

# The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, Effectiveness, and Wisdom  
Volume 1, 8 (5/30/07)

*Featured Article:*

## *Coping with Loss: Implications of Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom Part One*

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### **Introduction**

We all must face losses of one kind or another. For example, my mother died two years ago, plus I've had to anticipate the loss of my 88-year-old father – who happily is still going strong. Besides the dramatic losses of loved ones, there are other, sometimes as wrenching, losses having to do with animal companions, place (e.g., refugees), or limbs or faculties. Subtle, even abstract losses – such as reputation, standing, trust, or innocence – can also tear at your heart.

Then, of course, there are the many losses woven into the fabric of everyday life. Once in Yosemite, when our son was maybe six or seven, he was watching a rugged-looking rock climber (who, we found out later, had just received his MBA) play chess with himself in a café. Wally – the climber – invited Forrest to play a game with him, which our son enjoyed immensely. When he was finally checkmated (after a valiant struggle, I'm proud to say!), Forrest tried nearly as valiantly to persuade Wally to play

another game. Wally smiled, and then said, "You know, all good things have to come to an end."

Whether it's a warm snooze in bed, a hot fudge sundae, a vacation, a great conversation, or old friendships when we move on to new situations . . . all good things must indeed come to an end: an irrevocable loss forever of that particular moment of experience.

This fact of loss, ranging from trivial to shattering, is so central to the human experience that all the world's major philosophies and religions have grappled with how to find meaning in it, and ways to cope. Consider Existentialism, developed mainly in refined European intellectual circles in the 20th century, whose central theme is the confrontation with personal mortality. Or these words, written down somewhere in a small village or dusty caravan over two thousand years ago:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every

### **Also in this issue:**

Your Biochemical  
Foundation  
pg. 7



Offerings

pg. 8



## Greetings

The Bulletin offers skillful means from brain science and contemplative practice – helping you to work with your brain for the benefit of yourself and others.

The Bulletin is offered freely, and you are welcome to share it with others. Past issues are archived at [www.WiseBrain.org](http://www.WiseBrain.org).

Rick Hanson, PhD and Rick Mendius, MD edit the Bulletin. We welcome your contributions, and to subscribe, please contact Rick at [drh@comcast.net](mailto:drh@comcast.net).

purpose under heaven:

*A time to be born, and a time to die;*

*A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;*

*A time to kill, and a time to heal;*

*A time to break down, and a time to build up;*

*A time to weep, and a time to laugh;*

*A time to mourn, and a time to dance;*

*A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*

*A time to embrace, and a*

*time to refrain from embracing;*

*A time to get, and a time to lose;*

*A time to keep, and a time to cast away;*

*A time to rend, and a time to sew;*

*A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

*A time to love, and a time to hate;*

*A time of war, and a time of peace.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

Every time must come to an end – whether it is pleasant

or unpleasant, ugly or beautiful, wholesome or evil – because of the inherent nature of the universe: if things did not naturally end, then there would be no change; the universe would be static, eternally the same, and life could not exist. Who knows, perhaps there may be universes of that sort, but the one in which life can occur – this one, which contains the life that is reading these words – must endlessly change. It is precisely that which enables new things – loves, children, sunrises, teachings, pleasures – which also brings their endings. And our losses.

In Buddhism, this impermanence is regarded as one of the three fundamental “marks” of existence (the others are interdependence/”not-self,” and suffering). In a traditional formulation, it is said that all beginnings are followed by an ending, all gains by a loss, all gathering together by dispersal. In the modern vernacular: rust never sleeps.

We suffer in large part because we both cling to pleasant things that must inevitably change, and resist unpleasant things that are going to change anyway. We are fighting time, to no avail.

Of course, this way of life comes from the blueprint of our evolutionary heritage: our sorrows are the unfortunate by-product of primal mechanisms – holding onto the pleasant, fighting or fleeing the unpleasant, and moving on from the neutral – that increase the odds of having

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## Train Your Brain

This course teaches practical, down-to-earth ways to activate the brain states that promote: Steady Awareness, Wholesome Feelings, Good Intentions, Caring Heart, and Wise Action. It is taught in a 24-month cycle which you can enter at any time. Talks and materials from past class sessions are archived at [www.WiseBrain.org](http://www.WiseBrain.org).

