

The Wise Brain Bulletin

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

Reflections on Nondual Awareness

© John J. Prendergast, Ph.D.

Introduction

Rick Hanson has invited me to share some thoughts on the theme of nonduality in this month's Bulletin. I am the senior editor of two anthologies on the subject of nondual wisdom and psychotherapy – *The Sacred Mirror* (with Peter Fenner and Sheila Krystal) and *Listening from the Heart of Silence* (with Ken Bradford) – and have been a student of nondual teachings since reading the works of Ramana Maharshi and

Nisargadatta Maharaj about thirty years ago and then studying with the European sage Jean Klein from 1983 until his death in 1998 and with Adyashanti since 2001.

This fall Rick and I will each be offering different presentations at the first annual conference on Science and Nonduality on October 23-25th at the Marin Civic Center. The organizing theme for the conference is “Deconstructing the I”. Within this larger conference

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Greetings

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

The Bulletin is offered freely, and you are welcome to share it with others. Past issues are posted at www.wisebrain.org/bulletin.html.

Rick Hanson, PhD and Richard Mendius, MD edit the Bulletin, and it's designed and laid out by Laurel Hanson.

To subscribe, please contact Rick at drh@comcast.net.

will be a smaller specialized subconference on Nondual Wisdom and Psychotherapy that has been meeting independently since 1998.

Details can be found at www.scienceandnonduality.com/ndwp.shtml.

What is Nondual Awareness?

I have noticed that the term “nonduality” is still fairly unfamiliar to Buddhists even though it refers to the central Mahayana Buddhist teaching that form and emptiness are not different.

This lack of familiarity is understandable given that the term “nonduality” derives from the Sanskrit *advaita* which means “not-two”. *Advaita Vedanta* largely draws from the wisdom of the Upanishads. It was consolidated by the Indian sage Shankara (788-820 CE) and continues as a vital current within contemporary Hinduism. Interestingly enough, the development of *Advaita* in the early centuries of the first millennium CE was strongly influenced by the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism.

Buddhist and Hindu scholars have politely quarreled for millennia about how to think about our true nature (*anatta* v. *atma*/Brahman, no self v. Self), yet when the sages of both traditions speak openly about their realization, their often poetic accounts are remarkably similar. They describe an awareness that is without subject or object, where the discrete “I” has disappeared along with an apparently objective world of “you” and “it”. Things are not as

they conventionally appear. Not by a longshot. The penetrating clarity and power of this revelatory being-understanding is such that these sages compare ordinary dualistic ways of seeing life to a trance or dream state.

The essence of nondual perception is that no-thing looks out and sees that it is everything. Rather than being a discrete, substantial entity, the apparent perceiver realizes that she or he is no thing – not an object that can be defined or confined. One knows oneself as infinite open awareness – empty of any form, yet full of potential. As this open, empty, formless awareness contemplates form it “sees” that form is an expression of itself: emptiness actually is form, form is emptiness. The appearance of duality collapses and life is experienced as it is – undivided, seamless, whole. Integral philosopher Ken Wilber describes it nicely:

You don't look at the sky, you are the sky... (A) awareness is no longer split into a seeing subject in here and a seen object out there. There is just pure seeing. Consciousness and its display are not-two... The pure Emptiness of the Witness turns out to be one with every Form that is witnessed, and that is one of the basic meanings of “nonduality.”

This is the point where the Zen master raps his or her staff on the zendo floor with the words, “This is it!”

Resistance

Even as there is a profound attraction to release into this Great Mystery, there is enormous resistance to it. We humans are very ambivalent creatures! From the point of view of a “me” (whose main job is to resist), this shift of perspective is not good news. It is seen

as an end that is distinct from and more terrifying than physical death, especially if one believes in an afterlife. To the controlling ego it looks like personal annihilation (the Latin root “nihil” means “nothing”) – a freefall into a dark abyss. At the very least this opening signifies the dethronement of personal identity and the surrender to a deeper nonconceptual, undogmatic truth.

Even after experiencing a deep letting go, the conditioned self commonly reconstitutes itself in subtler ways, often as a spiritual seeker that keeps the self improvement project going by trying to attain or maintain certain spiritual experiences or states of consciousness. The mundane ego reincarnates into a “spiritual” ego and one can get stuck in some very interesting places, like being proud of being “no one” or imagining oneself as an “awake” someone. The process can get very tricky and a good guide is invaluable.

This reminds me of a joke from the Hasidic tradition

that goes something like this: Once a janitor, who was cleaning the temple after services, overheard two distinguished rabbis having a lively discussion about the immensity of God and their own insignificance. The first rabbi proclaimed, “God is a huge ocean and I am but a small fish.” The second rabbi responded, “God is greater and I am even less than that. He is like the vast, dark universe and I am just a tiny, flickering light.” Unable to contain himself, the janitor burst out of the shadows and added, “And I am only a dust mote floating in God’s endless depths!” Shocked, the first rabbi said to the second, “Look who thinks he’s nobody!”

