

# The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom  
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*Featured Article:*

## What Do You Mean, “Self?”

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One time in college, I was listening to two friends arguing cheerfully about something. He asked her, “What do you mean by ‘freedom?’” She fired back without missing a beat, “What do you mean, ‘mean?’”

The word, “self” – and related words like “I,” “you,” “she,” and “theirs” which refer to personal identity – have a similar mind-binding murkiness when you look closely at them, even though we use them routinely. Psychology, neuroscience, and spiritual practice all have an interest in what in the world the self **is** – if it’s anything at all – and so it’s helpful to know what we mean when we use that word, since it actually can mean quite a few different things. And it’s not uncommon to hear or read people using the term in several different ways, even in the same paragraph (sometimes sentence) without acknowledging the shifts in meaning. Then things get all mashed and muddled up.

The sort of self we are speaking of determines the properties it has, and more importantly for many of us, how to free ourselves from its entanglements. So here’s a summary of different ways to describe the “self,” informed by both neuroscience and Buddhism, and a consideration of some implications for a few deep questions.

For related discussions of the evolution of awareness and “self” among animal, including humans, consciousness and nonduality, and ways to practice with “self,” please see two past issues of this Bulletin, 2.2 and 2.8.

### **Entity or Process, Elaborated or Essential?**

Let’s start with two distinctions, expressed as questions:

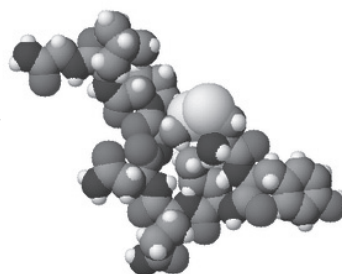
- Is “self” an entity or a process?

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## Greetings

The Wise Brain Bulletin offers skillful means from brain science and contemplative practice – to nurture your brain for the benefit of yourself and everyone you touch.

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).

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meaning-making. And it is autobiographical in two ways. First, it is a collection of descriptions that define a unique individual, such as gender, occupation, race, religion, dwelling place, parental status, son/daughter, brother/sister, social class, political views, etc. Second, it integrates perspectives about the personal past, present, and future. For example, during the day, it's natural to think about what you will do at home that evening, and that bit of rumination is probably informed by a mini-movie – which is a narrative, by the way – of what you have done at home in the past.

This complex weaving together of self-referencing memoir and planning for the future is uniquely human – and many scientists suspect that the evolution of the capacities for it in the nervous system were driven more by the social milieu of our ancestors, in small and intensely social hunter-gatherer bands, than by the physical milieu of their African savannah habitat. Other, less social animals, including nonhuman primates, are very successful at survival within that habitat without our narrative and autobiographical capacities. Nor does it look like the development of the brain was driven primarily by the need to master new tools; around Lake Victoria in Africa, methods used for making stone tools remained static for around a million years. The first stone tools appeared about 2.7 million years ago, and as our brains tripled in size over that time, there was an arms race, alright, but it wasn't primarily about improving adaptation to habitat or about increasing capacities to manipulate technologies. *The arms race was for improving social abilities*, in order to thrive within the band – managing the alliances and dominance hierarchies (who grooms who?) – while working together to compete, often violently, with other bands for scarce resources.

We are the most sociable species on the planet, and much of "I" is embedded in "we." For example, observing your own stream of consciousness, isn't most of it self-referential ruminating about your interpersonal world? And that includes when others are tacit, such as when there are references to whether an action of yours would be approved of or rewarded by others.

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- Is "self" elaborated or essential?

If we combine those, we get a 2 x 2 matrix, with four quadrants (see Figure 1). These define four of the major ways that you will find the "self" described.

<u>ENTITY</u>	<u>PROCESS</u>
<u>ELABORATED</u> Autobiographical	Parading
<u>ESSENTIAL</u> Core	Iipseity

Figure 1. Four sorts of "self"

1. Let's start with the upper left quadrant, with what people commonly regard as the self, an entity, a being, with elaborated qualities. For example, let's take my friend and teaching/writing partner: "Rick Mendius." He is recently married, has three children, works as a neurologist, grew up in New Mexico, has such-and-such SSN, likes good coffee, works incredible hours, and so on.

The term commonly used in neuropsychology for this sort of self is the *narrative* or *autobiographical* self. It's narrative in the sense that it is woven somewhat out of the stories we tell ourselves about our life: the ongoing commentary, evaluation,

2. Next, moving down in the first column, we have the *core* self. This equates to that sense of being the same fundamental “I” across all our autobiographical situations. It’s the primary sense of “I” that comes on-line a few seconds after you first wake up in the morning. There is often little if any sense of gender or other descriptors with this self. And if you are threatened, it often comes to the forefront: “I will survive!”