The class meets on the 2nd Tuesday of every month, 7 – 9:15 pm, at the Unitarian Universalist church in Terra Linda (San Rafael), at 240 Channing Way. The atmosphere is warm, informal, and focused. The fee for each month of the program is \$40 (please contact Rick Hanson if you would like a scholarship). To register, contact Guisela Luster at [drh@comcast.net](mailto:drh@comcast.net) or simply arrive fifteen minutes early.

Upcoming dates and topics:

- 6/12/07 – Concentration: The neurology of stable attention; challenges from the modern hectic world; how to steady the mind, even to the point of blissful absorption
- 7/10/07 – Mindful Presence: Accepting change and being with what is; mindfulness in daily life; the neurology of Buddhism’s Four Foundations of Mindfulness
- 8/14/07 – Positive Emotions and Taking in the Good: The benefits of feeling good; happiness as skillful means; how to make positive experiences a permanent part of yourself
- 9/11/07 – Letting Go: Releasing is profoundly important, both psychologically and spiritually; this class will cover both conventional and contemplative methods for letting go of challenging feelings, thoughts, and desires.

grandchildren. Suffering is collateral damage.

Nonetheless, because we are human and aware and able to observe ourselves and reflect on the results of our actions, we can gradually disengage from this ancient machinery. We can find other wellsprings for living happily and lovingly besides reacting and craving and clinging.

Many paths both embody this peaceful happy wisdom, and lead to its complete fulfillment. For example, the ultimate aim of Buddhist practice is to be free of the machinery of grasping, and awakened from the enchantments it uses to beguile us to reach for the booby prize: this is why it's called a path of Liberation.

In Western psychology, efforts to help people with their losses have ranged from Freud's theorizing about instincts for creating and destroying, to more recent protocols for healing trauma. And these approaches are becoming integrated with our growing understanding of the nervous system, particularly as neuroscientists develop technologies that can examine living brains in both joy and misery.

In Part One of this article, we will first lay a foundation of information about your own brain, and then explore the latest science about what goes on inside it when you experience a loss, or merely anticipate one. In Part Two, which will be in the next issue of the Bulletin (Vol. 1, #9), we'll weave together methods from psychology and contemplative practice – both informed by neuroscience – that you can use to bear and cope with and heal and grow from your difficult experiences, and those of others you care about.

In closing, let me express my gratitude for the 2007 Kara Conference on grief recovery, which supported the presentation that is the basis for this article. (You can download my talk here: <http://www.wisebrain.org/audio.html>.)

### **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.

## **Perspectives**

Loss is just one of the many human experiences that is challenging, and while it will be our focus – and, in particular, the loss of loved ones – you could apply much of our discussion to recovering from disappointment, frustration, stress, and trauma.

By the way, although the term, “recovery,” is commonly used to summarize the healthy response to losses, it has a few limitations to keep in mind:

- It implies that grieving is a departure from some healthy baseline, and that the successful response to loss is a return to baseline. But in fact, we never do return to the original baseline, since we are always changing and developing.
- Grieving and all that comes with it can in fact bring us to a healthier, better baseline.
- Recovery implies a fixed end, when in fact the research on loss and grief indicates an ongoing process of meaning-making, reflection, growth, setbacks, integration, and so on.
- Recovery also has Western connotations of finishing up one's business with something and then moving onto other matters. In other cultures, “recovery” could be seen as dishonoring those who have passed.

Further, our focus on neuropsychological subjects is in a context of great respect for the soulful, mysterious, and even Transcendental dimensions of grieving and loss. And there are more methods for coping with loss than the ones explored here.

Last, you'll see Buddhist perspectives in this article, since those are the ones I know best from the world's six major contemplative traditions, but the other ones – Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Shamanic – also have much to offer in helping us respond to loss, and grow in wisdom and love.

## **Mind and Brain Are One**

### **The Working Hypothesis**

A working hypothesis accepted by nearly all psychologists and neurologists is that almost every

– and perhaps every – subjective state of the mind is correlated with an objective state of the brain.

