

The Wise Brain Bulletin

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

Good Intentions: Neurological, Contemplative, and Practical Perspectives

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Basic Propositions

Everything happens because of preceding causes.

Everything, both inside our minds and outside in the world.

Those causes lead to results that are either beneficial or harmful, for ourselves and others.

Causes originate within yourself and outside yourself.

The primary source of the causes that originate inside you are your own intentions. As Joseph Goldstein puts it, "Everything rests on the tip of motivation."

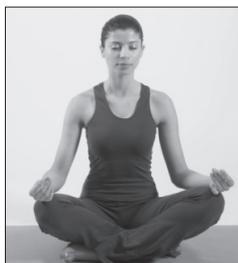
Some of our intentions are very deliberate and conscious, while others are shadowy or altogether hidden. Multiple intentions dance, join with, and oppose each other in the mind, some have more power than others do, and our actions are the result of the net sum of all of them at any one time. Our actions reveal our true intentions.

The sphere of intention is vast, ranging from the items listed on a shopping list to our loftiest aspirations. It encompasses our goals, aims, values, drives, purposes, wants, and ideals. The influence of our intentions pervades our entire life.

Also in this issue:

Stress and
Meditation

pg. 11



A Different
Perspective on
Cocoa

pg. 13



This means that through establishing our intentions, we have tremendous influence over our life. Therefore, our intentions bring us both great responsibility and great opportunity.

In sum, becoming more aware of our intentions, observing their effects – for better or worse – and becoming more skillful with them is an absolutely fundamental and powerful source of benefit for ourselves and others.

The Neurology of Intention

Our intentions arise in the brain, are represented in the brain, and are pursued in the brain. Where else?

Therefore, a basic understanding of how intentions work in the brain – and thus in your mind – is a very useful thing to have.

Greetings

The 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.

Rick Hanson, PhD and Richard Mendius, MD are regular contributors to the Wise Brain Bulletin, and since its inception it has been designed and laid out by Laurel Hanson. Stephanie Daigre is our new Managing Editor. We welcome your contributions, and to subscribe, please contact Rick at drrh@comcast.net.

The Executive Functions

The brain is like a committee, with many parts or “members” working together – or at cross purposes! – and the frontal lobes are like the chair of that committee. Or, to use a different metaphor, if the psyche altogether is a vast land, with a capital and many provinces, the frontal lobes are like the city manager of the capital.

But of course that does not mean that they are the owner of the country! An error the frontal lobes, and the self structures that identify with

them, tend to make. To the loss and often the rebellion of the provinces . . .

As you can observe in your own experience, it is possible to have effective “executive functions” in the mind – those capacities that plan, organize, monitor, and direct – without much if any sense of personal self in the mix.

A Proper Balance

To be sure, those executive functions are very important. A healthy nation needs both its capital and its provinces. Balance is everything, in the brain as in life. “The middle way . . . “

You might ask yourself, are you tilted either way:

- Toward an excess of executive functions, too much top-down control, not enough life breathing in the provinces, too much “head” and not enough “body” or “heart,” too much regulation, suppression and scorn directed at parts of the self, too many high judges and critics in the mind scolding the inner children and the passions, too much superego and not enough id, living too much behind city gates and not enjoying and exploring enough the rich and fertile lands outside those walls
- Toward an excess of unruly provinces, too much influence bubbling up from the bottom, not enough self-control, flooded with affect, impulsive and inattentive, a mental popcorn machine

Most of us are, indeed, tilted too much one way or another not just as a temporary imbalance but as a longstanding tendency. Certain moments call for more from the “capital” and others for more from the “provinces,” and being able to move nimbly in one direction or another without limitation or creakiness is very helpful in navigating the twists and turns of life.

So, when you see which way you are tilted, then restoring greater balance – and becoming stronger and more

able with the other aspect of the psyche – can become a strategic goal for growth.

