Hello,

On behalf of the Board of the Heartwood Institute, I wanted to give you an update about our activities and plans, and then do what non-profit organizations need (and ought) to do, which is to ask for your help.

**Major Steps So Far**
Based on the response to the Neurology of Awakening workshops we led at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, Rick Mendius and I established the Heartwood Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom. (You probably know that Rick is a neurologist, I’m a psychologist, and we’ve studied and practiced within the Buddhist tradition for many years.)

The Institute’s mission is to offer skillful means for changing the brain to benefit the whole person – and all beings in a world too full of war. It draws on psychology, neurology, and the major contemplative traditions for methods that anyone can use in daily life for greater happiness, love, effectiveness, and wisdom.

Heartwood emphasizes a combination of open access to individualized tools, scientific and contemplative rigor, a playful and down-to-earth spirit, skeptical and pragmatic open-mindedness, an ambitious connecting of dots, and strong support for the work of others.

The Institute sponsors the monthly Train Your Brain (TYB) course, the bimonthly Wise Brain Bulletin, and a growing website. Please visit [www.WiseBrain.org](http://www.WiseBrain.org) to download any of the articles, talks, slide shows, or Bulletins there, or visit the pages going up about the contemplative traditions and related scientific findings.

Over the next year, Rick and I will teach several workshops sponsored by Spirit Rock, the Sati Center, or the California Institute for Integral Studies (CIIS) (see the Offerings section of the Wise Brain Bulletin for details). We are beginning to offer the TYB course over the internet, and we are working on a book proposal with Christina Feldman for *Buddha’s Brain: The New Neuroscience and the Path of Awakening*.

**With Grateful Appreciation**
All this has unfolded over just six months, and it’s happened for one reason, the support of people like you. We’ve also been encouraged by established teachers – notably Christina Feldman, Sylvia Boorstein, James Baraz, Tara Brach, Phillip Moffit, and Gil Fronsdal – and by organizations such as Spirit Rock, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Kara, CIIS, and the Center for Timeless Wisdom.
In particular, the people on Heartwood’s Board and its Research Committee have made a tremendous contribution. I want to let you know who they are, both to thank them by name and to give you a sense of the human foundation of the Institute:

- Judith Bell, M.A. – Psychotherapist; founder of the Authentic Leadership Institute; researcher on stress management tools for returning vets
- Andrew Dreitcer, PhD – Professor at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University
- Daniel Ellenberg, Ph.D. – Psychologist and author; expert on thriving
- Michael Hagerty, Ph.D. – Professor Emeritus, UC Davis; researched happiness and quality of life with Martin Seligman, Richard Davidson, and others
- Jan Hanson, M.S. – Acupuncturist and clinical nutritionist; author on the biochemistry of peak neurological functioning
- Julian Isaacs, PhD – Researcher in experimental psychology; expert on EEG mapping and neurofeedback training
- Stephen Levine, PhD – Biochemist; wrote first major book on oxidative stress; owns major nutritional company
- Terry Patten, M.A. – Co-author of book with Ken Wilber on Integral methods of self-help; expert on technologies for generating positive brain states

**How You Can Help**

All of the revenue from Heartwood’s programs has gone back into the costs of the Institute (e.g., incorporation fees, printing handouts, research assistant); Rick and I have not taken anything for ourselves. We’ve relied on volunteer efforts and a “no-frills, cut-to-the-chase” ethic of right livelihood. This has planted the “sapling” securely, but for it to flourish and bear fruit, it needs more financial support.

In particular, we need your help to embark on two major projects: the first longitudinal study of long-term contemplative practice, and the first major interfaith conference grounded in neuroscience. Let me tell you about each one.

**Longitudinal Study**

This study will demonstrate the long-term results of spiritual practices, clarify the factors leading to those benefits, and illustrate what helps different people the most. Longitudinal studies are the gold standard in social science research, with their richness of detail and ability to make causal, not just correlative, connections.

