconfirmation—unless one believes that Lezano “certainly meant something else,” and the reference to the Chinese magicians should be interpreted in a symbolic rather than a literal sense (Casale and Avvisati 2015, 48).

If the statement should not be interpreted literally, it belongs to a domain other than facts or science. Although dismissed by three subsequent waves of criticism by Protestants, Enlightenment rationalists, and Marxists as *false* knowledge, the “rejected” knowledge of esotericism is better characterized as an *alternative* one. It is a knowledge hard to eliminate from the intellectual history of the West, where it had an enormous influence on culture, the arts, and occasionally science itself (Hanegraaff 2012)—and one that may “work” just as well as others in helping suffering human beings.

In theory, esoteric knowledge may move in a parallel dimension with respect to what is commonly understood as scientific knowledge, without creating any conflict. In practice, however, the same individual or group may regard esoteric and scientific knowledge as alternative rather than complementary. The field of healing offers a good example of this possible conflict.

### *Esotericism and Healing*

Esotericism does not necessarily deal with the healing of physical illnesses. However, many modern esoteric groups and teachings do (Hanegraaff 1996). In the New Age movement, that Wouter Hanegraaff regards as “esotericism in the mirror of secular culture” (a formula I have paraphrased for the title of this article), “therapy and religious ‘salvation’ tend to merge to an extent perhaps unprecedented in other traditions” (Hanegraaff 1996, 46). Interestingly, Hanegraaff refers here to *religious* “salvation,” and in fact similar problems arise when faith healing confronts mainline medicine. There, again, there may be cooperation as well as conflict.

Meredith McGuire noted that in premodern societies, “health, healing and well-being were traditionally interwoven with other institutional domains, especially religion and the family.” Modern medicine claimed health as its

exclusive domain, generating more than one “expression of dissent from the medicalized conception of health and healing” (McGuire 1993, 147–50).

Concerning the esoteric approach to healing typical of the New Age, Hanegraaff argued that, “in their implicit criticism of official western medicine, New Age healing practices not surprisingly evince a rather close affinity to those of traditional cultures which western medicine has sought to replace” (Hanegraaff 1996, 43).

Several esoteric groups today include in their literature about healing disclaimers stating that their suggestions are not intended to replace medical advice, and that in case of doubt doctors should be consulted. These disclaimers serve legal purposes, and try to avoid possible liabilities and lawsuits. On the other hand, as Christopher Partridge has noted, esoteric movements, as well as religious groups, are involved in a process of “democratization” of the “strategies for healing, health and well-being,” where “spiritual health” is emphasized, and the monopoly claimed by modern medicine is increasingly challenged (Partridge 2004–05, II, 4). Few resist the temptation of criticizing a brand of medicine they would call “western,” “mainline,” or “allopathic,” implying that a different medicine is possible.

This conflict emerges again “in the mirror” of the COVID-19 crisis. On the one hand, new religious and esoteric movements are careful in emphasizing that, unlike some mainline churches (Consorti 2020), they respect the authorities’ indications on lockdowns and social distancing. On the other hand, they also offer “spiritual health” suggestions that go beyond medicine and science (see Šorytè 2020). Some also openly criticize what they perceive as monopolistic claims by scientists.

#### *“A Bizarre New Religion Without God”: MISA vs “Mainstream Science”*

Gregorian Bivolaru shares with other spiritual teachers a concern about how millions lived the lockdown as a period of “lethargic” life, “fear,” and even “idiocy” (Bivolaru 2020, which is the source of all quotes in this and the next three paragraphs, unless otherwise indicated). The fact that many lived the crisis in a “larval state” is not coincidental. Within an esoteric view of history, it is further evidence that we live in what Hindus call Kali Yuga, the last and more

degenerated of the four ages the world goes through, and Christians call “apocalyptic times.”

These are the signs of the apocalyptic times in which we are living, times which are shattering, and staggeringly symptomatic of the Age of Darkness, of ferocious materialism, of stupidity and of the state of lethargy, of the larval state that unfortunately characterises many human beings and which indicate that we are living in Kali Yuga.