The primary way to develop your “weak suit,” in terms of optimal balance for yourself, is simply to identify the elements of it that you want to strengthen, and keep them in mind. That will mobilize resources for yourself over time that will gradually build up those capacities. Truly, 50% of personal growth is identifying the issue – whatever it is – and committing to work on it. Just that! Which is really very good news.

Held in a proper balance, establishing clear intentions – which are a way the frontal lobes call the other members of the committee to order and establish what the agenda is – is a powerful, skillful means to getting anything good done either inside your own head and heart or in the outer world.

Right Intention

Introduction

Of course, the first question regarding intention is, *for what?*

All the great wisdom traditions of the world, and all the great moral philosophers, have grappled with this question. What should we want?

There are many ways to approach this question. Some try to answer it in terms of discerning the will or desires of their sense of a Divine influence, of God. Others through resort to certain ideals or abstractions. And others through reliance on some kind of authority, such as a priestly class or a scripture.

In the case of the Buddha – and also some moral

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.

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 suggested fee for each month of the program is \$20 - \$40, but no one will be turned away for lack of funds. Please arrive ten to fifteen minutes early so you will have ample time to register for the class.

Upcoming dates and topics:

- 1/08/08 – From Shame to Worth

The social machinery of shame. The harsh and primitive inner critic. The distinction between healthy remorse and unfair guilt. Methods for releasing shame and guilt. Take refuge in your innate good qualities.

- 2/12/08 – From Sadness to Contentment

Healthy mourning, grieving, and “the wound of the heart” – and unhealthy melancholy and depression.

- 3/11/08 – The Power of Intention

“Everything rests on the tip of motivation.” Frontal lobe controls. Methods for clarity of purpose: verbal, imagistic, theatrical.

philosophers – he approached this question pragmatically, in terms of what leads to more or less suffering, to more or less benefit or harm to oneself and others. Intentions are good if they lead to good results, and bad if they lead to bad results.

This approach has numerous advantages. It is down to earth. It draws upon our own observation of what happens, rather than relying upon the viewpoints of others. It provides a ready test for the worth of an intention: what did it lead to, what actually happened? And it keeps turning us back to ourselves, toward how we can be ever more skillful.

The best available record of the actual teachings of the Buddha – what is called the Pali Canon after the language in which they were first written – is chock full

of encouragement and practical guidance for many kinds of intentions leading to good results.

For example, in one sutta – a talk or discourse of the Buddha – he is offering a merchant guidelines for an ethical business, and in another he is advising a monk on the subtlest imaginable inclinations of mind in profoundly realized states of consciousness. In one of my favorite suttas, the Buddha tells his seven-year-old son, Rahula, that knowing how to act in life is actually very simple: before you do something, consider if it will lead to benefit or harm, and if it will be beneficial, go ahead; then, while you are doing things, keep considering if they are beneficial or not, and if they are, it's alright to continue them.

In this context of diversity and individuality of wholesome intentions, the Buddha singled out three in particular. They are contained in what is called Right Intention, which is one of the parts of the Eightfold Path; that Path is the last of the Four Noble Truths, and it describes the way leading to the end of suffering.

By the way, Right (or Wise) Intention is sometimes translated as “Right Resolve,” which conveys the determination, firmness of aim, heartfelt conviction, and persistence that are central to right intention. Let's see what those three intentions were, that the Buddha thought were so important that they deserved such emphasis.

Intention of Harmlessness

This is a broad aim of not causing pain, loss, or destruction to any living thing. At a minimum, this is a sweeping



resolution to avoid any whit of harm to another human being. The implications are far-reaching, since most of us participate daily in activities whose requirements or ripples may involve harm to others (e.g., use of fossil fuels that warms the planet, purchasing goods manufactured in oppressive conditions).

Further, in American culture there is a strong tradition of rugged individualism in which as long as you are not egregiously forceful or deceitful, “let the buyer beware” on the other side of daily transactions. But if your aim is preventing any harm, then the other person’s free consent does not remove your responsibility.

