



# The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom

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## *Mindful Games*

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Meditation looks easy. How could sitting on a cushion and doing nothing be hard? Yet when I first learned to meditate, it reminded me of playing with a Russian nesting doll: open it and there's another just like it inside, only smaller, and then another, and several more, until the littlest doll is finally revealed. There seemed to be layers beneath layers of theory that I needed to understand before I could truly practice. Friends and colleagues had recommended several books, and I was having a hard time sorting through the different methods and terms; the progression of concepts and techniques seemed endless. But I stayed with it, and eventually meditation became a respite rather than a struggle. I finally had the littlest doll in hand. I wrote this book to synthesize what I had learned, and with the hope that it would make unpacking these ideas easier for other parents than it was for me.

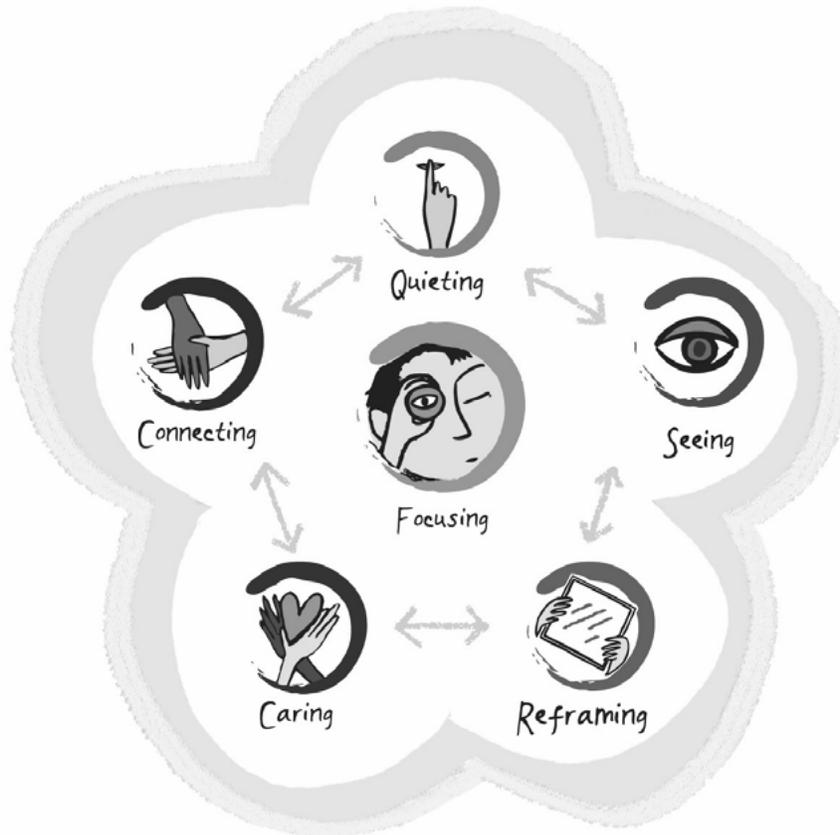
A growing body of scientific research supports what contemplatives have known for millennia: mindfulness and meditation develop a set of *life skills* that allow children, teens, and parents to relate to what's happening within and around them with more wisdom and compassion. *Mindful Games* teaches six of these life skills—Focusing, Quieting, Seeing, Reframing, Caring, and Connecting.

When children and teenagers focus on an experience in the present moment (the feeling of breathing, perhaps, or the sounds in a room), their minds tend to

quiet, and a space opens up in their heads that allows them to see what's going on more clearly. As they become aware of what's happening in their minds and bodies, kids learn to use sense impressions (“I’m feeling restless,” for instance, or “I have butterflies in my stomach”) as cues to stop and reflect before speaking or acting. Through this process they become less reactive and more conscious of what's going on within and around them. Rather than focusing on the result, they focus on responding to the situation with wisdom and compassion. The qualities caring and connecting emerge naturally as children and teens see the web of relationships, causes, and conditions that lead up to each moment. Then they have an opportunity to reframe how they view a situation and can choose to speak and act in a way that's aligned with those qualities. These six life skills are scaffolded so that transforming attention (Quieting, Focusing) leads to transforming emotion (Seeing, Reframing), which leads to transforming speech, actions, and relationships (Caring, Connecting), a progression that's drawn from classical meditation training.

Over thousands of years, contemplatives have compiled an extensive catalogue that maps our inner and outer worlds. I narrowed the catalogue down to two lists that I introduce to kids and their parents through games, stories, guided visualizations, and demonstrations.