On a more mundane plane, the situation is also due to “a strange system that promotes sickness and not health.” MISA respected the laws during the pandemic, and moved its activities online. However, it also engaged in “a dismantling of the mythical infallibility of mainstream science.” Bivolaru particularly criticizes the “tyrannical” side of mainline science that emerged during the pandemic. He believes scientists tried “to impose their points of view in a forced manner, especially through the state” and censorship of the social media. He denounces “Cerberus censors” who tried to “censor in a criminal manner certain information on the Internet.”

The pandemic, according to Bivolaru, evidenced that mainstream science is becoming

a false and a bizarre new religion without God, which is being imposed forcefully through fines, through prison, and this monstrous tyrannical proclaims of science, in a hallucinating manner, so to speak, through partial truths, not through expositions that are intelligent, objective, profound, full of common sense, but by means of certain dazzling and imposed laws. Such a science is not disseminated by ingenious, honest scientists but is proclaimed by police officers.

Bivolaru quotes the American “chemist of the people” Shane Ellison to argue that prescription drugs have killed hundreds of thousands (Ellison 2014). Ellison is a controversial character, and organized skeptics have denounced his writings as “a handy microcosm for pseudomedical notions” (Moline Skeptics 2015; *Encyclopedia of American Loons* 2016). They have argued that his remedies are not more, and probably less, effective than those of the “official,” and of parts of “alternative,” medicine he denounces. However, Bivolaru refers to Ellison only with respect to casualties deriving from hastily prescribes drugs. Here, Ellison derives his data from mainline sources. One is Peter C. Gøtzsche, who wrote in 2014 that, “our prescription drugs are the third leading cause of death after heart disease and cancer in the United States and Europe,” explaining that,

around 100,000 people die each year in the United States because of the drugs they take, even though they take them correctly. Another 100,000 die because of errors, such as too high a dose or use of a drug despite contraindications (Gøtzsche 2014, 628).

Gøtzsche is a militant opponent to what is often called Big Pharma. Pressures from pharmaceutical industries led to the Danish Ministry of Health sacking him from his positions as director of the Nordic Cochrane Center at Copenhagen's Rigshospitalet and professor at the University of Copenhagen. A petition in his favor promoted by his colleagues gathered 9,000 signatures (Ioannidis 2019, 1). Gøtzsche has been qualified in a scholarly journal as

a well-known firebrand. Yet he is well-respected for the science he has produced. He is clearly a giant with major positive contributions to evidence-based medicine. His work has been instrumental in promoting transparency in clinical research, revealing biases, and fighting against conflicts of interest. Both the citations to and the societal impact of his scientific publications are phenomenal (Ioannidis 2019, 1).

The Gøtzsche incident shows how conflicts penetrate *within* “mainline” medicine as well. Quite apart from the Ellison and Gøtzsche controversies, the Web site of the Center for Ethics of Harvard University reported in 2014 that,

Few know that systematic reviews of hospital charts found that even properly prescribed drugs (aside from misprescribing, overdosing, or self-prescribing) cause about 1.9 million hospitalizations a year. Another 840,000 hospitalized patients are given drugs that cause serious adverse reactions, for a total of 2.74 million serious adverse drug reactions. About 128,000 people die from drugs prescribed to them. This makes prescription drugs a major health risk, ranking 4<sup>th</sup> with stroke as a leading cause of death. The European Commission estimates that adverse reactions from prescription drugs cause 200,000 deaths; so together, about 328,000 patients in the U.S. and Europe die from prescription drugs each year (Light 2014).

If the argument that prescription drugs kill a significant number of patients is factual, Bivolaru's criticism of “mainline” science is philosophical. He argues that “official science has lost its consciousness,” and quotes a well-known dictum of French 16<sup>th</sup> century writer François Rabelais (1483?–1553), that “science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme” (science without conscience is but ruination of the soul: Rabelais 1532, 42). Here, Rabelais claims to summarize King Solomon, and Bivolaru calls the French writer an “initiate.”

According to Bivolaru, “scientific truth is partial, is ephemeral, and especially—it is dualistic.” McGuire notes that contemporary dissent from modern medicine is based precisely on its dualism between the body and the

mind, controlled respectively by medicine and psychiatry, and soul, the sphere of religion and esotericism (McGuire 1993, 146–47). Those who contest the benefits of the modern processes of differentiation, including Bivolaru, claim that illnesses are not located in bodies and minds only, but also involve the soul, and that treating body, mind, and soul separately is a mistake.