Taking it a step further, to many, harmlessness means not killing bothersome insects, rodents, etc. Even as you feel the mosquito sticking its needle into your neck. And to many, harmlessness means eating a vegetarian diet (and perhaps forgoing milk products, since cows need to have calves to keep their milk production flowing, and half of those calves are male, who will eventually be slaughtered for food).

Nonetheless, we need to realize that there is no way to avoid all harms to other beings that flow inexorably through our life. If we are to eat, we must kill plants, and billions of bacteria die each day as we pass wastes out of our bodies. If we get hired for a job, that means another person will not be.

But what we can do is to have a sincere aspiration toward harmlessness, and to reduce our harms to an absolute minimum. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Intention of Non-Ill Will

Here we give up angry, punishing reactions toward others, animals, plants, and things. If such attitudes arise, we resolve not to feed them, and to cut them

off as fast as we can.

The Buddha placed great stress on the importance of releasing ill will. In the extreme, he said that even when we are being grossly mistreated by others, we should practice good will toward them, and wish them the best.

To be sure, that does not mean turning a blind eye toward injustice and mistreatment – of ourselves as well as others – nor does it mean turning our back on skillful actions of protection, advocacy, and betterment. It is perfectly appropriate to defend yourself, assert yourself, pursue your own interests – and to do all that on behalf of others, too – as long as all that is done in the spirit of wisdom and good will. This stance is seen pointedly and poignantly in the Dalai Lama’s reference to “. . . my friends, the enemy Chinese.”

Of course, in daily life, practicing with ill will is often extremely difficult – especially when we feel we’ve been truly wronged. For help, please see the article, “21 Ways to Turn Ill Will to Good Will,” at www.WiseBrain.org. As a summary, those ways are listed here:

1. Be mindful of the priming.
2. Practice non-contention.
3. Inspect the underlying trigger.
4. Be careful about attributing intent to others.

Grateful Wonder

There are so many incredible pictures these days of the universe that it might be easy to get a little jaded. Then along come images like these:

- A pillar of star-forming dust and gas with a jet of gas at its tip (the one shooting off to the left) that doesn’t look like much . . . until you read the caption saying that it’s about a light-year long; the tip of your cursor placed on that jet might roughly represent the diameter of our entire solar system!

<http://antwarp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap071226.html>

- The Pictures of the Year from NASA’s Astronomy Picture of the Day website, a kind of universe’s greatest hits:

<http://antwarp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/apoys2007.html>

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/sanrafaelmeditation.html. Newcomers are always welcome!

5. Put what happened in perspective.
6. Cultivate lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.
7. Practice generosity.
8. Investigate ill will.
9. Regard ill will as an affliction.
10. Settle into awareness of ill will, but don't be identified with it.
11. Accept the wound.
12. Do not cling to what you want.
13. Let go of the view that things are supposed to be a certain way.
14. Release the sense of self.
15. "... ill will is suppressed by the first jhana based on lovingkindness and eradicated by the path of nonreturning."
16. Resolve to meet mistreatment with lovingkindness.
17. Cultivate positive emotion.
18. Communicate.
19. Have faith that they will inherit their own karmas one day.
20. Realize that some people will not get the lesson.
21. Forgive.

Intention of Renunciation

Renunciation is founded on a disenchantment with the world and with experience, based on right view. You see through all the possibilities of experience: you see their ephemeral, insubstantial, empty qualities, no matter how alluring or seemingly gratifying. You see the suffering embedded in the experience, the "trap," as the

Buddha put it. And you see the happiness, peace, and love available in not chasing after pleasure or resisting pain.

Based on this clear seeing, you align yourself with the wisdom perspective and with the innate, prior, always already existing wakeful, pure, peaceful, and radiant awareness within yourself. In so doing, you renounce worldly things and worldly pleasures.

