

The Wise Brain Bulletin

News and Tools for Happiness, Love, and Wisdom
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The Week of Circling Hawks

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My entire adult life I have been fortunate to avoid serious injury or long-term illness. As a practicing psychologist I have spent over forty years working with others who have not been so fortunate—counseling life-threatened children and adults, teaching meditation, visualization, dream work and spiritual attunement. Five days after celebrating my 63rd birthday ski touring in a glorious Sierra snowstorm, disaster hit.

Bending low I stooped to begin moving a cord of wood in our driveway. As I stood up with the first armful, my lower back seized up. Hobbled into the house, I lay down with an ice pack. The next day I went to a physical therapist who put me in traction for ten minutes. My back felt great. I stood up smiling. *"Wow, that really helped. Thank you so much."*

I walked happily to the door. Five steps and the bottom fell out. I collapsed to the floor screaming in agony. Blinding pain. People rushed over. A gurney appeared. A grim-faced attendant whisked me to the emergency room of a hospital that was fortunately right next door. Unfortunately it was jammed with patients overflowing into the hallway. *"We'll get to you as soon as we can"* said a harried nurse with a mangled body on a gurney.

Every instant was burning hell. I have no idea how long I lay there moaning but thank goodness, eventually my wife Andrea arrived. A nurse herself, she begged for help. *"I'm so sorry"*, several nurses said as they rushed by. *"We are so busy now. We'll be with you as soon as possible."*

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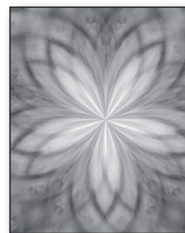
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Greetings

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.

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"As soon as possible" turned into a long wait. Sciatic fire roared through my hip, down my left thigh, into my knee. My spine was an exploding volcano. Helpless, desperate, frightened, my observing witness exploded with the pain. All I could manage was a plea—*"Please God. I can't take this. Get me out of here. Let me die if that's the only way out. Anything but this. Please. Mercy. I can't do this!"*

My inner critic was alive and well, commenting sarcastically, *"So this is what it comes down to when the shit hits the fan—you're reduced to pitiful begging."*

Despite my plea, I didn't die, but the pain reached such a level of intolerability that it shot me into a surreal time/space warp. Suddenly I was in the past, with others in their pain. I was with both my dads in their deaths, with my 19-year-old uncle whose plane was shot down in WW II, with my lifelong friend Steve who had choked to death recently from cancer of the

esophagus; with all the children I had worked with at the Center of Attitudinal Healing over the years. The time warp shot me forward as well—viewing possible future scenarios of pain and suffering.

Overwhelmed by so much pain, my heart dissolved into spontaneous metta—love poured forth like a jet of water from a broken dam. I sent love out to everyone who ever had been in pain, who ever would be in pain. It was all I could do. *"I'm so sorry. I'm here with you."* Pain remained but love was there lending comfort.

After hours of agony a nurse approached. *"We can take you now. A doctor can see you."* She wheeled me through a corridor into another hallway. Gurneys were everywhere. A doctor appeared. Andrea explained what had happened. He gave me a shot of morphine. Hallelujah. Merciful relief. My over-stressed sympathetic nervous system was finally damped down by a gift from the plant world administered chemically through a sharp needle.

An MRI revealed one herniated disk and a second one bulging, L3 and L4 at the base of the spine. I ended up flat on my back for six and a half weeks. Ever try eating on your back? How about lying on your back all day long?

Going to the bathroom was horrible. The hospital gave me crutches but even with their aid there was too much pressure on my spine to use them. The only way to get around was to lower myself to the ground and crawl like a dog. Once at the commode I had to sit up. The pressure was unbelievable. Miserable doesn't even get there.

In the midst of it all, an inner voice spoke through the darkness and despair—*"There is an intelligence available and within you that knows how to heal. Listen to it. Work*

with it. Open your receptivity to anything that might be of help. Let go of any thoughts about how long this is going to take. Surrender. You will heal if you let go, if you work with the Intelligence.”