If the frontal lobes of the brain – the apparent neural substrate of the autobiographical self – are damaged, there can still be some functioning personal identity in the individual. It is just not based on much complexity of continuity with the past or consideration of the future. That core self relies on subcortical and brain stem structures, and when those are damaged both core and autobiographical selves disappear, indicating that the *core* self is foundational to the autobiographical self, at least in neurological terms. In evolution, the neural structures that are the basis of the core self in humans (or their early analogues) appeared at least a couple hundred million years ago, and perhaps earlier. Therefore, it’s a reasonable conjecture that the core self in humans is similar to the self of a higher animal, such as a lizard, squirrel, or dog.

When your mind is very quiet, it feels like the autobiographical self is minimally present at most, which presumably corresponds to a relative deactivation of its neural substrate. At those times, what seems primarily active are the foundational circuits of the core self. Certain aspects of contemplative practice – particularly the concentration meditations that focus on stilling the mind – could thus be regarded neurologically as training the brain to inhibit the neural circuitry of the autobiographical self (particularly its verbal components, centered in Broca’s and Wernicke’s Areas in the left frontal and temporal lobes) and stabilize steady activation of the core self substrate.

3. Now let’s move to the right hand column on the slide, where we regard self as process, as a verb and not a noun. In this light, whatever may be enduring across moments of time about a self is seen as a kind of standing wave, like where a stream flows over a half-submerged boulder.

Notice how language carries embedded assumptions. For example, in English, is the word “I” a noun or a verb? It’s a noun, a “person, place, or thing,” isn’t it? That linguistic framing can lead us unconsciously to regard processes as reified entities.

It’s interesting that in Pali – the language of the earliest surviving written record of the Buddha’s teachings and the language spoken by many ordinary people of his time – there are basically no nouns: relatively persistent patterns in space-time, whatever they are, are described as gerunds: suffering, cling-ing, dog-ing, cup-ing . . . self-ing.

In the upper right quadrant, let’s call the elaborated process of selfing *parading*. I couldn’t come up with a better term! And invite nominations. But the image of a cavalcade of characters, bustling and complicated, full of life, streaming down a passage-way of some sort, with a certain messy unstably stable coherence, endearing and perhaps a little overwhelming . . . well that kind of conveys a sense of person-ness proceeding through time.

4. Finally, in the bottom right quadrant, there is the word *ipseity*, a technical term in consciousness studies for a certain, seemingly minimal sense of an experiencing subjectivity in the stream of consciousness, life given into a first-person perspective.

For example, when the mind is very quiet in meditation, and you seem to be getting pretty close to bare, rock-bottom awareness, you may still sense a subtle “beingness” that has a persistently individual quality to it.

When people equate the self with awareness, that view is usually grounded in this bottom right quadrant. But as appealing as that can be – “I’m open space awareness, unbounded and free!” – there are several issues with that view. First, it can lead to a reification of awareness as a thing (one of those pesky nouns) rather than as an activity, which is the teaching of both neuroscience and Buddhism. Second, it’s a short hop from equating self to awareness . . . to *identifying* with awareness, which is a kind of clinging that, like other forms of clinging, leads to suffering.

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Third, is awareness actually personal? Neurologically, awareness is founded on the representing capacity of the brain, and that capacity is as generic and impersonal as the capacity for taste or fear. Phenomenologically, in terms of personal experience, aspects of self – including a minimal ipseity, the barest possible sense of “I” as an experiencing subject – arise *within* awareness but they are not awareness itself. Awareness as the open field of presence, of knowing, in which mind-objects appear and then disperse, is regarded in Buddhism (particularly Tibetan) to have two qualities: emptiness (the capacity to represent) and luminosity (a self-sustaining kind of radiance); additionally, some schools ascribe a quality of universal compassion to awareness. But that’s it: no “I” or “mine.”

Last, conceptually, why use two words when one will do? If “self” and “awareness” mean the same thing, shouldn’t we junk the word, “self?” But there are plenty of aspects of “self” – in each of the four quadrants – that have nothing to do with awareness, so we still need to come to terms with those aspects even if, in some ways, “self” and “awareness” overlap in their nature.

### **True – or Useful?**

**O**K – Now having laid out this structure, let’s take it a step further and make another distinction, this time between whether something is true or whether it is useful.

For example, we could regard this 4-quadrant model in terms of whether it is true: Is there really an autobiographical self? Is there ipseity?

Alternately, we could ask, is it useful: Is it beneficial in some way, such as for how you treat yourself and others, or how you progress in your spiritual practice?

The Buddha’s general approach was to focus on whether something was useful, in terms of reducing suffering and increasing benefits to oneself and others. So even when he was asking people whether something was true, his larger frame was usually pragmatic, utilitarian – and often he was really asking whether it was useful to regard something as true. The Buddha is not a bad person to take one’s cues from – so here is the

central question of this little essay:

### **How is it *useful* for you to regard self . . . or selfing?**

So, in light of the points made so far about “self” and ways to regard it, here is a consideration of four distinctions that naturally come to mind. I pose them as questions, and then offer brief comments – and really invite you to investigate these questions for yourself.