If they pass through your awareness - a sunset, a child's smile, chocolate pudding, Beethoven's 9th - fine; just don't cling to them as they disappear as all experiences do.

Renunciation is NOT asceticism, or privation for privation's sake. It is a joyous union with the path of happiness that happens to include a relinquishing, casting off, abandoning, walking away from any seeking at all of worldly gratifications.

At its heart, renunciation is simple: we just let go. Ajahn Chah: "If you let go a little, you will have a little happiness. If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of happiness. If you let go completely, you will be completely happy."

Other Good Intentions

Besides the three fundamental intentions above, what other aims or values would really serve you, and others? How about:

- Feeling more relaxed and calm
- Deepening your well-being and capacity to contribute to others
- Working through something that's been bothering you

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.

- Giving up an addiction or other unwholesome behavior
- Coming to terms – and to peace – with a difficult life situation, such as a major illness

Or you could shoot for the stars and focus on a primary purpose in life. Such as liberation, awakening, Nirvana, enlightenment. Or abiding in love – all the time.

Expressing Your Intentions

Once your intentions are clear, the next question is: How to express them?

There are many ways, including

- As thoughts in your mind
- As an image
- In writing
- As a collage with words and images
- Through physical expression, posture, movement, dance
- As a sense of being

When you think intentions, you know them to yourself. Putting them in explicit words is usually helps create

real clarity in your mind. Some intentions co-exist as equally vital, but many times it's important to establish what your top priorities are. It's kind of like filling a bucket: you want to get the big rocks in first, then the pebbles, and last the sand. Your most important aims are the big rocks, and if you take care of them, everything else usually works out just fine.

The nonverbal expression of intentions is through imagery. For all the emphasis in education and in our culture on language – certainly an important tool – it's good to keep in mind that most of the brain, and most of our mental processes (especially unconscious ones) have nothing to do with language at all. A picture is indeed worth a thousand words, and pictures in your mind of your intentions – including both the path toward them and their fulfillment – are very, very valuable.

You can also write out your intentions, perhaps informally – as in a to-do list – or formally, as affirmations. These are complete sentences, positively stated, with the result already existing in the present. Like this: “I am healthy, happy, and whole.” “My family is full of love and harmony.” “I am completing my college education.” “My wife loves me.”



Collages are another powerful way to express your intentions. I have collages on the wall of my office at home that were made several years ago yet they still speak to me; I look at them, and know what I'm supposed to do.

Or you could move your body as an expression of your intention, letting it move through you as you walk or dance or whatever

Last and definitely not least, you could get the feeling of the intention in your body, and rest in that sense of

being. For example, if your intention is to be loving, rest in the sense of being loving. If it is to be highly focused and productive, get a sense of being that way, and then abide there. Be the goal you are aiming for.

Is the Intention a Goal or Already Realized?

This last point brings us to the third question: *Do you express the intention as a goal or as something already realized?*

This gets at a recurring question, even a debate, in Buddhism (and also in psychology and in some religions): Is it about progressing toward an enlightened state, or is it about uncovering the enlightened condition that has always been present? I can't do justice here to the nuances of that consideration, but I can say what many wise people think is at the marrow of the matter: both are true. (Darn that middle way.)

In other words, it is powerful to focus on intention both as an aim toward a target, and as something that is already the case. The phrasing, "May _____" is a nice way to accomplish this, since "May I be happy" or "May the world be at peace" both embody an aim and an actuality.

And of these two, aim and actuality, it's usually best to emphasize the latter, the sense of the intention as already realized. For example, one thing that makes the affirmation form of verbalized intentions powerful (whether written, spoken, or thought), is that they are expressed in the present.



We are such a goal-directed culture, and there are so many associations of striving, frustration, and disappointment related to pursuing goals in the minds of so many of us, that there is often greater openness inside to intentions expressed as already true. We are already that way. Our circumstances are already that way.