Think of it this way: from this viewpoint, just about everything we are aware of, including our own sense of self, has a one-to-one correspondence with underlying, physical, brain structures and activities.

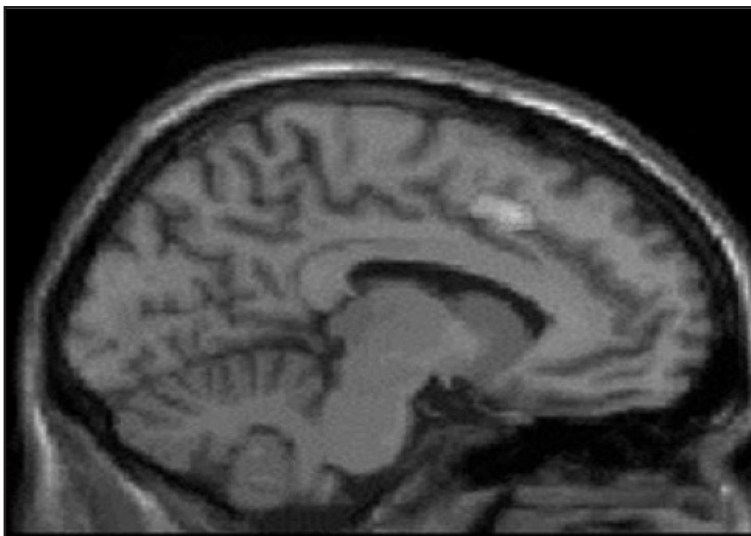
Just like a letter to friend or a picture of a sunset on your computer requires and represents an underlying pattern of magnetic charges on your hard drive.

### **Experience Changes the Brain**

First, this means that, as your experience changes, your brain changes. It changes both temporarily, millisecond by millisecond, AND it changes in lasting ways due to the fact that, “as neurons fire together, they wire together.” The fleeting flow of experience leaves behind lasting marks on your brain, much like a spring shower leaves a trail of little gullies on a hillside.

### **The Brain Changes Experience**

Second, this correlation between your experience and your brain means that, as your brain changes, your experience changes.



For example, this is a picture of a part of the brain that is very active during deep meditation or prayer, when the rest of the brain is relatively quiet. The active part is a little hard to see; it's the pale blob that looks like a small caterpillar just to the right of the mid-line. This part of the brain is located in a region called the cingulate

gyrus, which plays a central role in many important functions related to grieving and recovery, including controlling attention, weaving together memory and emotion, self-observation, and integrating thinking and feeling.

Through repeated use, regions in the brain build up connections among neurons, plus there's often increased capillary activity, so they get literally thicker; this is true for pianists (with and without moving their fingers!), taxi drivers . . . and meditators. And given my own gray hairs, it's worth knowing that these effects of cortical thickening for meditators were most pronounced with aging.

### **Using Your Mind to Change Your Brain To Benefit Your Being**

It follows, then, that if you change your brain in some skillful way, you can also change your state of being in a skillful way. By using your mind to change your brain to benefit your whole being – and thus everyone around you, as well – then you can recover from your losses, and any other challenging experience, more gracefully and effectively.

### **Recognizing Our Ignorance**

Of course, it's important to recognize how much we do not yet know. The close study of the brain and mind is about where biology was in the early 1700s, about a hundred years after the invention of the microscope. As Tenzin Palmo wrote, “We ask, ‘What is a thought?’ We don't know, yet we are thinking continually.”

## **Your Brain – The FAQs**

While recognizing the limitations of our knowledge, there is still a great deal known about your brain, and it's all pretty amazing. Here are some of the highlights.

Size

- 3 pounds, the consistency of cottage cheese

## **The Heartwood Institute For Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom**

The Institute is a 501c3 non-profit corporation, and it publishes the Wise Brain Bulletin. The Institute gathers, organizes, and freely offers information and methods – supported by brain science and the contemplative disciplines – for greater happiness, love, effectiveness, and wisdom. For more information about the Institute, please go to [www.WiseBrain.org/Heartwood.html](http://www.WiseBrain.org/Heartwood.html).