### **Existent or Nonexistent?**

*Does self/selfing exist, or is it a kind of illusion?*

**B**y “exist,” the question asks whether self/selfing has a reality distinct from the observation of it. Personally, I think that the granite deep inside Mt. Everest exists whether anyone is aware of it or not, that the planets circling faraway stars existed long before astronomers discovered them, and that neurons fire inside your brain whether you know it or not. This is the materialist presumption. No one can prove it. But most people, and just about all scientists, consider the alternative – that matter/energy depends for its existence on the awareness of conscious beings – to be highly implausible. So for our purposes here, let’s assume that existence . . . exists.

By the way: In terms of quantum physics and the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, just because uncertainty about a particle’s position decreases as certainty about its momentum increases does not mean that the existence of the particle depends on observation. Think of all the particles in the universe that no scientist is observing in a cloud chamber: do they not exist? Further, even though it is possible to do increasingly clever manipulations of “entangled” quantum particles to create cool stuff like “spooky action at a distance” in which the observation of one particle determines the nature of the other particle faster than light can travel . . . in the ordinary world of atoms and molecules all around us, including the ones functioning just fine in your brain right now to enable you to read these words, all these quantum entanglements “collapse” just

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fine without observation to form the material world. The jury is out on whether quantum phenomena require some mysterious underlying Transcendental Consciousness to operate – since the issue is currently unanswerable – but there is no question that quantum particles exist and dance together without any human awareness involved. The implications of quantum mechanics for human consciousness and the nature of everyday material reality can too easily be romanticized and overstated.

Within the framework of material reality, *patterns* exist, like the lace of foam on a wave, or the modulation of the frequency of a radio wave that carries the Hallelujah chorus, or the momentary neuroelectrical assembly that (in ways that are still far from clear) is the material substrate of your immaterial perception of, let's say, a carrot.

So too, in even more complex ways, the pattern that is self/selfing – in each of the four quadrants above – does indeed exist. Self/selfing consists of patterns in the mind – in standing waves of information flows – that correspond to patterns in the brain.

In short, self/selfing exists. It is questions about the *nature* of that existence that have bedeviled philosophers, psychologists, mystics, neuroscientists, and people in general throughout history, and as long as any human being or our ancestors has looked up at the stars and wondered, even wordlessly, “Who am I?”

### **Compounded or Irreducible?**

*Is self/selfing compounded, or is it in some way comprised of an essence that cannot be reduced to any further parts?*

In terms of the quadrant above, neuroscience would regard all four forms or definitions of self/selfing as certainly compounded – which is to say, based on underlying neural networks, such as the “default network” or the “dorsal medial prefrontal cortex” or a “thalamo-cortical complex” that can be decomposed further into circuitry that in turn can be divided into neurons . . . made of parts . . . made of molecules . . . made of . . . and so on. This would apply even to the most elemental subjectivity present in ipseity: if it depends on

underlying neural structures and activities – the central operating thesis of neuropsychology – then it is compounded of parts since that is the nature of its neural substrate.

I believe that Buddhist teachings would clearly regard the “elaborated” row – the autobiographical and the parading self – as also compounded: made up of memories, personal attributes (as in the Abhidhamma), mental formations, etc. Regarding the “essential” row, the original teachings of the Buddha (the core of the Theravadan wing of Buddhism) described a process in which the enactment of a presumed self gradually declines, disappearing entirely at the stage of the Arahant, the fully enlightened being. This progressive process implies that even the most elemental self/selfing must be made of parts since it diminishes its scope and influence bit by bit.

### **Dependent or Unconditioned?**

*Does self/selfing arise dependently upon preceding causes, or does it in some sense exist independently, unconditionally?*

Pretty much the same answer as above. Within brain science, each of the four modes of self/selfing has causes, and when those causes change – such as waking/sleeping, strokes, injuries, dementia, psychedelics, object of attention, task at hand, etc. – so does the self/selfing. And in Buddhism, both the Theravadan and the Mahayana (Zen, Tibetan, Pure Land) wings reject the notion of a personal self that persists independently of causes.

But here's where it gets tricky, particularly within “nondual” perspectives: If the ground of self/selfing is ultimately consciousness, and if the nature of that consciousness is ultimately unconditioned, then does it not follow that . . . self is unconditioned? In other words, not dependent on preceding causes for its existence. In the frame of “Thou art That” – a core view of the nondual, Advaita schools in Hinduism – the Thou is the self and That is God/The Ultimate Ground/The Unconditioned. So Thou is ultimately unconditioned in that perspective.