This also points us to a greater recognition of, and gratitude and appreciation for, what is already good and working and wholesome and wonderful inside ourselves and outside, in our world. This feels good in its own right, which is very good for your brain! And you! And

others!

And it directs us toward resources we may have missed, both inside and outside. There really is a profound wisdom and peacefulness already within us – in Buddhism, sometimes called Buddha mind, or bodhichitta. And a beautiful, wonderful harmony latent in the world.

For example, the “resting state” of the brain has a neurological coherence, a quiet hum of relaxed readiness, and a saturation with mildly positive emotion. That is what you return to when something is resolved, and

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Words of Wisdom: On Charting Your Course

As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler.
Henry David Thoreau

When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.
Audre Lorde

If by forsaking a limited ease, a great happiness is to be found, the wise one leaves aside the limited ease for the sake of great happiness.
Sitting alone, resting alone, walking alone, in diligent practice,
One finds delight in the solitude of the forest.
The Dhammapada

The Buddha had a simple test for measuring wisdom. You're wise, he said, to the extent that you can get yourself to do things you don't like doing but know will result in happiness, and to the extent that you refrain from things you like doing but know will result in pain and harm. He [emphasized] the radical importance of intentional action, [which] has to outwit our shortsighted preferences in order to yield a happiness that lasts.
Thanissaro Bhikku

Do all that you can, with all that you have, in the time that you have, in the place where you are.
Nkosi Johnson

One renowned Theravada teacher said, “As worldliness pursues getting, which is the root of greed in action, so giving is the way to [enlightenment].”
Gloria Taraniya Ambrosia

Each morning when I open my eyes, I say to myself: “I, not events have the power to make me happy or unhappy. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow has not arrived yet. I only have one day - TODAY – and I am going to be HAPPY in it!!!!!!”
Groucho Marx

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.

that is what you return to if you start with a positive state and then jiggle it, such as with EMDR or other psychological techniques.

All this means that the universe and mother nature and spirit are all on your side. So, in a sense, a lot of what anyone of us is really trying to do is to re-access a sense of the innate nature of the brain – of our own nature as beings – and settle ever more deeply into that always already true and present condition. Kind of like settling into a cozy comforter in our bed that is home base.

Perhaps take a moment to see if you can sense into your preexisting Buddha nature, inner goodness, spark of the Divine within – in whatever way you experience or name that.

How Firmly Should You Pursue Your Intentions?

Then, last, *how firmly do you pursue your intentions?* Again, neither too tight nor too loose a rein.

As with the balance of the capital city and the provinces, it's worth considering what your tendencies are and if there is an imbalance. For example, some of us hold onto our goals to a fault (myself, ahem) going down with the ship – pull up! It's a trap!! – while others give up way too soon or don't take their own needs and wants seriously enough.

From the Buddhist perspective, the path that leads to the greatest well-being and goodness for oneself and others steers clear of over-striving on the one hand – clinging is, after all, the primary engine of suffering – yet is also guided by Right Intention and other wholesome aims.

The importance of this side of the balance – of perseverance guided by goodness – is seen in one of my favorite phrases of the Buddha. Appearing in many places in the Pali Canon, indicating its importance, it describes worthy practitioners as “ardent, resolute, diligent, and mindful.” All these speak to a real dedication.

In my experience, more people err on the side of being flabby or fearful in their resolutions, and not enough of an ally to themselves, than err on the side of being obsessively driven toward important goals. And of course, within the same person, there may be goals that he or she is too lax about as well as goals that he or she is too obsessive about.

You could reflect on how you might come to better balance for yourself with regard to your strength of resolution. Consider both the goals you could be too driven about . . . and the goals you could be too lax about.

Conclusion

As we consider the fruits of our intentions – Are they bitter or sweet? – it is easy to veer into the pitfalls of guilt and shame on the one side, and self-congratulation and conceit on the other. Instead, the wise course is to be clear-eyed, even-keeled, and encouraging with yourself, continually focused on your learning and growth, on how you can become a little better person every day.