Jerry Jampolsky, my psychiatrist friend from the Center for Attitudinal Healing with whom I had worked since 1977, called on my second day home from the hospital. Wracked by pain spasms, spaced out on drugs, I was in an altered state. “Tom”, Jerry said, “*It’s important that you remember that you are not your body, you are not your pain; you are not your ego, your thoughts or even your feelings. You are light. You are love. Close your eyes*” he said. “*Focus on light. Repeat after me, ‘Your light is all I see, it is but a reflection of the light in me’.*”

Tranced-out as I was, Jerry’s words entered my mind with total receptivity. I latched onto them repeating, mantra-like, what he had said. “*I am not this pain, I am not my body, I am the light.*” I visualized a flow of healing light, breathed it into my back, my side, my thigh, and my knee. I breathed out, visualizing pain as a dark liquid leaving my body. This process provided a focus that allowed me to ride the pain wave down and out my leg. Gradually the intensity began to lessen as the concentrated breathing, mantra and visualization worked to induce a shift from my fear-based sympathetic nervous system to the calming



effects of my parasympathetic nervous system. After several minutes I was OK. “*Oh my God, this is bliss!*”

During these moments of relief my heart wept for others in situations where their pain would never lessen—a friend with terminal cancer bedridden for almost a year, another friend with a crushed spine. “*Send them love; send them love*” said my inner guidance. “*Yes, I can do that. I am love. My love is for giving.*” I visualized a stream of love pouring out from my heart moving through time and space to whoever needed it.

Andrea and our daughters, Kimberly and Nicole, were angels of mercy, as were loving friends who came to visit, bringing food for our family caught up in helping care for my needs.

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/wellspring.html

After several bed-ridden weeks on my back, wrestling with demons of depression, fear, anxiety attacks and despair, I hungered to be outside again. Fortunately a sunny in-the-middle-of-winter week arrived just when I needed it. Andrea was out doing chores, sunshine lazed into our bedroom, I wanted out. Gingerly I lowered myself out of bed and crawled on all fours' out the doorway onto our front deck.

I spread out some pillows under my knees, under the base of my spine and under my head for support. Moving carefully I lowered myself to the deck. I looked up into blue sky, soft fluffy clouds, and warmth of the sun. Seeing as if for the first time, everything was stunningly lovely. Plants, bushes and tree branches waved gracefully in a gentle breeze. Two crows rested on an overhead power line, their raucous chattering music to my ears. Blue jays alighted on a nearby oak branch. A red-crested hummingbird buzzed in to join the show. Everything glowed. Compared to where I had been, this was deliverance.

Gratitude poured forth. *"Thank you powers of nature. Thank you, thank you."* I reveled in it all until, exhausted by sleep deprivation, my eyelids closed. I drifted off into a ruminating hypnagogic state.

"What is this pain trying to tell me? What is it trying to help me see?" I wondered. *"I damn sure never want to go through this kind of suffering again so any information this injury might be trying to show me, I want to get!"*

A disturbing dream from a night ago floated into awareness. A muscular teenage hood saunters menacingly up a sidewalk, a sharp knife in his hand. He stops at a parked car. He opens the back door. An already wounded youth lies in pain on the seat. The hood leans in. He reaches forward with the knife. In

one terrible swoop he slices off the boy's testicles. I recoiled in horror recollecting this awful sight. The emasculated youth lay in shock and agony. But then to my surprise, a new being, filled with life, arose from the devastated body.

Reviewing the dream I got that I was the wounded boy—my father "cut away" two months before my fourth birthday. To my chagrin, I also saw that I was the violent hood as well. Past memories flooded my consciousness. I grew up in a tough neighborhood.



I was always the youngest kid in my class. The first week of junior high school one of the older kids pulls a switchblade on the teacher. Fights were a regular occurrence—in the halls, on the gym field, by an open field after school. It was clear to me that I was in a nightmare situation that required that I get tough and strong myself or I was doomed.

I asked my parents for some barbells for my 13th birthday. Fueled by fear, I trained six days a week as hard as I could—"Gotta get big, strong and tough so I won't be picked on. Looking back I see that the concentration, persistence and one-pointed focus that weight-training demanded was the beginning

of learning how to marshal the power of my mind. Through barbells I was learning how to meditate!

By fifteen, my efforts paid off. I was bigger and stronger which helped me excel in sports. At the same time I grew increasingly turned off with school. I joined a gang of delinquents and gained a reputation as “crazy” due to fights in which I beat several guys up so badly they required hospitalization. During these fights my reptilian brain high-jacked my higher functioning limbic brain and neo-cortex. All I knew was that I had to destroy the threat to my life.

From these experiences I got a reputation. Nobody bothered me. The strategy of getting stronger and tougher worked. I was seemingly safe.

This macho behavior lasted throughout my middle teen years. I barely graduated from high school yet I knew I had to change my behavior or I’d end up dead or in jail. I worked construction that summer to earn money for a car, then left in August for junior college in California. Here I was an unknown. I could start over. I could let go of the macho thing and try something new... being a student. I applied myself in school. I made the Dean’s list.

Fast-forward fifty years to lying outdoors on the deck reviewing my disturbing emasculation dream. The content of the dream dramatically revealed that despite years of various therapies and healing modalities, aspects of my adolescent strategy for safety were alive and well in the support foundation of how I operated in life.