- 1,100,000,000,000 neurons, total
- 100 billion “gray matter” neurons
- Each with about 10,000 synapses (connections to other neurons)
- Therefore, about one quadrillion – 1,000,000,000,000,000 – total synapses

#### Speed

- Neurons firing 10 to 100 times a second
- Signals crossing your brain in a tenth or hundredth of a second
- Neural nets integrated by waves of coherent activity, ranging from a few times a second up to 80/second

#### Activity

- Always on 24/7/365 - Instant access to information on demand.
- In a sense, your brain is forever pulsing. Each pulse rapidly disintegrates, and then there is an instant of fertile instability out of which the next pulse comes. That space of possibility is a kind of “emptiness” akin to the absolute

nature posited in Tibetan Buddhism within which the universe eternally flickers into and out of existence.

- Uses about 25% of the body’s blood flow, oxygen, and glucose

#### Structure

- Massive, pervasive, redundant interconnectivity
- Circular, feedback loops
- Different circuits share the same sub-circuits (even individual neurons), one reason for the seemingly random associations of the “stream of consciousness”

#### Profound Complexity

- With a quadrillion synapses – give or take a few million – the number of possible brain states is 1 followed by a million zeros. Your brain has more possibilities than the number of particles in the universe.
- Its dynamic interconnectivity makes the brain literally the most complicated object known to science, more complex than a supernova or the earth’s climate.

### ***The Natural State of the Brain – and Mind***

Before we consider the brain when it is grieving – and



thus how to help it down the path of recovery – it is worth noting that the natural state of the brain is already “recovered”:

- The parasympathetic wing of the autonomic nervous system is activated – associated with relaxed contentment.
- Pleasant hormones and neurotransmitters such as the endorphins, serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, and oxytocin bathe the reward centers of the brain.
- Brain waves emphasize Delta waves (1 - 3 Hz) and Theta waves (4 - 7 Hz), with some Beta waves (14 - 30 Hz) mixed in. In particular, when you are wrestling with something, your brain waves have a certain jumbled quality to them, but when you arrive at a decision, the waves come into resonance with each other.

In effect, the natural, resting state of the brain – when it is not troubled by a decision or a problem or a worry – has a settled, even-keeled, stable hum to it. In other words, your true nature – “underneath” or “the space or witness of” grieving – is always already awake, present, peaceful, benign, and quietly happy.

This is really good news! Mother Nature is on your side as you recover from a loss; there’s a gentle breeze at your back as you head on home.

## ***The Psychology of Loss***

If you like, take a moment to remember a significant loss, perhaps of a loved one. Let that remembering evoke an experience of the loss – though don’t let it be overwhelming – and then notice what the experience feels like. Notice its emotional qualities . . . the sense of it in your

### ***Grateful Wonder***

Your tax dollars at work. The sheer magnificence of the universe. The incredible opportunity it is to be alive today.

All this is brought home in these five consecutive “Astronomy Pictures of the Day” from NASA, showing the Milky Way, Saturn on the other side of the Moon, the Horsehead Nebula, a hole in Mars that may harbor life, and the gorgeous M81 galaxy.

- #1 <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap070525.html>
- #2 <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap070526.html>
- #3 <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap070527.html>
- #4 <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap070528.html>
- #5 <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap070529.html>

body . . . the thoughts associated with it . . . any longings or wants . . . any images . . . any grieving . . . and anything else. And then let all that go.

As you probably noticed, the experience of loss can have many elements to it, including these common aspects:

- Feelings of loss; deep sorrow and distress
- Thoughts, images, memories of what was lost
- Pining, yearning for what was lost

• Related reactions (e.g., anger, guilt, unresolved communications, stress of dealing with the aftermath, demoralization, anhedonia, depression, suicidal inclinations)

This psychological material can be very compelling, even intrusive. And sometimes the experience of loss is anticipatory, thinking about something that might happen.