For yourself. For everyone around you. And for the whole wide world.

Want Less Stress? Try Meditation

from The Albuquerque Journal

© Lara Patriquin, MD, 2008

Brenda Broussard says she had an enviable life, complete with several advanced university degrees, a thriving business and a rich family life. You would think inner peace would come easily for someone like Broussard, but it didn't. Actually, just the opposite.

"My parents became ill and my business and daughter kept me busy. With all the stresses my multifaceted life presented I was constantly worrying about one thing or another," she said.

One day, she realized she was too stressed to enjoy that life.

"My mind was always in the future or the past, not here where I wanted to be present for my family, patients and for myself. I knew there had to be a better way to think about all this."

At wit's end, Brenda turned to a meditation seminar at the Presbyterian Healthplex.

"I had tried other forms of stress relief but knew that the problem resided in my own brain. I knew the issue was not my life, which I did not want to change, but how I was reacting to it," she said.

We know and accomplish more than our ancestors could have ever dreamed, but now feel the untoward stress-related side effects of this new way of living. Stress is the physiological reaction of our brains and bodies to the

thousands of thoughts we have every day, a pervasive problem in our harried lives.

It is helpful to remember that our forerunners lived at a time when physical survival was the driving force in life. The specter of danger flooded the bloodstream with adrenaline, increasing the heart rate and directing oxygen to our muscles. These hormones allowed them to be faster and more aggressive but also fearful and nervous.

To some degree, our brains are still wired for these earlier days when being killed by a predator was a very real threat. The problem is that our own thoughts now prompt this same response. Stress can be self-perpetuating, as the nervous mind generates new negative thoughts, leaving our minds in a tailspin. We feel stressed out.

Unchecked, this leads to anxiety, depression and in some cases substance abuse or other forms of addictive behavior. Breaking out of this cycle is the key to fighting stress.

Jim DuVal, director of the stress relief program at the Presbyterian Healthplex, said he believes that by strengthening the mind through meditation, stress can be significantly reduced and people can enjoy peace of mind.

"Our minds naturally wander, and often to places we don't want them to be, such as in worry, anger or fear,"

he said. "Meditation trains our minds to come back to the present. In the course, I teach patients to focus on their breathing. When their minds wander, and it always does, I teach them to 'come back' and refocus on the breath. Then, in daily life, when faced with a stressful thought, the mind is capable of 'coming back' to the present and avoiding the stress response associated with that stressful thought."

DuVal regards meditation as a form of mental gymnastics that makes the brain better able to cope with an increasingly stressful world. He compares it to a muscle that can be trained for well-being.

Science has demonstrated that this is indeed true.

Modern medical imaging shows that people who meditate actually think differently from those who don't. Using functional MRI, a brain scan that lights up in areas where there is a lot of activity, scientists have pinpointed an area called the left frontal cortex, which is highly active in people experiencing happy thoughts and peace of mind.

On the other hand, the brain scans show decreased activity in the amygdala, an almond shaped portion of the deep brain commonly known as the "alarm system." This is where the fight or flight response is triggered.

MRIs also show that the areas of the brain that control attention become thicker with the practice of meditation. The thickening of the brain and its increased activity reflect changes in the structure of the brain: Like a muscle being bulked up, it builds itself up through the repeated exercise of meditation.

The ability of the brain to change its structure through repeated activity is called neuroplasticity. Richard Davidson, director of the Keck Laboratory for Functional Brain Imaging and Behavior at the University of Wisconsin, a pioneer in neuroplasticity research, believes that peace of mind is something we can all work

toward.

"This positive state is a skill that can be trained," he said in an e-mail. "Our findings clearly indicate that meditation can change the function and structure of the brain in an enduring way."

Dr. David Scrase, vice president and chief operating officer of Presbyterian Healthcare Services and a busy internist, is sold on the changes possible through meditation. After attending DuVal's seminars, he not only adopted the practice but also began referring many of his patients to the course.