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I'm not going to attempt a resolution of this: that's high above my pay grade! But one thing at least is clear: the Buddha for one relentlessly critiqued the identification of anything as "I, myself, or mine." And he drove a similar critique of the prevalent belief of his time in an "atman," a soul-essence that exists independent of causes. The term, *anatta*, means "not-atman," and *anatta* is one of the three characteristics of existence in Buddhism; the other two are *anicca* (impermanence) and *dukkha* (suffering). Not-soul-essence is thus a fundamental Buddhist teaching. Of course, you need to see for yourself if you consider that viewpoint to be true . . . and perhaps more importantly, if you consider that viewpoint to be useful.

### **Mortal or Immortal?**

*Does self/selfing end when the body ends (dies), or does it persist in some way?*

**T**his the question most people really want answered. Faced with inevitable death and usually wanting to keep living, it's natural to hope for some sort of personal continuity. As the saying goes: "Who in the world would want to live to a hundred?! Well, someone who's ninety-nine."

From a strictly Western science perspective, when the body dies, so do you. Period. Of course, the "you" here is a *mental* pattern of self/selfing. The *physical* body persists for a while as a coherent pattern, and many if not most of its constituent atoms will last as long as the universe does.

In short, self/selfing emerges as an impermanent pattern of mind, which emerges as an impermanent pattern of the nervous system, which emerges as an impermanent pattern of the body, which emerges as an impermanent pattern of atoms and molecules, which disperses and reform as rain, as dirt, as carrots, and as the bodies of other people.

From the perspective of the Buddha, he undeniably taught that there is reincarnation, which means that some patterning that is unique to a particular individual, and shaped karmically by the intentional actions (of thought, word, and deed) of that individual, must persist after the body dies. Whether that is actually true or not, I am not sure.

But even within the framework of reincarnation, the Buddha made it clear that there is no atman, no soul, that persists eternally from life to life, but rather a collection of qualities – what Chogyam Trungpa called our bad habits – that change over time, that should change if one is serious about practice.

And at the end of the journey, those qualities change so thoroughly that there are no longer any causes or conditions that would give rise to another life in any realm. In the Buddhist view, in the most complete sense, *anything* that we might consider to be self ultimately does – and ultimately should – come to a mortal end.

Here's the Buddha's description of his own enlightenment (from Bhikkhu Bodhi's wonderful anthology, *In the Buddha's Words*, p. 67): "I directly knew: 'Birth is destroyed, the spiritual life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming back to any state of being.'"

\* \* \*

To conclude, here is a final question:

How could it be *useful* to you to regard your self – the "I, me, or mine" – as fluid, compounded, conditioned, and impermanent?



# ***Oxytocin: Helping the Brain Generate Feelings of Deep Connection and Well-Being***

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One of the most exciting discoveries of modern neurobiology for me has been the role of oxytocin - the hormone released through warmth, touch, and movement - in generating feelings of deep connection and well-being. Known as the hormone of bonding and attachment, oxytocin generates the sensations of motherly love, oceanic feelings of devotion, and contented bliss.

Stephen Johnson tells a wonderful story about oxytocin in his book *Mind Wide Open*. He and his wife were living in downtown Manhattan before, during and after September 11, 2001. His wife had given birth to their son just two days before 9/11. Stephen could see debris and ash floating past the window of their apartment that morning. He was pacing the floor, half-crazed with anxiety, while his wife was calmly nursing their son in the rocking chair, completely oblivious to the chaos around her and her newborn. Oxytocin is released during childbirth and breastfeeding, generating an oceanic feeling of devotion between the mother and the newborn, and a blissful, other-worldly sense of contentment, "everything is all right." Stephen's wife was protected from the kind of anxiety Stephen was experiencing by the oxytocin coursing through her system and calming her down entirely.

Oxytocin acts as a down-regulator of our body's responses to stress. According to Kerstin Uvnas-Moberg in *Oxytocin Linked Antistress Effects*, when oxytocin is released, blood pressure lowers, cortisol levels plummet. The body reverses the arousal of the sympathetic nervous system (fight-flight) as activation of the parasympathetic nervous system relaxes us; our metabolism shifts from ready-to-run to a gentler storing of nutrients for growth and healing. Our pain threshold rises so we are less sensitive to discomfort. Even wounds heal faster.

In a study done in Richard Davidson's fMRI lab at the University of Wisconsin by J.A. Coan in 2005, women volunteers were given a slight but unpleasant electrical shock on their ankles while their brain responses of anxiety and pain were monitored in an fMRI scanner.



In the control group of women holding no one's hand during the procedure, participants registered anxiety before and pain during the shock. In the group of women holding the hand of a stranger (the lab technician) during the procedure, the reactions of anxiety and pain were reduced somewhat. But in the group of women holding their husbands' hands, the pleasurable security of holding the hand of someone who loved them down-regulated their stress and overrode both anxiety and pain. The women instead experienced peacefulness throughout the procedure.