Consistent with Hanegraaff's comment that esoteric critics of mainline medicine often look to non-Western models, Bivolaru also notes that in China during the COVID-19 epidemic the media often published articles about traditional Chinese medicine remedies, treating them very seriously. Sometimes, their stories were reported in the West in a sensational way (MISA quotes Teodoreanu 2020), yet beyond the tabloid style Bivolaru believes there is something worth investigating. He finds a precedent on the extraordinary career of Tu Youyou (b. 1930), the Chinese pharmaceutical chemist who went from traditional Chinese medicine to become the first citizen of China to win the Nobel Prize for medicine in 2015. Tu became famous for creating Artemisin, isolated from sweet wormwood (*Artemisia annua*) and used against malaria. She insisted she had not invented anything, but simply adapted a traditional remedy known to Chinese traditional medicine and first mentioned some 1,600 years ago (Tu 2017).

### *Eleven Forms of "Prophylaxis"*

A state of crass stupidity combined with the state of panic and hysteria has attained amazing peaks, so to speak. It is, however, essential to keep in mind that for every illness without any exceptions, there are nonetheless perfectly natural and efficient, prophylactic modalities.

In his lectures about COVID-19, Bivolaru proposes a lengthy discussion of prophylaxis, distinguishing between eleven different forms of it. While the taxonomy may seem pedantic, it is in fact essential to allow Bivolaru to claim that the herbal and esoteric methods he proposes constitute an effective prophylaxis for COVID-19.

Prophylaxis is part of preventive medicine, and Bivolaru mentions the distinction between "primary preventive medicine," intended to prevent illnesses, "secondary preventive medicine," which tries to avoid the aggravation

of an already existing illness, and “tertiary preventive medicine,” whose aim is to “limit the secondary diseases that appear following certain illnesses.”

Prophylaxis, Bivolaru explains, is a general word including:

1. *Active prophylaxis*, which aims at improving the specific resistance of a person or a group against infectious diseases.

2. *Passive prophylaxis*, or “passive immunization” through the assumption of preventive remedies.

3. *Collective prophylaxis*, which considers in advance how infectious diseases attack a “collective or group,” and works on the interactions within the group.

4. *Dispositional prophylaxis*, which refers to the dispositions of health authorities to prevent the spread of infections through quarantine and other measures (Bivolaru notes that “the students of our yoga schools” do respect these measures, while also using other remedies).

5. *Expositional prophylaxis*, including measures aimed at limiting the exposure of an individual or a group to infection.

6. *General prophylaxis*, also called *nonspecific prophylaxis*, which includes general measures intended for the population as a whole rather than custom-tailored for a specific person or infection.

7. *Personal prophylaxis*, which considers the specific health and hygiene situation of each individual.

8. *Specific prophylaxis*, targeting a specific pathogenic agent.

9. *Emergency prophylaxis*, including measures that may be implemented urgently, yet are still preventive.

10. *Phyto-prophylaxis*, based on the use of medicinal herbs.

11. *Spiritual prophylaxis*, or *esoteric prophylaxis*, adding remedies that belongs to the field of spirituality or esotericism to other kinds of prophylaxis. An *emergency esoteric prophylaxis* is part of this category.

MISA deals specifically with the last two categories, phyto-prophylaxis and esoteric prophylaxis. However, Bivolaru claim that the remedies he suggests are also adequate for all the other forms of prophylaxis.

An important part of all prophylaxis, Bivolaru adds, is a healthy nutrition. He recommends checking whether there is enough Vitamin C and Vitamin D in our diet, “choosing a preponderantly solar, yang nutrition,” and experimenting with days of fasting with water only. He also recommends products of apiculture, “natural honey, the use of bee pollen, 2 teaspoons full per day, and we also advise you to ingest 2 drops of propolis tincture 3 times a day.” He adds that,

it is also wise to ingest a teaspoon full of Acerola (*Malpighia glabra*) 3 times per day, and it is also indicated to put 21 drops of fresh lemon juice into a quantity of 1.5 litres of water, which we are consuming.