Entering the dream through inducing a meditation state, I examined my pain. I saw an image of the contracted muscles surrounding the herniated disk, a metal vice squeezing my back and knee while a chisel—my reactive anger—smashed into my bones. The contraction was a protection from the pain of the chisel. I saw a burning hot lava rock lodged in my side. Its heat held repressed anger going back to the wounded boy. When pressure reached a critical level, the stored up heat in the lava rock burst forth

in destructive fury, like the inflammation of burning sciatic pain.

While I no longer acted anger and aggression out physically, it still manifested energetically in how quickly I could be triggered into emotional reactivity that wanted to destroy

whomever it deemed a threat. My back-pain called me into deeper awareness of the mechanics of my reptilian brain-based suffering, while simultaneously crying out for transformation. As the dream revealed, a new way of being sought to emerge from my pattern of aggressive reactivity.

An inner voice spoke—

“Wrestle your demons of fear, doubt and despair with your ‘faith muscle’. Surrender with trust to the intelligence that knows how to heal. Emasculate the violence program. The herniated disk is an opening by which to clean it out. Let the old pattern die. Release into bigger currents, like a woman in labor. Use this time as opportunity to transform your fear-based reactivity program into a new program based on love.”

“Shift your identity focus from fearful ego to the inner light. That’s your real source of strength and security. It’s who you really are. Practice patience. You will heal completely but it won’t be on your ego’s time. It will be on divine time. Don’t try to force healing. Deeper intelligence knows what it is doing.”



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Listening to this counsel gave clear guidance on what to do, yet knowing intellectually is one thing, doing is another. In my weakened state I didn’t feel confident I was up to the task.

Suddenly a loud shriek popped me out of reverie. A red tail hawk circled directly above me, tail feathers shining brilliantly in the sunlight. I felt a energy line radiate down from the Hawk into my body letting me know I wasn’t alone. *“Uhhmm, bigger currents!”*

Gratitude. *“Thank you Hawk Spirit. Thank you for coming. Thank you Great Spirit for helping me remember the illusion of separation.”*

Observing the flight pattern I reflected on the interesting timing of my injury. Two weeks earlier I initiated a group on conscious aging, then I was jettisoned into a preview, through direct, real-life

experience, on the kind of challenges advancing years could bring—loss of independence, loss of functionality, reliance on others, how it feels when you can’t get around like you used to. My infirmity, helplessness and dependence were an experiential learning into what it’s like to live with a weakened body that no longer performs as you desire.

Upon review I saw that what had served me best during this trying time was love, caring and support from family, friends and community, along with my internal work. Without both I would have been lost.

Throughout the ordeal, the power of surrender into a larger presence—one whose intelligence knew how to heal a herniated disk, that brought a circling hawk when I felt overwhelmed, that showed me the transformational power of love during hard times—was a saving grace. My pain and suffering wasn’t about punishment, it was about helping me deepen my spirituality.

Mindfulness, conscious breathing, focused attention, opening to larger presence, letting go. Opening my heart. Practicing metta. In those moments, I felt peaceful and calm.

Six consecutive days of sunny weather allowed me to crawl out on the deck every afternoon. To my total delight, the hawk appeared each day. On the fourth day another Redtail joined the circle, alternately soaring higher, then descending, always directly above me. I couldn’t believe it.

Again, gratitude. *“Thank you Great Mystery for sending these soaring hawks. Thank you for helping me in ways I do not fully understand but which I welcome. Thank you Hawk Spirits, thank you for your lives. Please carry my love to others who need it for their healing. Thank you so much.”*

The two hawks circled above me again on the fifth, sixth, and seventh day. I marveled at my good fortune. My peace was shattered by a rush that shot five feet over my head, a peregrine falcon! *“Unbelievable!”* An immediate knowing suffused my being—*surrender and trust in the bigger currents was right on target.*

Winter returned the next day, and my sojourn with the hawks was over. Shortly thereafter the doctor said I could start hydrotherapy which took place in a large heated pool with participants ranging in age from late sixties to over one hundred. It was a community of elders who'd been doing therapy together for some time, people making the best of hard situations. There was a wonderful camaraderie amongst them, with a great deal of joking, laughter and support. Most often, I was the youngest one there, the new kid on the block.

I loved how they showed up each day, some in wheelchairs, with walkers, some paralyzed, but always exploring what was possible with good cheer and determination. What inspirational models they were of consciously working the challenges of aging. Hydrotherapy worked wonders. Slowly but surely the pain lessened, my back grew stronger. Two months after starting hydrotherapy I returned to work.