Oxytocin floods through our brains when we know we are deeply loved and cherished, or when we love and cherish others. Daniel Goleman writes in *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*: "Oxytocin generates a sense of satisfying relaxation. For a toddler, parents and family offer this savory security. Playmates and, later in life, friendships and romantic intimacy activate the same circuits. The systems that secrete these chemicals of nurturing love provide some of the neural cement for the loving bond.

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These brain chemicals evoke the inner sense that everything is all right, possibly the biochemical basis for what Erik Erickson called a basic sense of trust in the world.”

Louis Cozolino notes in *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships* that neuroscientists are now studying the capacities of the physical heart to not only receive information from the brain but to send information to the brain via the vagus nerve and generate its own hormones - including



**Oxytocin**

oxytocin - and release them into the body. Oxytocin is what spurs us to “tend and befriend” rather than fight, flee or freeze when we’re stressed. This chemical flood occurs whenever we engage in affectionate contact with someone we care for. A full-body 20 second hug is enough to release oxytocin in both men and women, putting them on the same loving hormonal wavelength for the time being. Sue Carter of the Chicago Psychiatric Institute writes, “a single exposure to oxytocin can make a lifelong change in the brain.”

Researchers have discovered that oxytocin can be released in the brain from all kinds of social interactions, psychological states and mental imagery, including therapeutic relationships. Oxytocin, sometimes referred to as the neuropeptide of trust, can evoke an inner sense of well-being that facilitates flexibility and openness to change.

Researchers are now learning that even thinking of someone who loves us unconditionally can release oxytocin in our brains. In July 2003, I chose to have lasik eye surgery to correct lifelong near-sightedness and astigmatism. The operation is risky, so I went into the operation with considerable anxiety. I had asked friends to think of me on the day of the operation, at the time I was actually in surgery, so I felt resourced and not alone during the procedure. I had to remain conscious during the operation and focus my eyes on the light beam above me so the laser could track exactly where to remove the fluid in the eye which

would re-shape the cornea and create the lens that would allow new 20-20 vision. So, while lying on the gurney staying as still as I could be, I thought of all my friends thinking of me, taking in the sense of love and caring I knew was being sent my way.

About 10 minutes into the operation, quite suddenly, all sense of anxiety ceased completely. I was flooded with a sense of love and belonging that was quite over-powering. There was nothing to be afraid of, nothing at all. This serene peacefulness lasted until the surgery was finished. It lasted for the next 8 months. I was aware that, in situation after situation that would have caused anxiety in the past, I was not feeling any anxiety. Just feeling aware and moving right along.

“Oxytocin has a short half-life in the brain – it’s gone in just a matter of minutes, writes Daniel Goleman in *Social Intelligence*. “But close, positive long-term relationships may offer us a relatively steady source of oxytocin release; every hug, friendly touch, and affectionate moment may prime this neurochemical balm a bit.

“The benefits of oxytocin seem to emerge in a variety of pleasant social interactions – especially caregiving in all its forms. Where people exchange emotional energy, they can actually prime in each other the good feelings that this molecule bestows. When oxytocin releases again and again – as happens when we spend a good deal of time with people who love us – we seem to reap the long-term health benefits of human affection. . . . Repeated exposures to the people with whom we feel the closest social bonds can condition the release of oxytocin, so that merely being in their presence, or even just thinking about them, may trigger in us a pleasant dose. Small wonder that cubicles in even the most soulless of offices are papered with photos of loved ones.”

*This article was revised from the September 2008 newsletter Healing and Awakening into Aliveness and Wholeness, archived on [www.lindagraham-mft.com](http://www.lindagraham-mft.com). Linda Graham is a psychotherapist in full-time private practice in San Francisco and Corte Madera, offering consultation and trainings on the integration of relational psychology, mindfulness, and neuroscience.*



# Words of Wisdom

## *No Self, No Problem*

*A human being is part of the whole that we call the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical illusion of his consciousness. This illusion is a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for only the few people nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living beings and all of nature.*

~Albert Einstein

*If we ask ... whether the position of the electron remains the same, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron's position changes with time, we must say "no"; if we ask whether the electron is at rest we must say "no"; if we ask whether it is in motion, we must say "no." The Buddha has given such answers when interrogated as to the conditions of a man's self after his death; but they are not familiar answers for the tradition of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century science.*

~J. Robert Oppenheimer

*One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And, the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.*

~Eleanor Roosevelt

*To exist is to change; to change is to mature; to mature is to go on creating one's self endlessly.*

~Henri Bergson

*The art of letting things happen, action through non-action, letting go of oneself, as taught by Meister Eckhart, became for me the key opening the door to the way. We must be able to let things happen in the psyche. For us, this actually is an art of which few people know anything. Consciousness is forever interfering, helping, correcting, and negating and never leaving the simple growth of the psychic processes in peace.*

~Carl Gustav Jung

*Sooner or later, everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences.*