## ***The Neurology of Loss***

Since the experience of loss has many aspects to it, it draws on many resources in the brain, including those dealing with attention, memory, emotion, planning, language, and relationships. To quote from a recent study (and give you a dose of academic lingo), even just one element of that experience – grieving – lights up many circuits in your brain:

Grief is mediated by a distributed neural network that subserves affect processing, mentalizing, episodic memory retrieval, processing of familiar faces, visual imagery, autonomic regulation, and modulation/coordination of these functions.

### ***From our Contributors***

#### **Pumping iron good for seniors, Buck institute study says**

Go to this link [http://www.marini.com/marin/ci\\_5964135](http://www.marini.com/marin/ci_5964135) for the article featuring a couple of hard-core Heartwood types.

And for another view of what Buddhism refers to as the Three Divine Messengers – old age, disease, and death:

#### **Reincarnation**

If there is  
Reincarnation

Maybe you’ll have  
Better luck next time

© Tom Bowlin 2006

Functional Neuroanatomy of Grief: An fMRI Study. *Am J Psychiatry* 160:1946-1953, November 2003. Harald Gündel, Mary-Frances O'Connor, Lindsey Littrell, Carolyn Fort, Richard D. Lane

Grieving activates both the general network described in the quote, as well as specific areas linked to the aspect of grief that's primary in the moment. For example, in the study above, bereaved women looking at pictures of their deceased loved one activated the cuneus, superior lingual gyrus, insula, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, inferior temporal gyrus, and fusiform gyrus. On the other hand, words related to their loved one activated the precuneus, precentral gyrus, midbrain, and vermis.

### **Conclusion**

From this one study on the differences between image-laden grieving and verbally-rich grieving, you can see

some of the complexity of neurological processes involved in grappling with a loss – or really, any other challenging experience. While this complexity may seem daunting (and why, Rick Mendius says, many medical students quickly trot away from neurology, leaving the field open to masochists like himself!), it actually creates a great opportunity in giving you so many different points of intervention into your own brain.

In Part Two of this article in the next issue of the *Bulletin*, we'll go through five of those points of intervention in detail; they are your parasympathetic nervous system, frontal lobes, cingulate gyrus, insular cortex, and amygdala. You'll learn ways to stimulate and strengthen the healthy capacities of each one, both from general psychology and from the contemplative disciplines.

See you then!

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## **Biochem Corner:**

# *Targeted Nutritional Interventions*

© Jan Hanson, MS, LAc, 2007  
janhealth@comcast.net

### **Introduction**

In the previous issue of the *Bulletin* (Vol. 1, #7), I described how you can promote the biochemical foundation of mental health and contemplative depth.

In this article, I am going to cut right to the chase and list specific, potent nutritional interventions – all with research support – that you can use to lift your mood, settle anxiety, steady your mind, and improve your memory.

You'll get the most out of these methods if you have already established the foundation of good health practices discussed in the previous issue, and of course, this article is no substitute for professional health care. If you experience any uncomfortable side effects from the suggestions below, stop immediately. And if you try these methods and they don't show much effect, I encourage you to consult with a licensed, holistically-inclined health professional.

### ***For a Blue Mood***

- Take pyridoxal-5-phosphate (P-5-P), 50 mg/day on an empty stomach, and make sure iron intake is adequate.
- Increase serotonin levels by taking either tryptophan (500 – 1500 mg/day, often best before sleeping) or 5-HTP (50 – 200 mg/day; both best on an empty stomach).
- These methods can also help with anxiety.

### ***For Anxiety***

You can increase levels of GABA through these methods:

- Take P-5-P, 50 mg/day on an empty stomach.
- Take theanine, 100 – 200 mg/day.
- Take taurine, 1000 mg/day.
- Consider progesterone (women only), as Pro-Gest cream, used only during the second half of your cycle. Some women really don't like the way it feels; others love it, so just use it if it works for you.

### *For Focus and Concentration*

- Make sure you have adequate thyroid hormone. If you are tired and have low mood, have your thyroid checked; be suspicious of levels below the 50th percentile.
- Make sure serotonin levels are adequate (see discussion above).
- Increase norepinephrine and dopamine by taking either L-tyrosine or L-phenylalanine, 500 – 1000 mg/day, on an empty stomach in the morning.