The circle of six life skills is the first of those lists. The second list is made up of *themes* that inform a wise and compassionate world view. They are:

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| Acceptance                                   | Discernment        |
| An open mind                                 | Empathy            |
| Appreciation                                 | Everything changes |
| Attention (the spotlight and the floodlight) | Interdependence    |
| Attunement                                   | Joy                |
| Behavioral restraint                         | Kindness           |
| Cause and effect                             | Motivation         |
| Clarity                                      | Patience           |
| Compassion                                   | Present moment     |
| Contemplative restraint                      | Self-compassion    |
|  | Wise confidence    |

Inherent in mindfulness and meditation are qualities that are mysterious, and trying to crack the code by boiling these elements down to a couple of lists might seem to be missing this point entirely. I'm emboldened by other mysterious creative codes, however, such as jazz, where musicians study a circle of fifths and practice scales to fuel artistic qualities



inherent in improvisation that are beyond description. Like jazz musicians, meditators study a set of themes and practice a set of life skills to fuel qualities inherent in mindfulness and meditation that are hard to pin down. In both creative disciplines, practitioners know these mysterious qualities when they see them, not because they're able to put them into words, but because they can feel them. There's an old saying that wisdom and compassion are like two wings of a bird and we need both to fly. The *conceptual* themes and *practical* life skills that mindfulness and meditation

develop also develop wisdom and compassion. Working together, they offer a degree of psychological freedom that, ideally, will help kids and their families to soar through life's difficulties, just as a bird takes flight and soars through the sky.

Mindful games are written for youth, but don't let that fact fool you. They can be just as much fun and life changing for parents and for anyone who has a meaningful relationship with a child or teenager. Teachers, therapists, grandparents, aunts, uncles, troop leaders, and camp counselors, these games are for you, too. Ready to give one a try? Just relax and feel your feet.

### ***Feeling my feet***

We pay attention to the feeling of the bottoms of our feet against the ground in order to relax, concentrate, and become aware of what's happening in this moment.

**LIFE SKILLS** Focusing, Caring



**TARGET AGES** All Ages

### **LEADING THE GAME**

1. Sit or stand with your back straight and your body relaxed. Breathe naturally and notice what's happening in your body and mind right now.
2. Keep your body relaxed. If you're standing, keep your knees soft.
3. Now move your attention to the bottoms of your feet and notice how they feel against the ground. Let the thoughts and emotions that bubble up in your mind come and go.
4. Are you feeling your feet now? If not, don't worry. It's natural for our minds to wander. Just move your attention back to the bottoms of your feet to begin again.

### **TIPS**

1. Shifting their attention to a sensation like children do in this game (where they feel the bottoms of their feet against the ground) helps children calm themselves when they feel overly excited or upset.
2. Vary the physical sensation that you ask kids to notice. For instance: Ask children to feel the cool doorknob against the palm of their hands when they open the door; or, the warm water and soap suds on their hands when they wash; or, the soft wool against their ankles and feet when they pull on their socks.
3. Consistency is more important than the length

Perhaps what I like best about mindful games is that they offer parents and children a unique opportunity for coteaching and colearning. It's no surprise that many parents report that activities designed for kids offer them a way into meditation that they hadn't been able to access before. Which brings me to this important point: as parents, our own mindfulness has a powerful effect on everyone in our lives, especially on our children. They



notice when we're calm, composed, and joyful, and they learn from our examples. How we steer our course through the world directly affects how secure they feel and how they move through the world. That's why I encourage parents to develop their own mindfulness first, by reflecting on the themes in this book and playing the games on their own, before sharing them with children.

And one final reminder, we don't need to practice mindfulness for a long time for it to be helpful; we just need to be consistent. Frequently integrate brief moments of awareness into daily life, and don't forget that repetition is important.



**Susan Kaiser Greenland** developed the Inner Kids mindful awareness program, and teaches secular mindful awareness practices to children, parents, and professionals around the world. In 2000, she established the Inner Kids Foundation with her husband, author Seth Greenland, bringing mindful awareness to underserved schools and neighborhoods in Los Angeles. She was a co-investigator in a

multi-year, multi-site research study at UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center/Semel Institute on the impact of mindfulness in education. Her work has been covered by *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, National Public Radio, various yoga journals, and CBS Morning News. Connect with Susan at [susankaisergreenland.com](http://susankaisergreenland.com).

# ***The Prejudice in Us All: Opportunities to Explore Our Instincts, Fears, and Capacity to Evolve***

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*Editor's note: This essay from a neuroscience researcher is a painfully honest account of personal prejudice with implications and lessons for us all. Warning: the author uses blunt, sometimes generalizing, and potentially inflammatory language as a way to share her own experiences and internal thought processes, not as an advocacy for that way of viewing or talking about other people, or for a particular political position. In fact, her intention is the opposite: through becoming more mindful of natural processes of prejudice – of course, “natural” does not equal “good” – we become more able to manage these processes, and more able to widen the circle of “us” to all of “them.” This is a complex topic that calls for diverse perspectives, and Tami Bulleri welcomes your feedback; please send it to her at [tamibulleri@gmail.com](mailto:tamibulleri@gmail.com).*

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In 1995, my high school graduating class in Wayne, New Jersey was comprised of over 98% white students, mainly Catholic or Jewish. What I knew of other races or religions was based solely on what I heard from friends, family, or TV. For example, the nearby town of Patteson was described only as a place where “dirty,” poor black people shot each other. I listened to friends tell jokes about “fags” in gay bars and heard neighbors complain about the “Chinese” neighbor down the street who was “of course” a terrible driver. As a kid watching the news, I seriously wondered why we didn’t just blow up the entire Middle East; to me, they all seemed evil. And this was all happening in a suburb of ostensibly cosmopolitan New York City.