Bivolaru also recommends inhaling essential oils:

to use through inhalation, especially when you are practicing profound yogic breathing, certain perfectly natural volatile essential oils such as: natural volatile mint oil, natural basil volatile oil, natural tea tree volatile oil, and from the series that is already well known by some of you, volatile natural oils from the Young Living company, you can use essential volatile oil of lemon, essential volatile oil of lavender, or you can use the combination from the same company of essential volatile oils for purification.

The reference to the Young Living company shows, once again, the interrelations at work within the alternative therapies subculture. Young Living was founded by Donald Gary Young (1949–2018), a Utah businessman who was once arrested for practicing medicine without a license and had other legal problems, which did not prevent his company from becoming the largest (or the second largest) essential oil distributor in the world, with more than three million customers and annual sales in excess of \$1 billion. As Rachel Monroe wrote in 2017 in *The New Yorker*, the immensely popular essential oils are sold as part of a “spiritual experience,” and their success would be difficult to understand by considering them as a mere secular product (Monroe 2017).

### *Phyto-prophylaxis*

Bivolaru refers to scientific literature arguing that “plants have a complex program of answer regarding the defense against viral infections.” Not only plants react to viruses in their own way, but “medicinal herbs, when ingested in an attentive, systematic, and persevering manner,” have a prophylactic effect that may help even in the case of COVID-19.

MISA has developed two herbal remedies that, it claims, “have clear prophylactic effects, in order to help you to avoid being contaminated with the COVID-19 virus.” To steer clear of any accusation that the movement is exploiting the pandemic for commercial purposes, Bivolaru repeatedly insists that the two remedies are not sold, but offered to MISA students for free. They may mightily contribute to prophylaxis.

Referring to this form of prophylaxis; those of you, either men or women who will ingest the prophylactic remedy that will be provided free of charge, you will feel through direct experience both the increase of nonspecific resistance and the increase and the amplification of an immunization that is not only active but also passive.

One of the phyto-therapeutic mixtures developed by MISA is a tonic, to be used in primary preventive medicine. The second, called “Lightning Phytotherapeutic Mixture,” is part of secondary preventive medicine and “can be used in the first stage of a contamination with the virus COVID-19.”

One of the mixtures is promoted with reference to the story of the four thieves, which refers to a medieval or early modern epidemic of bubonic plague but seemed to have appeared in print first in 1719, in the *Synopsis universæ Medicinæ practice; sive doctissimorum Virorum de Morbis eorumque causis ac remediis judicia* by the British doctor John Allen (1660?–1741), which became popular in Europe through the 1741 French edition *Abrégé de toute la médecine pratique*. There, Allen tells the story of four thieves that entered the homes of those who had died of the plague to plunder them, yet miraculously were not infected. When apprehended, one of the thieves, to escape execution, revealed that their secret was a special “vinegar,” in fact a concoction of various herbs granting them immunity from the plague (Allen 1741, 219).

Although the story is often regarded as legendary, modern scientists have noted that the “four thieves vinegar,” a part of traditional European pharmacopeia, had indeed some effectiveness, perhaps because one of its components was the same *Artemisia annua* used by the Chinese doctor Tu against malaria, and also effective in general prophylaxis and against other diseases (Bina and Rahimi 2017).

Bivolaru argues that, when approached with “creative intelligence,” the story of the four thieves emerges as “legendary significant evidence.” Another way of confirming it is just to try the MISA remedy, which is an evolution of the traditional four thieves vinegar, and check whether a “betterment” follows.

“When regarded from an esoteric point of view, the betterment that settles in allows us to have righteous hopes that we have won over the illness.” However, the treatment should continue during convalescence, “with herbs that will be ingested 4 times a day, throughout the 24 hours for another 49 days.”

Do not give up on the treatment based on herbs or even utilising certain appropriate therapeutic modalities because, given the state of sensitivity of both your organism and subtle mysterious vital layer PRANAMAYA KOSHA, it is possible to face a relapse, which—take heed—will not be solved as easily.

### *Esoteric Prophylaxis*

The phyto-prophylaxis proposed by MISA is strictly connected with what Bivolaru calls “esoteric prophylaxis,” as it relies on “aspects which are for the most part hidden.” The combined use of herbs works, Bivolaru claims, because of “the Principle of Occult Totality.”