### *For Memory*

Consume plenty of these foundational nutrients:

- Folic acid, 800 – 1000 mcg/day
- Fish oil: about 500 mg/day of EPA and DHA
- Methylcobalamine (B-12), 1000 – 5000 mcg/day, sub-lingual

Add these targeted interventions:

- Take N-Acetyl-Carnitine, 500 – 1000 mg in the morning, on an empty stomach.
- Take Phosphatidyl Serine, 100 – 200 mg/day.
- For women entering menopause, consider taking estrogen.

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# *Offerings*

**Rick Hanson, PhD, and Rick Mendius, MD**

1. On Wednesday evening, June 13, Phillip Moffitt and Rick Hanson will speak on “Taking in the Good” at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, co-sponsored by the Institute for Spirituality and Psychotherapy. Making positive experiences, ideas, and people a part of yourself is central to psychological and spiritual growth. These resources inside help you cope, feel happy, heal from trauma, and cultivate bhavana, bodhichitta, and other spiritually wholesome qualities. Phillip and Rick will explore methods for taking in the good from Eastern religions and Western psychology – and how they can support each other. And they’ll discuss ideas from the new neuroscience about ways to change your brain to liberate your mind. (CE credits are available.)

2. The two Ricks (los dos Ricardos) will be teaching two daylong workshops at Spirit Rock in 2007, and you can go to [www.SpiritRock.org](http://www.SpiritRock.org) for information and to register:

- August 11 – The Neurodharma of Love: Using Brain Science and Buddhist Wisdom to Illuminate the Heart of Important Relationships – Through integrating contemplative teachings about healthy relationships with current neurological research, we’ll offer practical tools for activating the brain states underlying wholesome mind states of empathy, compassion, and loving kindness. Additionally, we’ll explore ways to preserve your equanimity in rough-and-tumble relationships, and to ride (gracefully) the roller-coaster of romance, sexual desire, and the long-term shift to a calmer love.

- November 10 – On One Wing and Two Prayers: Practicing with a Wounded Brain – This will be taught with James Baraz, a founding teacher of Spirit Rock and the source of the fantastic Awakening Joy course. It is for people interested in well-being and contemplative depth who are also grappling with depression, significant anxiety (or trauma), ADD/ADHD, head injury, or dementia – and for caregivers who work with them.

3. On Saturday, September 8, we will do a small “dress rehearsal” of what will become an annual, inter-faith conference – working title: “This Is Your Brain on God” – applying neuropsychology to the similarities and differences in contemplative practice in Buddhism, Christianity,

### ***San Rafael Meditation Group***

Open to beginners and experienced practitioners, we meet on Wednesday evenings at the A Sante day spa in downtown San Rafael. Meditation is available from 6:45, with formal instruction at 7:00, ending at 7:30, with a dharma talk and discussion ending at 8:30. It is co-led by Rick Hanson and Manny Mansbach, and for more information, contact Rick at [drhh@comcast.net](mailto:drhh@comcast.net).



## Words of Wisdom

A merry heart goes all the day,  
Your sad tires in a mile-a.  
William Shakespeare

The joyfulness of a man prolongeth  
his days.  
Sirach 30:22

The days that make us happy make  
us wise.  
John Masfield

A merry heart doeth good like a  
medicine: but a broken spirit drieth  
the bones.  
Proverbs 17:22

The good life, as I conceive it, is a  
happy life. I do not mean that if you  
are good you will be happy; I mean  
that if you are happy you will be  
good.  
Bertrand Russell

The happiest people are those who  
think the most interesting thoughts.  
William Lyon Phelps

[The six quotes above were found in  
Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener (2005).  
The Benefits of Frequent Positive  
Affect: Does Happiness Lead to  
Success? Psychological Bulletin, 131,  
803-855.]

Don't worry.  
Be happy.  
Make efforts.  
Meher Baba

The moment an experienced medita-  
tor looks into the nature of mind  
every thought and emotion vanishes  
like snowflakes falling on a hot plate.  
At that moment a meditator is truly  
free of any attachment.  
Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche

Judaism, Islam, Hindu-  
ism, and shamanism.