Seven months later I hoisted a 45 pound backpack to my shoulders to lead my annual vision quest retreat in the High Sierra. I had some ache when I took my pack off but with a few days rest and some

Advil, along with sending love to my back, I was fine. Hallelujah! The intelligence within that knows how to heal had done its work.

While on quest I reflected on how longevity's greatest gift might be the very challenges it brings, such as the ones I faced on my healing journey, which provide opportunity to nurture one's practice and spiritual growth. I noticed how I held deeper appreciation for the healing wisdom of my body and its need for tenderness, for love. I also realized on a deeper level that we are more than our bodies, more than our thoughts, more than our ego-based identity. We are beings of light, here to love.

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One year later I tweaked my back carrying a few boxes of holiday decorations up from the basement. Same place as before but fortunately just an ache, no searing pain. The ache spoke—*“Take it easy for a few days*

Tom. You'll be fine”. I didn't listen. I went to the gym, did some stretching, worked out with weights, went swimming. My back seized up. For three weeks I couldn't sit upright again. I could only stand or lie flat. Once again I had to wrestle the demons of fear and despair.

I used the seeing-light mantra and visualization from the first go-round. It worked again. Only now I had to accept that I had a “vulnerability.” The ache had warned me to go easy but I hadn't listened. Instead I pushed forward with reactive aggressive, force, the old pattern I thought I had transformed. *“No more”*

I vowed. *"I got it. I don't want to return here ever again so from now on I listen to any 'take-it-easy-message' I get. Stop, rest, send love, relax, get a massage. I get it. No pushing. Let go. Surrender. Trust the intelligence that knows how to heal."*

Upon reflection I see that my healing journey served to strengthen my mindfulness practice. I diligently worked more consciously to activate my parasympathetic nervous system, thereby calming my sympathetic nervous system fight/flight response. I spent a great deal of time extending metta to others. Years of meditation practice helped immeasurably in using my mind to focus and maintain concentration in the midst of suffering.

The old adage is true—*"When the going gets tough, you get what you practice."*

My challenge today is to welcome any ache or pain that shows up as an ally, not an enemy; to recognize its functions as a signal-alert growing me towards greater mindfulness of physicality—sitting, standing, bending, walking, i.e. more consciousness about embodiment.

Transforming the cognitive frame of aches and pain from enemy to ally might prove helpful to you as well. Give it a try. What do you have to lose?

Try slowing down from doing. Come back to being, to presence in the moment. Wake up to the gifts of now, mindfulness with the simple things—being able to sit up while you have a meal, to walk, to see, to hear, to feel, to care, to love. Come back to gratitude, enjoying the gifts of the ordinary.

What about embracing the gift of longevity as opportunity to nurture relationship to whatever you believe is sacred presence in your life? Towards deepening your mindfulness practice? It's a vital step towards a new vision of aging—conscious aging—that's worth exploring. You never know what doorways it might open for enriching the quality of your life.

Hey—Look up. Maybe there's a hawk circling above you!

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Dr. Tom Pinkson is a bridge builder uniting hearts, minds and cultures. He is a husband, father and grandfather who loves to sing, play guitar, and shine light into dark places. His current work focuses on The Developmental Tasks of Conscious Aging and Training Workshops to help people learn the attitudes and behaviors that build emotional, physical and spiritual resilience for meeting the challenges of change. You can reach Tom by phone at 415-451-0192, through email at thomas@microweb.com, or via his web sites at www.anewvisionofaging.com and www.nierica.com

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Success, Stress & Creativity

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There is an optimum level of alertness necessary to accomplish any goal. Obviously, paying attention and being focused comes with the territory of being successful. However, when alertness becomes tinged with anxiety, performance tends to fall off. This is often called stress. Research reveals a bell curve of maximum effectiveness—too little alertness and too much alertness generally leads to failure. Obviously, you need to be alert to pay attention, yet if you become hyper-alert (stressed or fear driven), your body-mind is too anxious to notice and deal with the subtleties of a situation. This leads to being distracted or hyper-vigilant—thus being unable to see the forest through the trees.

Let's take the example of sports where success or failure shows up more instantly and dramatically than in most life scenarios. If a baseball player is not alert, is it likely that he will hit a 90-mile per hour fastball? The question answers itself. On the other hand, if he is too stressed is it likely he will hit this same fastball? Probably not. Athletes and other performers are aware that they must pay attention, yet not overly pressure themselves. Paradoxically, their success rests on being both alert and relaxed at the same time.