Certain medicinal herbs that are associated according to certain criteria, and which are selected beforehand because they are appropriate for attaining a certain effect, trigger phenomena of synergy through a mysterious effect, which is something far more than a simple process of addition.

It is not enough to reach a “physical balance,” but we should also achieve “a balance in the sphere of our consciousness.” In fact, simply ingesting the mixtures is not enough.

In situations in which you resort to certain mixtures of medicinal plants or to a liquid tonic that dynamizes the immune system, it is also necessary to bless the respective powder of plants or the correspondent tonic that you will ingest a minimum of 12 times beforehand.

Similarly, it is recommended to

bless the food that you are eating and the water that you are drinking a minimum of 12 times beforehand. By so doing you can be sure that you are using an esoteric prophylactic method that is very strong.

Blessing is an important part of the prophylaxis recommended by Bivolaru. He suggests to “all the [MISA] students to send blessings to one another to avoid a contamination with the COVID-19 virus.”

Another solution is to perform self-blessings. Still, it is necessary for us to mention that, when we choose to offer blessings to a colleague from our classes, either man or woman, we thus set the law of occult giving into action in an eminently beneficial and

constructive manner, and in this way the ones who choose to offer blessings to another human being will thus feel that they are also mysteriously blessed.

Blessings should be generously offered, but not wasted on those who do not understand and reject them.

Those students who will choose to help and protect the members of their family will be able to offer them blessings, either from no matter what distance they may be at, or in close proximity. But it is necessary for the human being who will be blessed to accept beforehand, with humbleness, with benevolence, and with common sense the blessings that are being offered to them. We advise you not to bless human beings who reject blessings with skepticism or who despise such a spiritual gift.

Not everybody can offer effective blessings, and Bivolaru recommends the practice to MISA students who have learned how to bless. Some of them have received during their initiations within MISA certain esoteric artifacts that can be used for blessing.

All those of you men and women, who have already received certain gifts over the course of time that were charged with certain sublime subtle godly energies, you can use them successfully in this period by placing them, if you are not left-handed, in your left hand, and then you will aim to feel, in an uninterrupted flux, the subtle sublime energy of the appropriate godly attribute, with which the respective gift was originally charged for you. This will be significant, and you can be sure that it will be much more than nothing in benefiting you.

Group practice by initiated students is even more effective, as collective energies are mobilized, creating what in the Western esoteric tradition is known as *egregore*.

You can even operate in a group, when you attract and accumulate the subtle sublime energy of a certain godly attribute into your aura. It is worth taking into consideration that, when you operate in this way in a group where there are several people, the power of such an invocation grows to a surprising degree, and in this way you are benefiting from the effects of the phenomenon of occult multiplication.

It is welcome for you to realize that, by choosing to act in this way in a group, you combine the usefulness of spiritual transformation that is accelerated with the ineffable pleasure of accumulating the subtle sublime energy of a certain godly attribute into your aura. In so doing, you resort in an obvious way to a beneficial form of esoteric prophylaxis, which will not remain without consequences.

Bivolaru teaches that there are precious consequences in creating an *egregore* of like-minded practitioners of esoteric blessings, but there are also extremely negative occult consequences in abandoning ourselves to the fear and lethargy

that prevailed in many households during the COVID-19 quarantine. “By acting in this dumb way, you are triggering in a sure and fatal way, a process of occult resonance with the mysterious invisible world of all of those who have become sick.” On the contrary, the collective “heroism, enthusiasm, and optimism” during the pandemic may be directly channelled “into your aura, into your inner universe,” and are “directly proportional with the capture of these subtle sublime energies, of these godly attributes that I have mentioned, that accumulate in your aura.”

Ultimately, these occult principles also contribute to explain why some are infected by the virus and some are not, and why some develop serious and some milder symptoms, as

the specific nature of every human being has what one may call an appropriate field, and this field causes every human to be affected by a certain illness in an appropriate manner. The occurrence and exacerbation of a particular disease occur in an occult manner.

The “occult manner” in which somebody reacts to a pathogen may be “most often suspected to include the karma of that human being.” However,

even in the case of an unfavourable, harmful, inauspicious, bad karma, when a human being who confronts such a karma mobilises strongly in an attentive, systematic, appropriate, enthusiastic, and persevering manner, even then, in spite of bad karma, such a human being can nevertheless fully heal.