~Robert Louis Stevenson

*For self-reflection to work, there has to be a lot of emphasis on lovingkindness and friendliness toward yourself. But that doesn't mean self-indulgence . . . Treat yourself as though you're raising a child . . . You know you need to give the child a lot of love and nurturing, but the child also needs some boundaries. You're not going to let yourself eat all the candy and run out into traffic. In your heart, you know what is going to help you grow. In the beginning of course, you don't really know that very well, but you will learn, and that will include learning what helps you to become more patient, loving, and less aggressive. You find that out through self-reflection, but if it twists, and you use what you see against yourself, you will lose track and get angry at yourself without noticing it any more . . . You need to be kind as you look at yourself and not let it turn into loathing.*

~Pema Chodren

*We choose and sculpt how our ever-changing minds will work. We choose who we will be the next moment, in a very real sense, and these choices are left embossed in physical form on our material selves.*

~Michael Merzenich

*The original heart-mind shines like pure, clear water with the sweetest taste. To know this we must go beyond self and no-self, birth, and death. This original mind is limitless, untouchable, beyond all opposites and all creations. When we see with the eye of wisdom, we know that the Buddha is timeless, unborn, unrelated to anybody or any history. The Buddha is the ground of all being, the realization of the truth of the unmoving mind. So the Buddha was not enlightened in India. In fact, he was never enlightened and was never born and never died, and this timeless Buddha is our true home, our abiding place.*

~Ajahn Chah

## ***Book Review:***

# ***Beyond Happiness: Deepening the Dialogue between Buddhism, Psychotherapy and the Mind Sciences***

***By Gay Watson, Ph.D.***

(Karnac, 2008; ISBN 978-1855754041)

By Els van Ooijen, Psychotherapist, © 2008

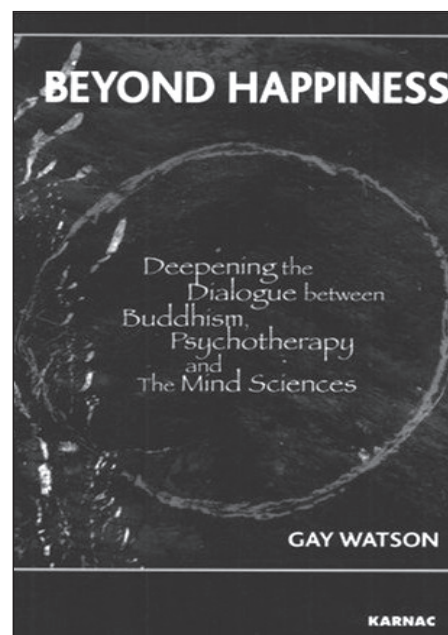
**T**his is a wonderful book, blending findings from neuroscience with ideas from psychotherapy and Buddhism. Clients often ask how psychotherapy actually works. In this book Watson begins to provide an answer. She argues that recent neuroscientific research indicates that the 'experiential exploration of subjectivity' within psychotherapy, as well as Buddhist practices such as meditation and mindfulness, can transform neural pathways. Thus her book builds on works by, for example, Gerhardt (*Why Love Matters*) and Goleman (*Emotional Intelligence*), which discussed the importance of early experience in developing the brain structures needed for the regulation of emotions.

It is striking how much similarity there is between the 2500 year-old philosophies and practices of Buddhism and the findings of the contemporary mind sciences. Some of the quotes by neuroscientists read as if they are taken from Buddhist texts. The central message is that we are all connected and affect each other in more ways than we are normally aware of. This has implications for psychotherapy, through supporting intersubjectivity, confirming the importance of the therapeutic relationship, and affirming the need to pay attention to processes lying outside our normal everyday awareness.

This clear and lucidly written book is in three sections. In the first, Watson introduces the state of play in the neurosciences, consciousness studies and psychotherapy, followed by a synopsis of Buddhist psychology. Next she considers issues of

embodiment, situation and context and how these affect our experience. Much of this challenges traditional views of the self, suggesting that it is not a fixed entity, but a process that is created from moment to moment. Lastly, Watson considers the significance of imagination, creativity and reconnecting with 'feminine' qualities such as care and compassion.

I absolutely loved this book and feel that it will be of interest to all practitioners regardless of experience.