It's similar with the creative process. A writer, a physicist, a software developer or an executive could work long hours in an attempt to handle a challenge, yet still not reach a successful conclusion. He or she could get rather frustrated and continue to push toward resolution without appreciable results. However, after doing the necessary left brain work, research shows that it's good to back off the project.

Engage in a right brain activity like meditating, visualizing, relaxing to music, or even sleeping. Many inventors have solved massive challenges in their sleep—literally from dreams. The brain will work on the problem in more holistic ways and will often come up with a successful resolution.

There are physiological reasons why we must uncover our appropriate level of alertness to be creative and successful. Let's take the relationship of two primary parts of the brain—the cerebral cortex and the limbic system. The cerebral cortex is the most recent brain development—the thinking center of the brain. It has also been referred to as the learning brain, where creativity and problem solving occur. Optimally, we are able to consciously choose to have our cerebral cortex engaged as we engage with the challenges we seek to solve. However, often another part of our brain becomes activated when we become overly stressed in trying to resolve a difficulty.

The limbic system, also referred to as the leopard brain, switches on when situations are perceived as stressful. The limbic system is often associated with emotion where instinct and training rule. A kind of toggle switch determines whether the learning or leopard brain dominate at any given time. This switch is called the reticular activating system (RAS). It is located in the upper brain stem (limbic system) and continues into lower region of cerebral cortex.

The RAS is responsible for managing our level of alertness. Is the RAS perfectly logical regarding whether a given situation (stimuli) calls for a

fight-flight reaction or relaxation? Absolutely not! Actually, as human beings, we are constantly evaluating every situation and assessing whether or not we feel safe. This assessment is largely based on past experience, which has been routinely labeled as safe or threatening by the amygdala—a central part of the limbic system. The bottom line is that we are always assessing or evaluating every situation to first determine whether or not we are safe. Essentially, our brains are hardwired to answer the question: what does this mean?

Think of the evolutionary and survival value that the limbic system performs. Although it would be wonderful to live in a world where there were no dangers, the fact is that we do not. And no human beings have historically lived in such a world. Even if there were no physical threats from other people, there have always been dangers from an uncompromising environment.

If our nervous systems were not set up to handle potential danger, we would never have survived this long as a species.

Imagine crossing a street and suddenly a car turns the corner and heads toward you at breakneck speed. If you did not have an automatic mechanism in your body-mind (triggered by the sympathetic nervous system secreting adrenaline) you would be just another road kill. Instead you leap to the side and narrowly avoid this crazy driver. If you had to think and deliberate whether this was a dangerous situation without having the benefit of the quicker reactions

fueled by adrenaline, you would be asking yourself is this safe just as the bumper slammed into you. So obviously the fight-flight mechanism is critical to our survival.

Therefore, the problem is not the existence a fight-flight mechanism, because there are real dangers that need to be reckoned with. The real challenge lies in determining whether or not there really is a danger in the first place. That's where the relationship between past experience—or more specifically, how we have

interpreted past experience—and present situations becomes so pivotal. For example, many people have endured the pain of being raised by an abusive parent or parents. The emotional imprinting of these negative childhood experiences often creates a template through which these people experience their lives. They perceive danger and confrontation where there may

be little or none—if an objective measurement could be made. A manager raising his voice in passion could be perceived as being hostile (the receiver's toggle switch triggers a limbic fight-flight response), while many other people may perceive the manager as simply wanting to make a point.

While most people have not grown up in an abusive environment, it is the rare person who does not become defensive occasionally. I believe that the number one problem in any personal or business environment (our unconscious mind does not distinguish between the two) is defensiveness.



At times we react with a fight-flight (red zone) mentality instead of a more reasonable, cortical response (green zone). These reactions make basic communication, decision making, creative endeavors and strategic planning less liable to be successful. It's not enough to try to be reasonable and think positively. We need a more sophisticated strategy to deal with unconscious challenges.

The key is to gain control of our ability to coach ourselves through the conditioned automatic, defensive reactions of our limbic mind. Since the way we learn negative, reactive patterns is through our senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste), the way we must change these patterns is also through our senses. That's where the power of inner coaching emerges. By re-conditioning ourselves through the practice of inner coaching, we put a pause in between stimulus or stressor (environmental challenge) and our reaction to this stimulus. Auditory anchors may be "I can handle this situation" or "I can remain calm or gain hold of myself, even though I have reacted defensively at first." Visual anchors may be "to see myself peacefully resting on the beach" or visualizing yourself "seeing a beautiful sunset." Kinesthetic (touch) anchors may be to "touch my heart when I feel myself closing down" or "holding both hands together" to symbolize my unity with myself.