We'll use the dress  
rehearsal (and maybe  
another one) to plan the  
first official conference,  
scheduled for the Fall,  
2008, in partnership  
with major institutions.  
The principal organizer  
of the conference is Dr.  
Andrew Dreitcer, a pro-  
fessor at the Claremont  
School of Theology and  
the Graduate University.

4. On Friday evening,  
September 21, we will  
give a lecture and dis-  
cussion at the monthly  
meeting of the Marin  
County chapter of the  
California Association  
of Marriage and Family  
Therapists. The topic  
will be the neuropsy-  
chology of positive emo-  
tion, and how to help  
clients (and ourselves!)  
activate it. If you're an  
MFT, it will be great to  
see you there, and we  
think any therapist is  
welcome; just contact  
the local chapter at 459-  
3484 for the details.

5. On Thursday eve-  
ning, October 25, with  
Fritjof Kapra and Stan  
Grof, we will be present-  
ers at the annual 108  
Blessings fund-raiser for  
the Spirit Rock schol-  
arship fund. We feel  
humbled by this honor,  
and we encourage you to

information will be available on the Spirit Rock website.

6. On Friday, October 26, we will be presenting a daylong  
workshop on "The NonDual Brain" at the Conference on  
Nondual Wisdom and Psychotherapy, which is co-spon-  
sored by The Center for Timeless Wisdom, the California  
Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), and other organiza-  
tions. Continuing ed units will be offered, and you can  
register by contacting CIIS. While there will be a focus  
on using non dual brain tools in caregiving settings, this  
workshop is appropriate for anyone.

7. On Saturday, December 1, we will lead a daylong at the  
Sati Center in Redwood City on The Neurology of Awak-  
ening. This will be an updated version of the daylong  
by that title we presented at Spirit Rock in November,  
2006, with more experiential emphasis on neuroscience-  
informed exercises for steadying the mind. If you live in  
San Francisco, the East Bay, or the Peninsula, this would  
be a great way to deepen your understanding and practice  
– plus learn more about the Sati Center itself, founded by  
a wonderful teacher of ours, Gil Fronsda.

8. Probably, in 2008 and at Spirit Rock, we will co-lead  
the Neurodharma of Love workshop with Sylvia Boor-  
stein. Sylvia, as you may know, is quite extraordinary  
– sort of a cross between a Jewish grandmother and the  
Dalai Lama – and this workshop is likely to be memo-  
rable. We'll let you know the date when it's solid.



come to this event and support this worthy cause; more

# Two Wisdom Streams On the Subject of Happiness

As the Dalai Lama says, “Everyone wants to be happy.”

Many have reflected on this great subject – the nature of happiness, its obstructions and its causes, its effects, and how to nurture its growth – from many different perspectives. Here, let’s juxtapose two views, one from Tibetan Buddhism, and one from Western science. Each has its own power, and each has its own partial nature; taken together, they are more profound than either alone.

**From Ani Tenzin Palmo, an English woman who went on retreat in Tibet for twenty-four years (twelve in a cave by herself), in her wonderful book: *Reflections on a Mountain Lake* --**

“Traditionally, the Buddhist path may be divided into three stages: view, meditation, and action. First, we develop the right view, we meditate on it, and then we put it into action in our lives . . . We are using ‘view’ to mean ‘understanding the ultimate nature of the mind’ . . . [As Padmasambhava said], ‘Your view must be as vast as the sky, but your conduct must be as finely sifted as barley flour’

. . . If we can break through to the unconditioned nature of the mind, the fundamental underlying condition of who we really are, we are left with no-dual awareness. We are consciousness; that is who we are . . . This awareness is non-dual, there is neither subject nor object. There is no sense of ‘I doing anything. There is just total awareness, which is vast and infinite, beyond time and space. That is what supports all our thoughts and emotions

. . . The fact that we already have it is important for us to

grasp. We don’t have to bring in something extraneous. We don’t even have to develop anything. We already have everything. We just need to uncover it. It’s always been there. It’s absolutely perfect just as it is . But we don’t recognize it. It’s as if we’re standing in the sunshine, and then we go inside, draw the shutters, and say that it’s dark. But the sun is shining the whole time. This innate wisdom is always present. Our problem is that we don’t recognize it. . . the empty, aware, clear nature of the primordial mind, our inherent wisdom and compassion. This the mind’s unconditioned nature, is always with us. It is the most fundamental aspect of our being.