Then fast forward ten years, when I began studying the brain at Johns Hopkins university, a place where people had all shades of skin, and accents, and cultural wardrobes. If you had asked me when I began working in that setting, I would have told you my *opinions* that all people should be treated equally, we should not use race, religion, or sexual preference as categories for division, marriage should be open for all, and anyone who wants to immigrate into America should be able to do so . . . easily. I really did believe those things then and I still do.

But . . . other reactions still came up for me, especially at the start of my career . . .

One time when the secretary in my office extended her very dark arm out to me, offering one of the cookies in her hand, for a split second a wave of disgust passed through me and I recoiled as if her hand were dirty. “Yes, please,” I said, dismissing my initial reaction, taking the cookie and telling myself that race does not matter.

And . . . when the young girl in the wheelchair, her head contracted to the side with drool spilling down her chin, sat in the exam room with her mother, I resisted the urge to run away and with great effort placed my hand on her shoulder. I half-listened as her mother spoke, internally thanking God she was not my daughter. “We are in this together,” I lied to the mother . . . and internally congratulated myself for being so sympathetic.



## Greetings

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[Rick Hanson, PhD](#), edits the *Bulletin*. [Michelle Keane](#) is its managing editor, and it's designed and laid out by the design team at [Content Strategy Online](#).

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And . . . when the male nurse asked me to see a patient in his nasal high-pitched voice with a stereotypical gay flip of his wrist, I heard a laughing in my head, like he was not a real person to take seriously. “Of course,” I answered and reminded myself that Ray was a good nurse and what gender he wanted to have sex with did not matter to me.

So what matters? My initial reactions or how I respond afterwards? Maybe both do.

People win elections for many reasons, and an individual may cast a vote for many reasons. I write here soon after the U.S. Presidential election in 2016, during which Donald Trump and his political allies said many racist, sexist, or otherwise bigoted things – so repeatedly and conspicuously that they were routinely criticized even by major Republican lawmakers and pundits. In spite of this – or perhaps to some extent *because* of these behaviors – Trump was victorious in the Electoral college.

How might we understand this particular piece of the puzzle that was the 2016 election? (Important note: I am not making a case here for who should have

become President; my focus is on the roots of prejudice.)

To the extent that Donald Trump is personally bigoted – and there is much evidence for this going back many years that can be found in minutes with a Google search – it has been useful to reflect on the little “Trump” (which I am using as a metaphor, in quotation marks) that lives inside me, illustrated in my personal examples above.

Further, perhaps I’m not the only one with a little “Trump” inside.

Maybe Donald Trump received many votes from people (who may outwardly deny it) in part or even primarily because they were swayed by the “Trump” inside their own heads.



A person might secretly love that little “Trump” inside. Or a person might hate him, or not even know he exists. But no way around it, he is there. Maybe we can’t help it. Or maybe we can. Either way, it’s time to stop hiding him.

I think it is time to look into this little “Trump” in all of us. Prejudice comes in many forms, and from people in all aspects of society. It is a good thing to bring this part of us to light. All of us, not just the professional scientists and scholars, should study our own instincts and our own minds. Instead of hiding or denying initially prejudicial reactions when they come up, we should be mindfully curious about them.

These reactions exist for a reason. We all have a survival instinct. As social primates whose ancestors evolved in small bands – “us” – while competing intensely and often violently with “them,” we are naturally attracted to those who look or who are similar to us, while being wary, alarmed, or even repulsed when we encounter those who are different. We belong first to our own perceived “tribe” and tend to defend it, sometimes by building it up by bringing others down. Perhaps the actual Trump became popular in some quarters because he normalized the inner “Trump” as a more authentic expression of the self than “politically correct” ways to treat others that involve managing, even contradicting our initial reactions.

We could leave it there, and just say that we have innate, survival-of-the-fittest, instinctual tendencies toward in-group membership and out-group prejudice that certain kinds of

political leaders have exploited throughout human history. But I can't imagine that we are not more evolved in *all* of our capabilities than the other social animals that have these tendencies.

Some reactions do feel innate, like I was born with them, such as instinctually running from a bear. But most of my reactions, even ones that are pretty automatic, are not grounded in true physical survival instincts, but instead are reflexive ways to protect who I *believe* I am. These self *concepts* are built from experiences beginning the day I was born, including internalizing the beliefs – and prejudices – of others. As a child, I had no choice, no understanding of the world besides what was presented to me.

My impulsive reactions have dwindled as I've been able to connect with a much greater diversity of humans. But I haven't been able to reverse completely what has already been engrained. Still, when I accept these reactions as a part of me rather than denying or avoiding them, and let them pass, knowing where they come from through largely impersonal processes shaped by millions of years of evolution, and that there is no binding truth to them, it gives them a kind of . . . irrelevance.