# From Our Readers...

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## Vanity

Vanity

Looking at  
Itself

For  
Reassurance



## Invisible

I don't feel  
Invisible today

Somebody  
Smiled at me

On  
The bus

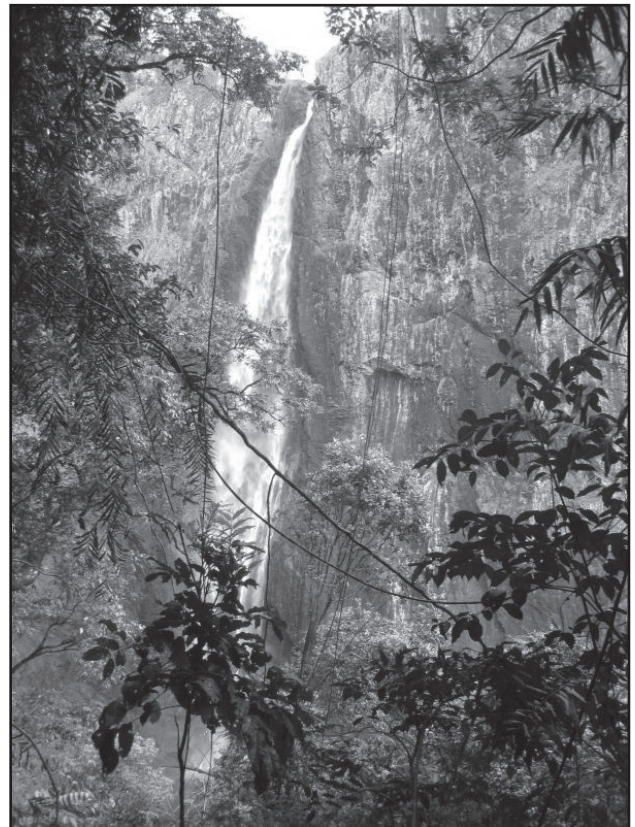
## This Lifetime

Your purpose  
In this lifetime

Is to  
Be you

And to  
Reveal yourself

To the rest  
Of the world





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## Grateful Wonder

Why is it that people typically feel so happy in the settings that make them feel so small? Such as peering up at the night sky, surveying sweeping mountain ranges from the top of a peak, gazing out to sea – or contemplating the vast spaces of the universe.

Here are some of our recent, small-frog-in-big-pond favorites.

- The first confirmed direct images of planets around other stars:  
<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap081117.html>
- Another one of the few direct images of a nearby planet, “just” 50 light-years away:  
<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap081128.html>
- A bubble of gas 25 light-years across:  
<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap080813.html>
- One galaxy swallowing another:  
<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap081127.html>
- Beautiful and moving slide show of satellite shots, set to music:  
<http://www.greatdanepro.com/Blue%20Beauty/index.htm>
- And for a completely different sort of reflection on the gratitude for life’s blessings – which often come in unexpected ways – that can relax the sense of self, here’s a very special video. Lightning strikes about twelve seconds in:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4uG2kSdd-4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4uG2kSdd-4)

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# Offerings

Rick Hanson, PhD, and Rick Mendius, MD

1. Sounds True offers *Meditations for Happiness* by Rick Hanson, Ph.D. It's 3 CD's worth of talks and brain-savvy exercises for increasing your happiness, with an emphasis on experiential practices and practical tools. It is offered as an inexpensive download to your computer, where you can listen to it or burn it to CD's or transfer it to an iPod.

This program truly turned out to be pretty great, and here's a comment about it from the author, Annie Spiegelman:

*On his new "Meditations for Happiness" program, benevolent Rick Hanson guides me to sit down and face my inner critic – and then actually see it as a form and shrink it. Being a Master Gardener, I see the critic as a gnome who tiptoes into my brain when no one is looking, with those tiny pointy shoes, and makes me doubt myself. I shrink him down to the size of a snail and toss him out. He knows nothing. The shoes are a dead giveaway.*

Here's the link to this program at Sounds True: [ADD LINK HERE](#).

2. Rick also has a chapter, "7 Facts about the Brain That Incline the Mind to Joy," in *Measuring the Immeasurable* – which is chock full of essays from luminaries like James Austin, MD, Larry Dossey, MD, Daniel Goleman, PhD., Candace Pert, PhD, Marilyn Schlitz, PhD, Dan Siegel, MD, Charles Tart, PhD, and Cassandra Vieten, PhD. Check it out at <http://www.amazon.com/Measuring-Immeasurable-Scientific-Case-Spirituality/dp/1591796547>.

3. On January, 31, 2009, Rick Mendius and Rick Hanson will be presenting "The Complex Power of Simple Attention: The Brain Science of Mindfulness Methods," at the annual conference of the California Society for Clinical Social Work (CSCSW). If you are interested in attending this conference – on The Emotional Brain and Wellbeing: Understanding and Promoting Wellbeing in Clinical Practice – please contact CSCSW at [www.clinicalsocialworksociety.org](http://www.clinicalsocialworksociety.org).

4. At Spirit Rock, in 2009, these daylongs with Rick Hanson and Rick Mendius are scheduled:

- **The Neurology of Awakening**, on Sunday, March 1. We'll cover how to nurture the brain states that foster the steadiness of mind leading to the deepest and most liberating insights. This is our foundational workshop, with solid neurology and practical tools for activating, step-by-step, the brain states of the Buddha's progressive process of contemplative illumination.

- **Equanimity, on Sunday**, May 17. Equanimity is the key to freedom from emotional reactions, and to cutting the chain of craving and clinging that leads to suffering. This workshop will also address the neuropsychology of difficult emotions, as well as trauma, and neurologically-informed methods for dealing with those.