Bivolaru does not teach that being a MISA student automatically protects from infections. In an epidemic, an “emergency esoteric prophylaxis” is needed, which implies the creation of an “energetic sphere of protection.” Bivolaru recommends some specific techniques, based on colors, crystals, and yoga. Colors play a key role in prophylaxis.

Those of you who have Zepter chromotherapy devices, you will be able to perform simple chromotherapy sessions by allowing or leaving the respective device focused on your body when you are sleeping, and you will use the yellow filter one day, the green filter the next day, and on the next day the orange filter. And you will repeat this in the same order.

Zepter is a Swiss-based multinational company founded by Serbian entrepreneur Philip Zepter (b. 1950), which started by selling home products such as cookware and tableware accessories, but then carved a successful niche in the alternative medicine market with its light therapy and chromotherapy devices.

Bivolaru details which colors, and in which sequence, should be used in the emergency esoteric prophylaxis.

When you are facing a strange inner state, you will be able to successfully use the set of colors to enter through an appropriate visualization, in communion with certain colored subtle streams. We suggest to you in this regard to use the yellow-colored subtle current, the violet-colored subtle current, the green-colored subtle current, the orange-colored subtle current, and the pink-colored subtle current.

Crystals are also mobilized.

Those of you who have certain appropriate crystals, you can place them in the left hand and, if you are not left-handed, then you will aim to feel, in an uninterrupted flux, the specific beneficial subtle energy of the respective crystal. In that context, you will feel how the subtle energy that you are capturing by means of the respective crystal accumulates into your aura, and gives you an inner state that corresponds to the structure of that crystal.

However, when you need “to burn and annihilate a possible karma that might predispose you to be contaminated with the COVID-19 virus,” Bivolaru believes that advanced yogic practices are necessary. He recommends *laya yoga*, an expression that is often regarded as synonymous of *kundalini yoga*, although in fact, as Georg Feuerstein (1947–2012) noted, “*kundalini yoga*” is a comparatively recent label, while “*laya yoga*” indicates a more specific and ancient Tantric practice (Feuerstein 2011, 70–1). *Laya yoga* aims at liberation from karma, by reabsorbing the five gross elements (*mahābhūta*) that are present both in the universe in the human body, i.e. ether (*ākāśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*tejas*), water (*ap*), and earth (*pṛthivī*), into their divine matrix. *Laya yoga* includes the chant of the *bija mantras*, also known as “seed mantras,” believed to resonate at seven different frequencies connected with the seven chakras.

The *ajna chakra* is the sixth chakra, and is supposed to be located in the center of the forehead, which is believed to be the location of the invisible “third eye.” Its *bija mantra* is AUM or OM, the primordial sound of the world in the Hindu tradition. Bivolaru suggests that,

you perform *laya yoga* with the AUM *bija mantra* 30 minutes a day, and you will be able to focus your attention firmly at the level of the subtle center of force *ajna chakra*. By acting in this way, by doing *laya yoga* and by emitting silently within the AUM *bija mantra*, you can be sure in anticipation that you are burning and annihilating a possible karma that might predispose you to be contaminated by means of the COVID-19 virus. By acting in this way, you will feel at the same time in the microcosm of your being, a strong state of elevated, euphoric, and indescribable safety.