What years of studying neuroscience research has taught me is that our brains are not fixed, but constantly changing – and we can help drive that change. Each day that I choose to acknowledge and then let pass the limitations of my instinctual reactions and related mental activities, I can experience my mind more clearly and engage the world more wisely.

For example, I recently saw an elderly male patient who was dressed in a nice shirt and tie. I noticed, as I was talking about his brain tumor, that I was explaining things more thoroughly and

spending more time with him than with the disheveled patient I'd just seen. I realized that I assumed this elderly man was well-educated or had a high-ranking position because of the way he was dressed. So I stopped and asked if he had a medical background. He answered, "I am a retired plumber." I noticed my perception of him change at that moment and if left unchecked, I would have unconsciously begun treating him based on my new concept of who he was. Instead, I was able to realize that both perceptions of him – "doctor" or "plumber" – were just that, perceptions. I let them go and looked him in the eyes, which began to tear up. He stopped being a plumber, or a patient, and was just a human experiencing pain – a universal pain that was impervious to money or status. I effortlessly placed my hand on his shoulder. My mind chatter was quiet for once. "I'm sorry you are going through this," I said – because I really was . . . sorry.

Over time, I find that being able to see my own mind, and not always believing every thought to be the truth, allows me to see that my mind is only a part of who I am. I am more than my social primate instincts. I am more than the mind that acts out these instincts by creating a "me" vs. "you" mentality.

Or maybe I am actually less than that mind. When I shift perspectives and can see the relative insignificance of my mind-made self, it can feel like I am left with no solid place to stand, no solid self to be – that in some sense I am nothing at all. Maybe this is what's



scariest. Maybe this is why we don't acknowledge that our opinions and beliefs and prejudices are not the ultimate truth. Maybe we try to avoid this ultimate fear that we are nothing by grabbing hold of those survival-of-the-fittest instincts and acting out those familiar prejudices – and casting our votes.

Maybe this election result is the best worst thing that could have happened to Americans, and maybe to humanity. Maybe it will help reveal a little prejudiced “Trump” in each of us that we can begin to accept and move on from instead of continuing to deny. Maybe it will bring to light the greatest underlying fear – the fear of insignificance – that we desperately avoid feeling by clinging to our judgments about others. And maybe, a really big maybe, we will emerge as a more evolved species that finds out that the scary nothing hidden by all our contrived opinions and differences is not scary at all. It is where we can know a deeper truth: a felt sense of connection – not as a race, or even a nation, or even a species, but as an entire living planet.

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**Tami Bulleri** was in the Neurosciences Department at Johns Hopkins University for the past 10 years working as a physician assistant for patients with brain tumors and chronic facial pain. She has been practicing and studying mindfulness for over 7 years and is a graduate of the [mindfulschools.org](http://mindfulschools.org) program. Tami recently moved with her husband and 3 young children to Ringwood, NJ where she is currently working with the public schools to develop a mindfulness curriculum.

# *Meditation*

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From *Marriage and Other Leaps of Faith*, Penciled In.

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With my eyes closed,  
my finger trace grooves  
in a table-top labyrinth.  
Body and mind disappear,  
leaving all I need to know  
in the touch spot  
and the path.



This poem reminds me of *flow* as written about in Mihaly Csikszentmihaly's books:

“The metaphor of *flow* is one that many people use to describe the sense of effortless action they feel in moments that stand out as the best in their lives. Athletes refer to it as *being in the zone*, mystics as being in *ecstasy*, artists and musicians as in *aesthetic rapture*.”

When we are immersed in something meaningful and pleasurable, we enter the present moment in a state of timelessness.

Meditation offers such a path. We don't find it every time, but when we do, we feel transported. Our brains brighten with appreciation as we empty them, and we briefly take leave from this world.

It's fun to notice activities that sweep you away, that bring you into *flow*.

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**Jeanie Greensfelder** is a poet and a retired psychologist. A volunteer at Hospice of San Luis Obispo, CA, she does bereavement counseling. Her two books are *Biting the Apple* and *Marriage and Other Leaps of Faith*. Her poem, “First Love,” was featured on Garrison Keillor’s Writers’ Almanac. Other poems are at *American Life in Poetry*, in anthologies, and in journals. She seeks to understand herself and others on this shared

journey, filled, as Joseph Campbell wrote, with sorrowful joys and joyful sorrows. View more poems at [jeaniegreensfelder.com](http://jeaniegreensfelder.com).

# *A Strange New Demeanor*

© Jonathan Nash

Several months ago the author of the following story, who had been a rather sociable person, had begun to notice a rather strange shift in the way he related to other people. He started to become much more interested in their qualities and characteristics and less concerned about the more superficial trappings of their mundane identities. This new way of seeing others progressed to such an extent that it became very difficult for him to remember the names of new people that he met. This new social impediment made him feel uncomfortable and embarrassed. It continued unabated and he finally stopped attending any social events. Others saw him as overly shy and anti-social. Invitations dwindled. His therapist told him that there was no need to beat himself up over this; that many people suffered from a similar social awkwardness. That didn't help much.