Remember you are creating new grooves in your mind that can be more powerful than the original one's that led you to feeling dis-empowered. Ultimately, if you do not take charge of your reactions—both the ones that get triggered when we you not reaching your desired personal goal or the ones that get triggered in interpersonal relationships—then you are at effect of your earliest

programming. Don't let history dictate your destiny. You must practice your anchors over and over and over again to change the groove in your habitual reactions—to shift your toggle switch from the reactive mode of reflexive, brainstem-driven activity to the creative pursuits of a more integrated neural mode, in which cortical logic and limbic emotion work hand in hand. If you do not take charge, you can be sure that your unconscious habits will run the show. Who would you rather have in charge?

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Daniel believes in the power of people creating truthful relationships whereby purpose and meaning lead to greater happiness, success and fulfillment.

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The Neuroscience of Leadership: The Brain and Change

© Judith Bell, M.S., M.F.T.

Have you ever wondered why so many people resist change, whether it's adopting a new computer system at the office or making good on their New Year's resolutions?

Major change forces people outside their comfort zone, upsetting their emotional equilibrium and triggering unconscious fear and anxiety.

There's a good reason for this. When we're faced with something new or different—even if we're consciously looking forward to the change—the “old” primitive part of our brain that is focused on survival goes into high alert. By trying to protect us from unpredictability and chaos, both emotionally and physically, our brain pressures us to make decisions that are “safe”—even if they're not necessarily logical, well thought out, or innovative.

Let's take a look at the mind of a person who is in a state of fear compared to a person who is relaxed and thriving.

In a fearful state, the survival brain is hyper-vigilant, focused on the easiest escape route, the strategy to gain an upper hand, or the means to ameliorate the ferocity of a perceived enemy—be it a person or a situation. It's

guided by the amygdala, which triggers the defensive behaviors of fight or flight, freeze or appease.

On the other hand, in a relaxed state, the cerebral cortex—the logical, analytical “new” part of the brain—is in charge. Feeling safe, the cerebral cortex is able to take its time, savor a moment, consider the pros and cons of a variety of options, create

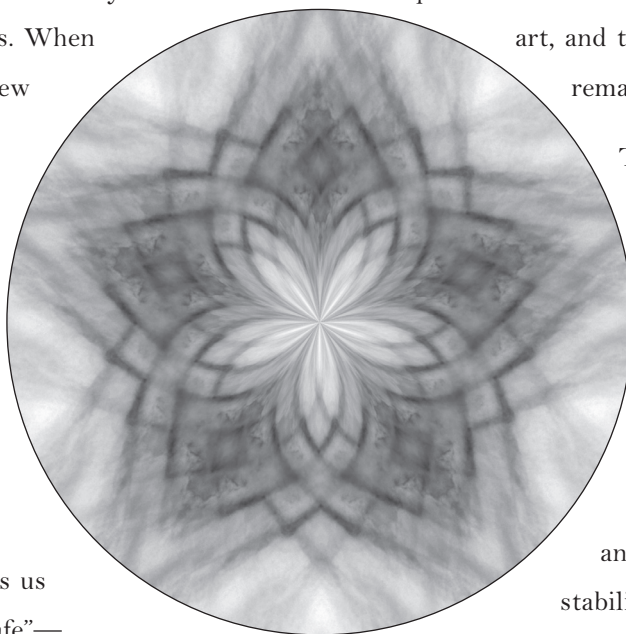
art, and think outside the box while remaining sure and calm.

The problem is that when the old brain perceives a threat, it hijacks the cerebral cortex and sends it on vacation. So, even though we may feel as if we are making logical decisions, we're unconsciously saying and doing things designed to stabilize the situation and return us

to a feeling of safety. As long as the new brain is on vacation—and the old amygdala in charge—it's much less likely than an individual or organization will be able to navigate change successfully.

Hard Wired for Safety

Time also plays an important role in how we respond to change. When we take in information (via the thalamus), the data is relayed to our old and new brains simultaneously to make meaning of it and to determine a course of action. Though the message



is sent at the same moment, the amygdala and limbic system can react much more quickly than the prefrontal cortex—so our survival center is often reacting to the new information (and processing it based on the perceived level of threat) before it even reaches the point of logical reason. If there's the slightest threat to our physical or emotional safety, the old brain will choose the safest survival strategy.

That might ensure our security and longevity—better that we eat than are eaten—but our brain's natural negativity bias can cause us to misread others' intentions, doubt ourselves when there is no “real” reason to do so, and choose predictability (and safety) at the sake of change, whether we're at work, on vacation, or in the classroom.