- **The Neurodharma of Love**, on Saturday, May 23. The emphasis will be on relationships in general and love in the broadest sense, integrating deep teachings on compassion and lovingkindness with a clear-eyed understanding of how we evolved to be caring toward "us" and often wary and aggressive toward "them."

- **Resting in Emptiness: The Evolution of Awareness and the Transcendence of the Self**, on Saturday, November 7. This workshop will address the thorny and fundamental question of . . . "me, myself, and I." The self – with its tendencies to grasp after possessions and take things personally – is perhaps the premier engine of suffering. We'll explore the evolution of the apparent self in the animal kingdom, and the ways in which the self is real and is also not real at all, coming to rest more and more in the underlying spacious awareness in which self appears and disappears.

- **The Hard Things That Open the Mind and Heart: Practicing with Difficult Conditions**, led with James Baraz, on Sunday, December 13. This is for people grappling with difficult conditions – both internal and external – and for caregivers and friends who support those individuals. These include challenges with the body, mind, and life circumstances. We'll cover Buddhist perspectives and practices for difficult conditions; lovingkindness for oneself and for any being who suffers; brain-savvy ways to strengthen your capacity to be with the hard stuff; and methods from the intersection of the dharma and neuroscience for lifting mood and cultivating joy.

*Also in 2009, there are these additional offerings:*

5. At the *Awakening to Mindfulness* conference in San Diego, April 2 – 4, the presenters include Marsha Linehan, Tara Brach, Steven Hayes, Jack Kornfield, and Rick Hanson. 18 continuing education credits are available, and it should be an incredible program. Rick will be presenting two workshops on Friday, April 3: "The Self-Transforming Brain" and "Taking in the Good." See: [www.facesconferences.com](http://www.facesconferences.com) for more information.

6. At the *Barre Center for Buddhist Studies*, in Barre, MA, on Saturday, April 11, Drs. Hanson and Mendius will be offering "Neuro-Dharma: Mindfulness and the Shaping of

the Brain.” See [http://bcbs.dharma.org/Pages/course\\_detail.lasso?-KeyValue=58&-Token.Action=&image=1](http://bcbs.dharma.org/Pages/course_detail.lasso?-KeyValue=58&-Token.Action=&image=1) for more information.

7. At *Kripalu Center*, in Massachusetts, April 12 – 17, Drs. Hanson and Mendius are teaching a weeklong workshop on “The Intimate Brain: Exploring the Neural Circuits of Happiness, Love, and Non-Dual Awareness.” See: [www.kripalu.org/program/view/IB91/the\\_intimate\\_brain\\_exploring\\_the\\_neural\\_circuits](http://www.kripalu.org/program/view/IB91/the_intimate_brain_exploring_the_neural_circuits) for more information.

8. At *New York Insight Meditation Center*, on Sunday April 19, Rick Hanson will be presenting “The Neurodharma of Love.” See <http://nyimc.org/index.php/site/eventcalendar> for more information.

9. At James Baraz’s wonderful *Awakening Joy* course, April 21 and 22, Rick will be a guest speaker. His subject will be how the brain constructs suffering in order to help you survive – and how understanding the mechanisms of that process suggests ways to suffer less.

10. With the *Dharma Zephyr Insight Meditation Community* in Nevada, Rick will be leading a two day workshop June 6 and 7 on using brain-savvy methods to steady the mind, quiet it, bring it to singleness, and concentrate it, following the road map of the Buddha. See: [www.nevadadharma.net/zephyr.html](http://www.nevadadharma.net/zephyr.html) for more information.

11. Through *R. Cassidy Seminars*, Rick will be teaching continuing education workshops to mental health professionals in Los Angeles and San Diego (September 25 & 26), in Portland and Seattle (November 13 & 14). The workshops will focus on translating neuroscience research, informed by contemplative practice, into tools and skills that therapists can offer their clients. See: [www.ceuregistration.com](http://www.ceuregistration.com) for more information.

12. At the *Insight Meditation Community of Washington, DC*, Tara Brach and Rick Hanson will be offering “The Neurodharma of Love” workshop on Saturday, October 10. See: [www.imcw.org/index.php](http://www.imcw.org/index.php) for more information.



### **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 at the corner of Brooks and 3rd. “Early-bird” meditation starts at 6:45 with formal instruction at 7:00; meditation ends at 7:30, followed by a brief break, and then a dharma talk and discussion, ending at 8:30. It is led by Rick Hanson, and for more information, check out [www.WiseBrain.org/sanrafael-meditation.html](http://www.WiseBrain.org/sanrafael-meditation.html). Newcomers are always welcome!

### **The Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom**

The Institute is a 501c3 non-profit corporation, and it publishes the Wise Brain Bulletin. The Wellspring 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](http://www.WiseBrain.org).

### **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.

~\*~ *Fare Well* ~\*~

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