But suddenly it all ended.

No, it's not that this problem had been miraculously cured in some way. Rather it had become overshadowed by a new development. It was challenging enough not to be able to identify other people, but suddenly he had lost all identification with his own self.

He wanted, no needed, to tell the story of what was happening to him, but found himself unable to talk about it in a way that would make sense to anyone else. Ever since the transformation he found it impossible to communicate from a first person perspective. He had become de-personalized. Words such as 'I', 'me', and 'mine' had become irrelevant - they would ring hollow in the emptiness that remained.

But he would not let this deter him - he had to let his family know that he was OK. He finally decided that his only reasonable option, regardless of how strange it might sound, was to resort to a third-person rendition, told in the past tense. And so this is how it was written, and this is his story.



The person he used to be was gone.

This was not a memory defect like some sort of amnesia. Rather, it felt more like a detachment, a complete disconnect from his previous persona. The names, titles, and roles that used to define who he was, had become totally irrelevant.

All sense of self-agency had slipped away leaving no one to direct the show from the inside. It's as if his previous self just 'up-and-quit with no notice', and suddenly no one was home. There remained only a vague sense of the person he used to be - like a far memory of a previous incarnation.

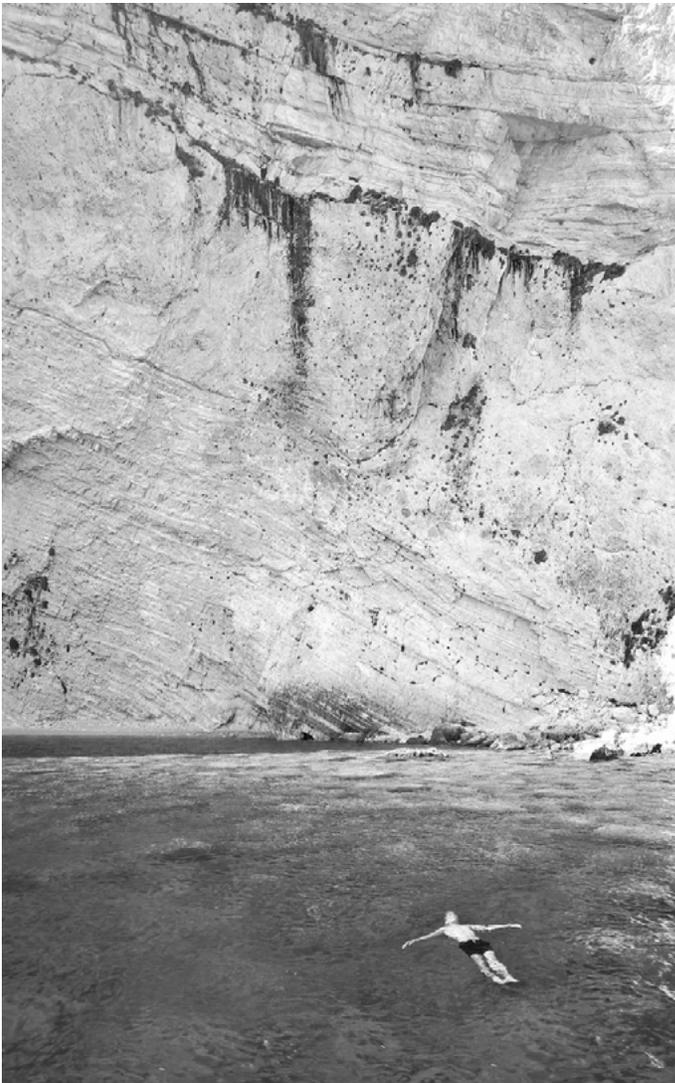
Instead he became increasingly aware of a lingering, unabated presence. It was like some kind of witness; an objective observer of the unfolding of his life - a life that no longer 'belonged' to him.



Absent any connection to a mundane identity, personal conventions became meaningless. Rather than a 'me', this new version of himself felt more like:

a cork  
bobbing on the waves  
a raft set adrift on the ocean of life  
with no sail or rudder with which to steer  
no compass to guide him, no anchor to bind him

He could not remember exactly when this transformation began, but he was able to sense the faint remnants of those initial waves of anxiety, as if something had gone wrong. Was this something pathological? Was he going crazy? But those concerns soon faded. His body-mind had become a sieve, his core had no substance. All worries, feelings, thoughts, and experience just passed right through him. It became impossible to cling to any of it.



But it was not like he had become someone incapable of experiencing emotions. Anger, joy, disappointment, frustration would still arise (along with other 'normal' feelings), but they no longer had any substance or power or effect. They became wisps of smoke that would quickly fade away.

Previously there was a sense of doubt and worry about all of this, about what might happen next, and what other people would think. But now there was just a profound sense of peace, acceptance, and equanimity. He was OK. He was not unhappy or depressed; he was on an even keel – not too high, not too low.