Each year, in cost-effective ways, we will gather web-based survey data from hundreds, perhaps thousands of dedicated Buddhist meditators and Christian contemplatives, in addition to physiological measures from a sub-set of these people (e.g., EEGs, stress hormones), in order to investigate these questions:
What do people actually do in their spiritual practices (e.g., type of meditation, study, group activities, prayer, chanting, reflection, service)?
- What are the results, psychologically, socially, and physically?
- In particular, what are the effects of long-term practice on the aging process (e.g., lifting mood and reducing cognitive declines)?
- Why do practices produce their results?
- In what ways do things change over time?
- What are significant individual differences?

Taken as a whole, no one has ever gathered this information before now. And since people who meditate also tend to be interested in psychological growth and good health habits, this study will also provide a window into the broad-scale benefits of those factors. We will make our data available to other researchers, a treasure trove that will only grow as the years go by.

Frankly, in a world that needs to act less out of emotional upset, it will be a great thing to be able to demonstrate scientifically that contemplative and psychological methods really work over the long haul, and how to adapt those methods to individuals with different needs.

Our first-phase of activity is to design this study in detail, and pilot some of its features. Then we will launch the first wave of data-collection, probably in 2008. Even though we are keeping costs cut to the bone, that first phase will cost around $45,000; that’s a pittance compared to the typical academic study of similar scope, yet it still needs to be raised through people’s generosity.

**Interfaith Conference**

We are planning a series of annual, interfaith conferences, with the working title: “This Is Your Brain on . . . God?”

Each year, starting in the Fall of 2008, these meetings will bring together scholars, practitioners, and the general public in the Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Shamanic traditions. Each conference will examine an important theme of contemplative practice through the lens of neuroscience, illuminating common ground and important differences – and suggesting ways for practice to be even more fruitful.

The emphasis will be on actual practices and their benefits, with an empirical and pragmatic flavor, rather than on discussions of theology, culture, or philosophy. The themes being considered for the first several years include the role of attention in
different types of practice, the nature of extraordinary experiences, and the neuropsychology of faith: pretty incredible stuff, actually.

We will do one or two “dress rehearsals” – the first in September, 2007 – to plan for the conferences and iron out the bugs. We anticipate that the cost of this planning phase will be around $10,000.

**What You Can Do**

Any help you can offer will make a big difference; with our minimal overhead and “cutting through” spirit, your generosity will have highly leveraged impacts. Over the centuries, it has only been through the gifts of good-hearted people that many wholesome teachings and endeavors have come to fruit.

We anticipate receiving 501c3 status in the next few months, so any contributions to Heartwood in 2007 should be tax-deductible. Sure, we would love “keystone” donations of $10,000 or more to really get the research and conferences off the ground, but honestly, anything at all will add up and hearten our efforts and spread good ripples. Please call Rick Mendius (415/464-0411) or me (415/491-4900) if you have any questions or if you would like to speak further about how you can help or how your donation might be used.

If you like, you can designate your gift for just the longitudinal study, or just the interfaith conference – though we prefer that you make an unrestricted gift that will give us the most flexibility. And each year, like any other non-profit, we will do a financial accounting that is publicly available. (This appeal is also attached, if you would like to share it with others.)

Please make your check out to The Heartwood Institute, and mail it to the Institute at 25 Mitchell Blvd, Suite 3, San Rafael, CA 94903.

**In Closing**

The opening lines from Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* describe our own days quite well:

> “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness . . . it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair . . .”

The world today is poised on the edge of a knife, and can go both ways. For it to fulfill its promise – with a growing respect for human rights, democratization, standard of living, tolerant pluralism, environmental awareness, etc., etc. – a critical mass of people will need to become more skillful with their own minds – and thus
their own brains. The Heartwood Institute – with its programs, Bulletin, website, research, and conferences – is making a real contribution to this historically crucial effort, and with your help, can make an even bigger one.

I thank you in advance from the bottom of my heart for whatever you feel moved and able to do.

Many blessings,

Rick Hanson, Ph.D.