While we might want the amygdala in charge as we're preparing to go skydiving—or do any other potentially threatening activity—it's essential to have the prefrontal regions of the cerebral cortex calling the shots during organizational change in a work environment. With the new brain in the lead, people are more capable of and ready to embrace change; they're both relaxed and stimulated. It's a state of mind comparable to someone taking a walk in an unknown but safe environment, curious about the surroundings, eager to find the treasures that lay ahead, and devoid of any background chatter spurred by anxiety.

Creating Neural Networks

In this “learning state,” the brain is literally growing, developing new neural connections as we consider an idea, examine it, evaluate it, reflect on any experiences we may have had that are similar, and begin to practice it. Our brain cells, called neurons, grow more dendrites (which look similar to the roots

of a plant) which receive more signals from other neurons, creating a vast neural network of behaviors, attitudes, feelings and thoughts. The new networks don't immediately replace the old; instead, they're laid over the top of old networks like a new city layered on top of an old one.

Like an Olympic athlete practicing a new skill, it takes time and work for new patterns in the brain to become unconscious habits. Attention, intention, and commitment are also necessary to learn new processes, procedures, and systems—not only by individual contributors but by leaders as well.

Leaders who understand what is occurring in the brain while learning is taking place can create an environment in which people are free to make mistakes and learn from them. It's not easy for some leaders to encourage people to “relax” while striving for high performance. But the more leaders are able to create a learning environment and model it through their own attitudes and behaviors, the more easily and quickly change will occur.

If you're a leader managing change, ask yourself the following questions:

What are the elements of an environment that encourage and support successful learning?

How do we create such an environment?

How do we, as leaders, use our understanding of the brain to manage our own conscious and unconscious fears as well as support others to function from a thriving state?

Regardless of whether you are interested in developing your leadership skills for your own life,

your family, your friends, or your work place, these are the questions that you must address to navigate change successfully.

Perhaps in reflecting on the questions above, you thought about the role of awareness, the need to influence and get buy in from key members of your management (or family), the importance of shifting and expanding perspective, and the pivotal roles that breathe and somatic awareness play in staying relaxed while striving for high performance. Each

of these activities requires its own skill set. Each requires time and practice to be successful. Each requires full engagement. Each, in its own right, is a microcosm of the change process.

Because change is constant, the more you develop these skill sets and support those around you to do the same, the more resilient you and they will become. With practice, navigating change can shift from a feared upheaval to a welcome playing field of challenges, ingenuity, and pleasure.



Judith Bell, M.S., M.F.T. is recognized internationally as an expert in the [FIRO](#) theory and as a master facilitator, teacher, consultant and coach. She has created and facilitated personal growth, team development and organizational change seminars since 1975.

Judith trained at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, California State University, Sonoma, and California State University, Hayward as well as the Institute for Creative and Artistic Development. She chaired a Master's Program in Creative Arts Therapy at Antioch University, San Francisco. For ten years, she developed and taught a wide variety of coursework, served as guest lecturer at universities throughout the United States, and authored a chapter on family and couple's therapy in *Theoretical Approaches in Dance-Movement Therapy, Volume II*.

Outside the academic setting, Judith delivers courses internationally. Her current work on [HYPERLINK "http://www.aleadershipinstitute.com/pdf/LeadershipAL1.pdf"](http://www.aleadershipinstitute.com/pdf/LeadershipAL1.pdf) authenticity is based on her own practice, her extensive experience in organizations and as a personal growth coach, therapist and educator. Judith began meditating in 1970. Shifting perception is a key concept in her work as is the development of meta-skills.

She and her husband, Daniel Ellenberg, Ph.D., co-authored http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_ss?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=lovers+for+life *Lovers for Life: Creating Lasting Passion, Trust and True Partnership* in 1995. They reside in Marin, CA and are the parents of one son who is studying currently in Australia. Judith can be reached via her website www.aleadershipinstitute.com or by email at judith@aleadershipinstitute.com.

Words of Wisdom

Love and Change

Time is on my side, yes it is

-The Rolling Stones



The Five Reflections:

- *Is it given to you to avoid illness?*
- *Is it given to you to avoid aging?*
- *Is it given to you to avoid death?*
- *Is it given to you to avoid being separated one day, one way or another, from everything you love?*
- *Is it given to you to avoid inheriting the results of your actions?*



Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

-Reinhold Niebuhr



*If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.*

-The Dalai Lama



Sometimes when I consider what tremendous consequences come from little things, I am tempted to think there are no little things.

-Bruce Barton

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits and

Are melted into air, into thin air:

And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,

Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,

Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

-William Shakespeare

From *The Tempest*,

Act 4 Scene 1



Moon in a barrel:

you never know just when

the bottom will fall out.