He could still function and make good decisions, and he no longer felt awkward around other people.

Sometimes he wondered what all this would be like if he happened to be somewhere else, in a different country or different culture; where other people would understand what he was going through, could accept him for what he had become, and could

explain what was happening to him. The answer that he was looking for came to him late one night. He thought he could hear a faint whisper - a small voice was saying:

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**for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom**

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*“This is not a bad thing; this is what happens when one’s Buddha nature is awakened”*

Yes, there is emptiness inside, but it’s a place where  
no sadness can abide.

He has a countenance that can’t be missed, he is glowing with  
the light of pure bliss.

Although it comes from a place he cannot find, he is filled with compassion  
for all mankind.

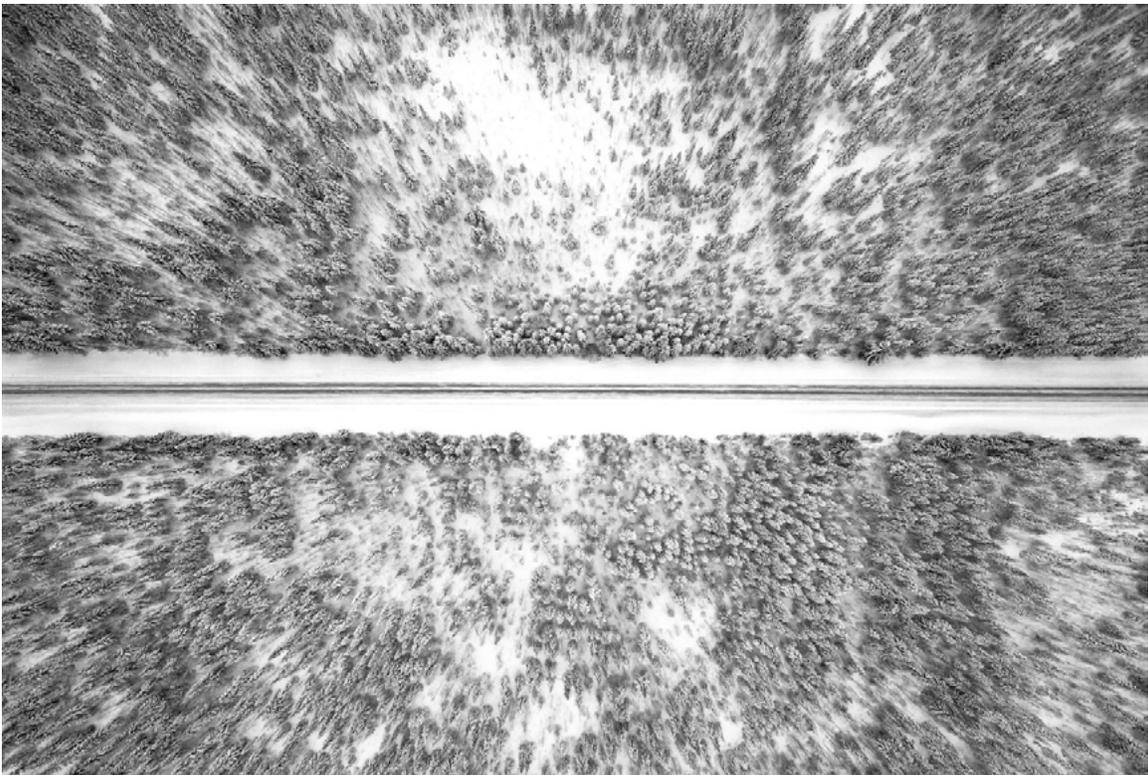
Yes, his former self has vanished  
without a trace.

Yet now there is always a smile  
upon his face.

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**Jonathan Nash** is an American expat who retired from the dental profession in 2005 and has been living in Chiangmai, Thailand for the last eleven years. Since moving to Thailand he has developed a keen interest in the Buddhist dharma and meditation techniques, which inspired this essay about the state of non-self. He has been a TM practitioner since 1972 and a Tai Chi/Chi Gong practitioner since 1976. Several years ago he developed an interest in meditation research and the nascent field of contemplative neuroscience, culminating in the co-authorship with Andrew Newberg, MD and publication of 'Toward a Unifying Taxonomy and Definition for Meditation' in 2013 in the *Frontiers in Psychology Journal*. Currently he is engaged in a research project to investigate the potentially confounding effects of fMRI technology in meditation research.



# ***AWE & Resilience***

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This article is adapted from a newsletter by [Reaching IN...Reaching OUT](#) (RIRO), a non-profit evidence-based program helping to build resilience in young children and adults since 2002.



*The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead – his eyes are closed.*

–Albert Einstein

Awe experts like Professor Dacher Keltner at the University of California, Berkeley believe we're "awe-deprived." We are spending less time in nature and on other awe-inspiring activities like art, music and spiritual pursuits.