"It works," he said, "by helping patients gain insight on how their thought patterns affect their mental and physical health. Meditation is not only very effective in lowering stress and anxiety but can assist in relieving physical problems such as chronic pain and high blood pressure. It is a very empowering tool."

DuVal began meditation about 25 years ago when dealing with chronic pain. He studied with Dr. Daniel Brown, a psychologist at Harvard who brought Eastern concepts of meditation to the mainstream in the United States, and interned with Jon Kabat-Zinn, whose stress reduction program at the University of Massachusetts is regarded as one of the finest in the country. He now holds classes at Presbyterian Healthplex.

Broussard is quick to endorse the program, to which she refers many of her own clients. "I feel healthier and more effective. I can see the difference my new presence has on my family and patients," she said.

Lara Patriquin, M.D., is a radiologist with Radiology Associates of Albuquerque and a member of the Albuquerque Center for Spiritual Living.

Hot Chocolate

Author unknown, forwarded by Jennifer Steward

A group of alumni, highly established in their careers, got together to visit their old university professor. Conversation soon turned into complaints about stress in work and life. Offering his guests hot chocolate, the professor went to the kitchen and returned with a large pot of Chocolate and an assortment of cups - porcelain, plastic, glass, crystal, some plain looking, some expensive, some exquisite - telling them to help themselves to the chocolate.

When all the students had a cup of chocolate in hand, the professor said: "If you noticed, all the nice looking expensive cups were taken up, leaving behind the plain and cheap ones. While it is normal for you to want only the best for yourselves, that is the source of your problems and stress.

Be assured that the cup itself adds no quality to the chocolate. In most cases it is just more expensive and in some cases even hides what we drink. What all of you really wanted was chocolate, not the cup, but you consciously went for the best cups.....and then you began eyeing each other's cups.

Now consider this: Life is the chocolate; the jobs, money and position in societies are the cups. They are just tools to hold and contain Life, and the type of cup we have does not define, nor change the quality of life we live. Sometimes, by concentrating only on

the cup, we fail to enjoy the chocolate provided us.

Life is the chocolate, not the cups.....

Enjoy your hot chocolate!

The happiest people don't have the best of everything.

They just make the best of everything.

- Live simply.
- Love generously.
- Care deeply.
- Speak kindly.



Offerings

Rick Hanson, PhD, and Rick Mendius, MD

1. On Saturday and Sunday, February 23 and 24, Rick Hanson will be leading an experiential and powerful personal growth workshop called Being Your Best Self. Deep within each one of us, grounded in the structures of the brain, is a core of being that is courageous, caring, and contented – and this workshop is about removing blocks to living from that core, and about energizing it in your relationships and in your work. We'll be sending out more detailed information about this workshop in early January.

2. At Spirit Rock, in 2008, these daylongs are scheduled:

- The Neurodharma of Love, led with Sylvia Boorstein, on Sunday, March 30. Sylvia, as you may know, is quite extraordinary – sort of a cross between a Jewish grandmother and the Dalai Lama – and this workshop will be memorable. 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.”

- Equanimity, led with Christina Feldman, on Sunday, May 11. Christina is a senior Vipassana teacher from England who combines profound penetration with practical good humor. Equanimity is the key to freedom from emotional reactions, and to cutting the chain of craving and clinging that leads to suffering.

- The Neurology of Awakening, on Saturday, Septem-

ber 6. 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.

- Resting in Emptiness, on Sunday, November 9. 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.

3. At One Taste in San Francisco – an organization and living collective dedicated to conscious and embodied relationships – on Tuesday evening, April 15, we will be giving a public talk on the evolution – and transcendence – of jealousy. It should be a fun, playful, and informative event.

4. At Claremont Graduate University, during October 19 – 21, we will be discussants at a conference on using neuropsychology to help illuminate the common ground – and differences – among the contemplative practices of different faith traditions.

Fare Well

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