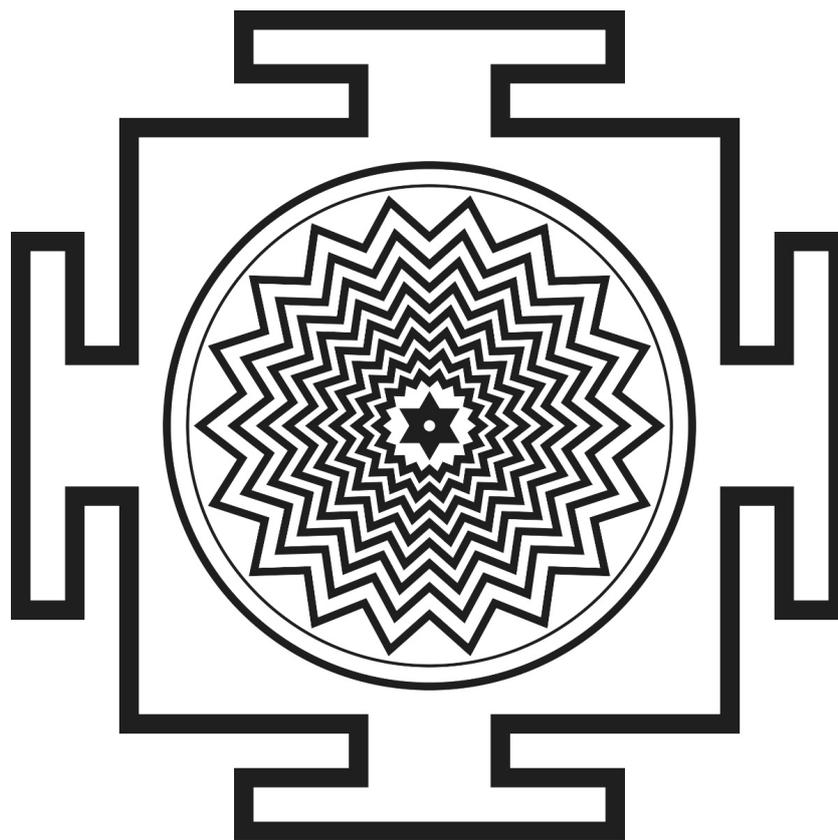


Figure 1. Yantra “The Star of Shiva.”

Also, on the same line of energizing one’s *ajna chakra*, the Tantric tradition recommends *tratakam* meditation, performed by focusing on a single point or on a yantra, or diagram painting. Artists associated with MISA such as Ines Honfi often produce yantras, and believe that during meditation our mind slowly takes the form of these diagrams (see Introvigne 2017b, 6). During the COVID-19 emergency, Bivolaru suggested

to do for a minimum of 2 times at home *tratakam*, both with the yantra named the Star of Shiva and with the yantra of the Great Cosmic Power Tara. When we choose to perform *tratakam* with one of these yantras, it is important to simultaneously feel an ineffable state of supernatural spiritual communion with the immense force sphere of Shiva, or with the macrocosmic force sphere of Tara.

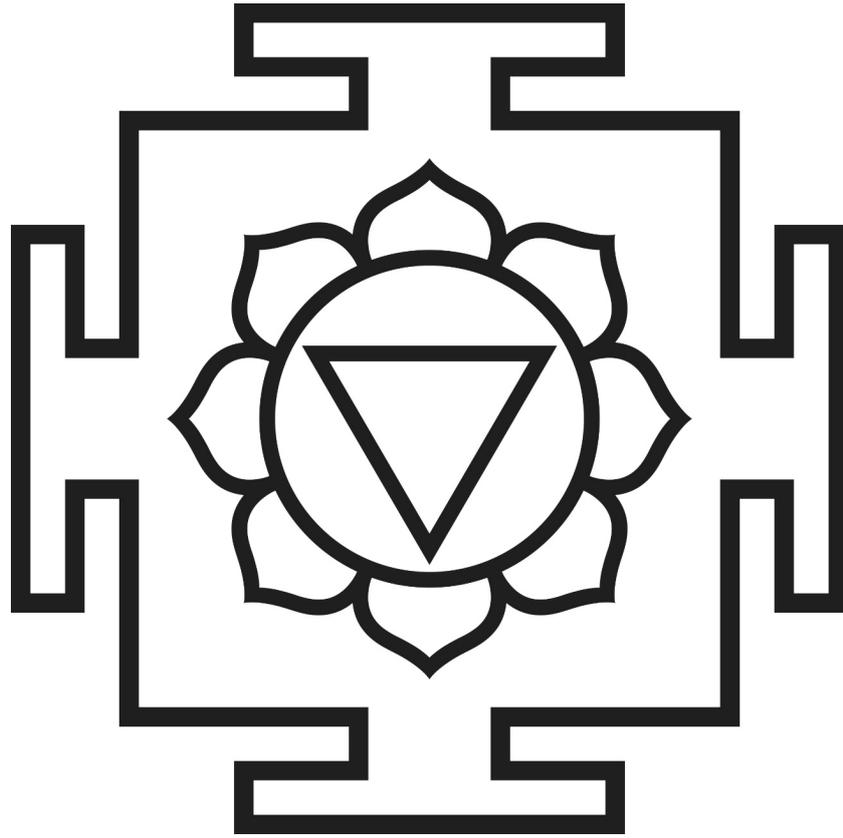


Figure 2. Yantra of the Great Cosmic Power Tara.