## ***AWE Deprivation***

Many of us live and work in man-made bubbles. These environments limit and affect the quality of our daily contact with nature. For example, man-made light pollution is now so strong that [a third of the world cannot see the Milky Way in the night sky](#). And that number jumps to nearly 80% of North Americans!

We spend lots of time working and commuting, checking for messages on our cellphones and googling on our tablets. Our lives are more "inner-focused" which disconnects us from others.



So, in addition to spending less time outdoors, adults also attend fewer arts and music events. This trend has contributed to arts and music programs being dismantled in our schools. And children now spend less time outdoors and in unstructured activities at school and home.

## ***What is AWE?***

The term “awe” has become watered down since it entered into North American slang. So, we say something or someone is “awesome” when we really mean “cool.”

However, scientists say “awe” has two essential qualities (Keltner & Haidt 2003):

- perceived vastness (feeling of being in the presence of something larger than ourselves)
- accommodation (feeling a need to incorporate this experience of vastness that transcends our understanding of the world)

This combination tends to make people feel like they are just a tiny part of a vast interconnected universe. This can lead to feelings of uncertainty and even fear, especially when we’re faced with the sheer power of nature (e.g., wind storms, lightening, ocean waves, etc.).

Awe is generally thought to be elicited by nature, music, art, impressive physical feats or people, exceptional acts of goodness, spirituality/religion and meditation.

But awe can be found in daily life, too. Autumn leaves, a sleeping baby, a stranger's act of kindness – all of these can have a profound impact on the beholder. Dr. Amie Gordon's research (2015) at the University of California, Berkeley found that even bursts of daily awe predicted greater well-being and curiosity weeks later.

## *Why We Feel AWE*

From an evolutionary point of view, scientists theorize that awe exists to increase our sense of connectedness. This resulted in stronger groups and greater chance of survival (Keltner 2016).

Another complementary theory is that awe encourages curiosity, which led to discovery of new lands, food and ways of doing things. Research suggests that “people who are more curious tend to get along better with other people.” So, curiosity also supports social cohesion and our ability to adapt (Anderson, as cited by J.A. Smith, 2016).



## *How AWE Affects and Helps Us*

Until quite recently, awe has received little attention from emotion researchers.

One of the most interesting findings is that awe is unique among “positive” emotions. Scientific measurement shows it is literally a “jaw-dropping,” “breath-taking,” “eye-opening” experience, instead of the smiles associated with its emotional cousins (Compos et al. 2013). Researchers hypothesize that enhanced vision, increased oxygen intake and reduced

physiological arousal associated with awe allow us to do the complex cognitive processing required to deal with “awe-inspiring” and “mind-blowing” experiences (Shiota et al. 2011).

Here are just a few ways that awe seems to affect and help us:

- Expands our sense of time – keeps us in the present (Rudd, Vohs, and Aaker 2012)
- Helps us process information thoroughly – aids critical thinking (Shiota, Griskevicius, and Neufeld 2010)
- Stimulates wonder and curiosity – leads to greater knowledge (Shiota 2016)
- Encourages flexible, “outward” thinking which boosts creativity (Lieberman et al. 2012)
- Connects us to nature – which leads to a “diminished” self and sense of higher power (Keltner and Haidt 2003)
- Increases sense of well-being (Keltner 2016)
- Increases hope and appreciation of life (Schneider 2011)
- Enables “peak experiences” which can transform lives;
- supports search for meaning and purpose (Maslow 1964)

### **Physiological Effects**

- Reduces sympathetic nervous system influence – helps slow down heart rate, remain still, stay in the present moment and soak in information which facilitates complex cognitive processing (Shiota et al. 2011)
- Can reduce inflammation, some inflammatory diseases and improve health by decreasing pro-inflammatory cytokines (Stellar et al. 2015)

### **Social Effects**

- Increases helpfulness, kindness and altruism (Piff et al. 2015)
- May be a core dimension of gratitude (Emmons; interview by Keltner, 2010)
- Increases sense of belonging to something larger than oneself (Keltner & Haidt 2003)
- Increases social cohesion (Keltner 2016)

### ***Perspectives on Self-Care***

Be careful with all self-help methods (including those presented in this *Bulletin*), which are no substitute for working with a licensed healthcare practitioner. People vary, and what works for someone else may not be a good fit for you. When you try something, start slowly and carefully, and stop immediately if it feels bad or makes things worse.

## ***The Relationship Between AWE and Resilience***

When we look at the list above, it's clear that awe-inspiring experiences can play a vital role in supporting our capacity for resilience. Since the key to resilience is relationships, awe's effect on our connectedness and ability to respond to the needs of others is very important.

In addition to attachment relationships, other core competencies associated with resilience (Masten 2009) can be affected by experiences of awe – such as agency and mastery motivation, executive functioning and problem-solving, self-regulation and meaning-making.