-Mabutsu

San Rafael Meditation Group

Open to beginners and experienced practitioners, we meet on Wednesday evenings in downtown San Rafael. "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!

From Our Contributors

Going to See a Therapist

*When you think problems are big
And you feel weak and small
You go see the Spell Breaker
And he gets rid of them all*

*Like stretching in yoga
He does not force me to grow
Instead, he is patient and kind
Providing an environment for the process to flow*

*Flexibility, stability, strength and power
Are values I learn in less than an hour
I breathe through the emotions and feel the pain
Something that before I thought was a
waste of time and vain*

*I am thankful to the Spell Breaker
Who so many times helped me see
Who taught me how to love myself,
And let myself be*

*I don't know what lies ahead
But I know I have the tools
To be successful and happy
In any direction I choose*

-Anonymous



Launching

*For
Me*

*It was that feeling
Of freedom*

*Launching
Off the porch*

*When the chores
Were done*

-© Tom Bowlin 2008



Grateful Wonder

Transience and Renewal

It all really does keep changing, doesn't it?

- **An incredible helmet-cam video of a skier caught in an avalanche, facing certain death... and then rescued:**

<http://vimeo.com/6581009>

- **An active volcano:**

<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap090713.html>

- **Auroras flapping in the night sky:**

<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap090922.html>

- **Free flight on earth:**

<http://vimeo.com/1537600>

- **Free flight in space:**

<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html>

Offerings

1. **Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom** is now in production, with a publication date of November 1, 2009. It can be pre-ordered from [Amazon](#) or from [New Harbinger](#). By Rick Hanson, PhD (with Rick Mendius, MD; preface by Jack Kornfield, PhD and Foreword by Dan Siegel, MD), this book draws on the historically unprecedented integration of modern neuroscience and ancient contemplative wisdom to show you how to use your mind to change your brain to change your life.
2. The “two Ricks”—Mendius and Hanson—have also produced a 3 CD set with **Sounds True called Meditations to Change Your Brain**. This program combines fascinating insights with seven powerful guided practices that you can use routinely to change your own brain for the better. For more info, go to Amazon
3. At the ***Science and Nonduality Conference*** in Marin County, California, during October 23-25, Rick Hanson will speak on **Self Is a Unicorn: The Real Representations of an Unreal Being in the Brain**. See www.scienceandnonduality.com for more information.
4. Through R. Cassidy Seminars, Rick Hanson will be presenting **Taking in the Good** as a continuing education workshop to mental health professionals. Through using the neural machinery of memory in clever ways, you can defeat the negativity bias of the brain, which particularly remembers and then reacts to stressful or painful experiences—even though most of life is positive or neutral. The results include greater self-confidence, better mood, and a gradual healing of upsetting, even traumatic, experiences. The locations and dates are:

Friday, October 2: San Francisco, CA

Friday, October 9: Sacramento, CA

Friday, November 13: Los Angeles, CA

Saturday, November 14: Pasadena, CA

See www.academeca.com/Amedco/SeminarInfo.aspx?seminarId=417 for more information.



...more offerings

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

- **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. www.spiritrock.org/calendar/display.asp?id=RR4D09
- **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. www.spiritrock.org/calendar/display.asp?id=JB3D09

6. At InsightLA, Rick Hanson will be teaching **The Neurology of Awakening** on Sunday, November 15. This foundational workshop summarizes the practical neuroscience of mindfulness, and deep meditative absorption (including up to the jhanas, which are non-ordinary states of awareness) leading to transformative insight. For more information, go to www.insightla.org/schedule_details.asp?adref=sch&event_ID=458.

7. At Khandro Ling Buddhist Centre in Macclesfield, Cheshire, England on Wednesday, November 18, Rick will be giving a public lecture on **Buddha’s Brain: Neuroscience, Meditation, and Well-Being**. For more information, go to www.khandroling.org.

8. At the University of East London, the conference on Mindfulness and Well-Being: **From Spirituality to Cognitive Neuroscience** will be held on November 20 and 21. Rick will be giving a keynote address plus two workshops. Contact Dr. Patrizia Collard at drcollard@stressminus.co.uk for more information.

9. At the London Insight Meditation Center, Rick Hanson will be presenting **The Neurology of Awakening** on Sunday November 22. See www.londoninsightmeditation.org.uk/programme/schedule for more information (click on Daylong Retreats).

10. Rick Hanson 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>.
11. **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: <http://shop.soundstrue.com/shop.soundstrue.com/SelectProd.do;jsessionid=91E06512A8A5D4D222A639DA4C1ED2F9?prodId=1715&manufacturer=Sound%20True&category=Exploring%20the%20Psyche&name=Meditations%20for%20Happiness>

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*