Students of MISA initiated in the *bija mantra* practice may also supplement the exercise focusing on the *ajna chakra* with one concentrating on the *manipura chakra*, the third chakra, believed to be located above the navel and in the solar plexus, whose *bija mantra* is RAM. Bivolaru recommends

to those of you who already have the initiation in the *bija mantra* for the dynamizing of the subtle force center *manipura chakra* to perform *laya yoga* for 30 minutes on a daily basis with this *bija mantra*. In this way, you protect in a spiritual manner your being and your body, and you avoid a possible contamination with the COVID-19 virus.

The *manipura chakra* is also associated with fever. According to Bivolaru, one common mistake of those relying on “mainline” medicine is to immediately react to fever by assuming drugs aimed at reducing the body temperature. In fact,

when it is considered from an esoteric perspective, it can be said, rightfully speaking, that the state of fever highlights the dynamizing in the microcosm of the human being of a process of occult energy with the subtle energy of fire, called in the Sanskrit language TEJAS TATTVA, which is in connection to the subtle center of force MANIPURA CHAKRA.

Fever can thus be eminently beneficial, just as inducing abundant perspiration through saunas is useful, although Bivolaru cautions that medical intervention is appropriate in case of extremely high temperatures, and that dehydration should be fought through “water blessed 21 times.”

### *Conclusion*

In an article published in 2006, Brian Hughes criticized the theories explaining the popularity of alternative therapies through “a popular deconstruction of the hegemony of biomedical science, and a counter-cultural onslaught against modernist, technologically focused construction of progress.” In fact, Hughes argued, engagement with therapies “is frequently based on heuristic reasoning rather than logical rationalism” (Hughes 2006, 550). Hughes’ theory is that there is a constant demand for “mysticism.” In modern Western societies, some have noted “a decline in the social acceptance of other mystical belief practices, such as the observance of formal religions” (Hughes 2006, 551). Hughes was aware that, already in 2006, theories of secularization were increasingly criticized. However, he examined data about Ireland to conclude that there is some empirical evidence that “CAM [complementary and alternative medicines] usage is greater where religious observance is lower” (Hughes 2006, 553).

Hughes’ article criticized derogatory explanations of the success of alternative therapies that “have pointed less than flattering fingers at decreasing popular understanding of and respect for science, an increasing level of popular neurosis, or a mass failure of rational thought and critical judgment on the part of the population” (Hughes 2006, 550). In his opinion, rather than a cheaper and less effective alternative to science, CAM are an effective alternative to mainline religion.

My research on MISA and COVID-19 both confirms and calls into question Hughes’ theory. By adopting Hughes’ terminology, one can qualify Bivolaru’s approach to prophylaxis as a form of (esoteric) mysticism. Bivolaru himself would, however, probably argue that any such analysis is inherently dualistic, and based on the presupposition that “mysticism” and bodily health are separate fields, while it is precisely this assumption that MISA’s non-dualistic system intends to challenge.

Some of the practices recommended by Bivolaru for the COVID-19 crisis, including meditation in front of yantras, the use of mantras, and blessings, are clearly part of esotericism and spirituality. They belong to a domain where there is little interaction, and as a consequence little opportunity for conflict, with what he calls mainline or “allopathic” science. On the other hand, herbal remedies and Bivolaru’s view of prophylaxis do enter into, or at least come dangerously close, to the field that modern medicine has claimed at its own. Bivolaru does not shy away from the confrontation, but claims that the contradictions are due to the fact that modern medicine has lost its soul, becoming a Rabelaisian *science sans conscience*. MISA also insists that its prophylaxis was effective, and that this is proved by the fact that none of the yogis in the movement nor their friends got infected.

Ultimately, solving the contradiction matters, both for getting saved from COVID-19 and for saving our souls. For this, both allopathic and herbal remedies are not sufficient, although the latter are introduced as more effective than the former, and we are called by MISA to resolutely enter the path of esotericism and initiation.

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