### *A Personal Story of Sharing Awe*

One cool November day, I was walking to pick up some bread for dinner. I turned the corner onto a busy street and was absolutely awestruck by the sunset. I stopped and just stared at Mother Nature's spectacular show of iridescent purple, red and bright orange. People, street and cars were bathed in a pinkish-orange glow. After a couple minutes, I realized I was the only person looking up and was blocking part of the sidewalk. A very disgruntled man asked me what I was doing. I simply pointed to the sky. That was all it took—the two of us stood there quietly. Gradually more people looked and joined us. Time stood still that evening for strangers joined in amazement and awe. It was wonder-ful!



## Resources to Help Build AWE

*One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, "What if I had never seen this before? What if I knew I would never see it again?"*

–Rachel Carson

- Online Awe Quiz: [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take\\_quiz/16](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/quizzes/take_quiz/16)
- Simple practices to nurture your own sense of awe: <http://ggia.berkeley.edu/#filters=awe>
- Video resources:
  - [Fascinating Nature II – Colors of the Earth](#) by Gogol Lobmayr, legendary nature documentary photographer and director:
  - [13-minute excerpt from the Planet Earth series](#), involving a collaboration of many nature photographers using awe-inspiring new technology
  - [Shots of Awe](#) channel on YouTube, where science, philosophy, and inspiration collide. Host Jason Silva gets us thinking about the awesome world around us.
- [Irmela Mensah-Schramm](#), a truly awe-inspiring person, has removed 72,354 hate messages in Berlin and other parts of Germany over the past 30 years.
- This [Reaching IN... Reaching Out \(RIRO\) poster](#) inspires you to spend more time in nature and to look for awe-inspiring things in everyday life.

## AWE-some Resources to Help Kids

Children seem to be awestruck fairly frequently—it's part of the magic of childhood. Fortunately, they don't operate with the same filters that adults do – resentment, anger, social comparisons, fear of embarrassment, etc.

So, when little kids ask "Why?" it's just their natural curiosity about the amazing world around them.

*A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that for most of us that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring, is dimmed and even lost before we reach adulthood. . . . . If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.*

–Rachel Carson

## Role Modeling Awe

Young children often learn best by watching the behaviour of important adults around them. So, when adults are open to experiences of awe and wonder and share it with children around them on a regular basis, they are setting the stage for a lifetime of wonder and curiosity.

Articles to help you encourage children's magic moments and purpose

- Childcare by Design offers ideas on helping ourselves and children keep our sense of awe and wonder in this [terrific article](#).
- This [article from the Greater Good Science Center](#) discusses how to use findings from awe research to build a sense of purpose in children.

## Awe Inspiring Video

This 2-1/2 minute [video excerpt from Planet Earth](#) is used by researchers and educators alike to inspire awe in children.

## Children's Books

- [RIRO's selection of children's books](#) to support children's wonder and awe
- Children's Books Guide [100 Most Inspiring Books](#)
- [The Sense of Wonder](#) with superb photography by Nick Kelsh is a gift to the children of the world.

## Activities

10 simple activities for young children to help build awe and a positive outlook that support their resilience: <http://www.momentsaday.com/10-activities-help-young-children-develop-a-positive-attitude>

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# *Skillful Means*

[Your Skillful Means](#), sponsored by the Wellspring Institute, is designed to be a comprehensive resource for people interested in personal growth, overcoming inner obstacles, being helpful to others, and expanding consciousness. It includes instructions in everything from common psychological tools for dealing with negative self talk, to physical exercises for opening the body and clearing the mind, to meditation techniques for clarifying inner experience and connecting to deeper aspects of awareness, and much more.

## **Mindfulness of Sounds Meditation**

### **Purpose/Effects**

One of the simplest, most direct ways to connect with the present moment and further cultivate our awareness is to become aware of the many sounds that are constantly arising around us. Intentionally paying attention to the sounds filling our ears can not only help us to come back to the present but can also stabilize the mind and further refine our sense of hearing and deep listening.

### **Method**

#### **Summary**

Sit and pay close attention to the sounds arising around you.

#### **Long Version**

- Settle into a comfortable position and become aware of your breath flowing in and out.
- When you are ready, shift your awareness to the sounds that are present in this moment.
- Without searching for sounds, let them come to you and fill your ears while simply hearing sounds near and far away.
- Notice any judgments or thoughts about the sounds and let them pass away.
- Notice if you find yourself trying to identify or label the sounds and instead focus on hearing the bare sounds themselves.
- Be aware that sounds arise and fade away, and notice if there are any spaces between sounds.

- When your mind wanders or fixates on a particular sound, gently return your attention to the flow of sounds occurring in the present moment.
- When you are finished, shift your attention back to your breathing and gradually open your eyes.

### History

Awareness of sounds is one of the areas of focus cultivated when practicing mindfulness meditation and is found in various Buddhist traditions including Zen and Vipassana.

### Notes

Some traditions teach a version of mindfulness of sounds by repeatedly ringing a meditation bell and sustaining their attention fully on the sound of each ringing of the bell.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGFog-OuFDM>

### See Also

[Breath Awareness Meditation](#)

## *Fare Well*

*May you and all beings be happy, loving, and wise.*