. . . We need to do our part by purifying and simplifying our minds and making them increasingly open . . . We [need] to learn how to return from our enormous confusion back to the ultimate simplicity of our true nature . . . We all have a lot of work to do. We have to do a lot of purification, a lot of learning how to pacify the mind, how to clear it out, how to simplify it, and begin to understand it. . . . What we are really trying to do is reconnect with what we have always had and find the inner [teacher]. To reconnect with our primordial nature, our wisdom mind, which is always here. In the end, the practice is our refuge. . . . We all possess innate wisdom, and we should begin to get in touch with it more and more often. Then we will start to experience an inner poise and a sense of autonomy.

. . . [If we have been on a personal or spiritual growth] path for some time, we should look back to see what is happening to us. Do we feel that there is really is some inner transformation, that we really are beginning to grow up? Are we gaining greater understanding? Is our inner psychological life becoming clearer and simpler, more open and spacious? Are our negative emotions, greeds and desires, angers and aversions, delusions and confusions diminishing, increasing, or remaining the same? . . . The test for whether a practice is successful is whether our negative emotions have declined or not.

. . . It is absolutely essential to do a formal practice and to have the understanding and experience gained from our formal practice. But that is not enough. That



understanding has to be translated into our daily actions and our interactions with others.”

**From Sarah Pressman and Sheldon Cohen, Does Positive Affect Influence Health? (2005), Psychological Bulletin, 131, 925-971 --**

“Evidence suggests an association of trait PA [positive affect] and lower morbidity and of state and trait PA and decreased symptoms and pain.

Trait PA is also associated with increased longevity among older community-dwelling individuals. . . .

[Nonetheless], that there are over 20 times more studies on depression and health than there are on happiness and health.

. . . We define PA as the feelings that reflect a level of pleasurable engagement with the environment . . . such as happiness, joy, excitement, enthusiasm, and contentment. These can be brief, longer lasting, or more stable trait like feelings. . . . [PA has] three subcomponents: vigor, calm, and well-being.

. . . it is trait (or at least enduring state) PA that influences health outcomes. This is because the emotion has to last long enough to influence proposed mediating behaviors or physiological responses in a manner that would create a long-term risk. . . . Higher state and trait PA have been associated with better behaviors such as improved sleep quality . . . more exercise, and more intake of dietary zinc. . . . Better sleep, exercise, and diet have all been associated with lower risk for morbidity and mortality and with more positive immune and cardiovascular profiles.

. . . PA could also alter people’s disease susceptibility via

the dampening of SNS [sympathetic nervous system] activity, decreasing HR [heart rate], BP [blood pressure], and blood concentrations of the hormones epi [epinephrine/adrenaline] and norepi [norepinephrine/noradrenaline]. In fact, our review suggested that trait PA was generally associated with lower levels of epi and norepi.

. . . Cortisol [a stress hormone, associated with many negative health effects] has been shown to decrease . . . with increasing levels of trait PA. Two other hormones, oxytocin and growth hormone, are thought to increase under PA, although there is little evidence for PA associations with these hormones at this time. Increased concentrations of oxytocin decrease cortisol and BP, and growth hormone plays an important role in physical development and growth.

. . . PA could influence the opioid system via its influence on behaviors such as exercise and laughter . . . Endogenous opioids may . . . be especially important in explaining the link between PA and pain response because opioids act to blunt the distressing, affective component of pain.

. . . PA facilitates approach behavior . . . [and] Persons who report more PA socialize more often and maintain more and higher quality social ties. . . . Increased engagement in social network activities is associated with decreased risk . . . of morbidity and mortality. Furthermore, social support is beneficial to survival from life-threatening illnesses and is associated with improved immune outcomes.

. . . [In sum], happiness is probably an important positive emotion for health.”



*Fare Well*

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