Psychotherapy: Beyond Self Repair and Improvement

It seems that more people are beginning to have intuitions of the insubstantiality of their conditioned self and of an underlying unity with the whole of life. Some of these people happen to be psychotherapists



and clients (it sometimes seems as if the majority of the population where I work - Marin County, California - is either one or the other.) So the discussion and direct experience of what we are calling nondual awareness, once largely confined to a small group of academics and renunciates, is finding its way into the life of ordinary people living ordinary, worldly lives. The implications for the field of psychology are important.

Most psychotherapy aims at helping people have a better story and image of themselves and to be more in touch with their emotions and bodies. There is real value in becoming a better, more integrated, authentic person. It enhances our relative happiness and makes the world an easier place to live for everyone.

Yet what if our deepest happiness comes through the dis-illusionment of the separate sense of self? What if the nagging sense of lack, emptiness, and disconnection that so many of us experience, albeit subtly, is an inevitable existential consequence of misidentifying as a discrete somebody? What if a causeless joy and profound inner freedom are our natural birthright, available to anyone willing and able to undergo the pangs of a “second birth?”

There is an emerging possibility in the dialogue we call psychotherapy to take a step beyond the repair and improvement of the self, as important as this is. Instead of being a step forward, however, it is

a step back, a deepening and settling in and down. This movement of attention back to its source in and as unconditioned awareness is accompanied by a flowering of presence, quiet joy, profound peace and deep connection.

While in principle there are no preconditions for the recognition of our deepest nature and it is not uncommon to have a brief glimpse of it, in practice it is very difficult to sustain this awareness when one's inner sense of self lacks some degree of stability and coherence. Letting go into the “groundless ground” of Being or no-self can be profoundly destabilizing and terrifying, somewhat like being in a major earthquake. People who have experienced early trauma and/or absent and disorganized emotional attachments (bonds) will often need to do careful reparative work to establish a functional resilience before their system can tolerate such a major letting go.

Good psychotherapy and disciplines of attention training such as those that Rick Hanson teaches can play a vital role in supporting the experience of inner calm and resilience. The potential pitfall of trying to fix or improve the self, however, is that it becomes an endless project in itself. After all, what is there that couldn't use some improvement within each of us? This could keep us occupied for quite some time. As my teacher Jean Klein would sometimes say, “The car is still stuck in the garage.” It is very easy for attention to be seduced and distracted from facing the underlying falseness of the constructed self, even a relatively authentic and well-adjusted one!

Of course, many people are not ready or even interested in exploring beyond the apparently safe, though sometimes rather miserable, confines of their familiar (and familial) self. This is not a problem. Yet it is important that

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.

someone who wants to look really deeply into who they are beyond all stories and images be able to work with a therapist or teacher who knows the territory well enough first-hand. A psychotherapist who is oriented in this way brings the additional capacity to work skillfully with difficult emotional and somatic states.

Scientific Research: A Cautionary Note

If what we are calling nondual awareness is the natural fruition of human consciousness, it would be very interesting to discover if there are certain conditions that optimally support it, along with certain neurophysiological markers that accompany it. For example, the newly formed (2009) Baumann Institute (<http://baumanninstitute.org/>) is funding scientific research and dialogue into these questions, looking beyond popular progressive approaches to ones that directly point to nondual awareness and to a natural, causeless well-being.

It is important that any research of this sort acknowledges the dangers of material reductionism and the possible conflation of correlation with causation. That the brain may change states when nondual awareness is more foreground, does not necessarily mean that the brain is causing awareness. It could as well be a receiving instrument for it. It is tempting to reduce consciousness to an epiphenomenon of the brain, or “the heart” to the anterior cingulate cortex. It is doubtful to me at least that prajna or heart-wisdom originates in the brain. The consistent report of the great sages is that our true nature cannot be objectified, that “Buddha Nature” is autonomous. We would be wise in our research and thinking to be mindful of this, staying

open, curious, and proceeding with some humility.

A Final Word

Nondual awareness is always here right now, whether we recognize it or not. The jewel of awareness is already hanging around our neck. It is not something that can be created or even attained. While effort is useful at one stage, in the end it becomes futile. All techniques will inevitably exhaust themselves. After all, how can we attain what we already are? As Rumi wrote,

*Knocking on a door, it opens
I have been knocking from the inside!*

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Laughter

© Linda Graham, MFT

The August 2009 issue of *Ode* magazine is devoted to Laughter: how laughter evolved and how it makes us human; the positive impacts of laughter on health and productivity; how laughter creates trust, social bonds, and intimacy; how laughter helps people cope with stress, loss, trauma, oppression.

I was so touched and thrilled by the information on this subject that I wanted to summarize and share it with you. Laughter is a great example of the mind-body connection: notably, how powerfully the physicality of laughter affects our hearts and minds.

Research studies are pouring in from around the world (see the 8/09 issue of *Ode* for details). Some highlights:

Laughter Promotes Health

Laughter triggers catecholamines in the brain that heighten alertness. Laughter releases endorphins, the body's natural pain killer. Laughter cleanses the body of the stress hormone cortisol, lowering blood pressure, reducing stress and increasing pain tolerance. Laughter's alternating contraction-relaxation of the diaphragm releases tension in the body, bringing our autonomic nervous system into balance. (The physiological effects of a good session of laughter can last up to 45 minutes.)

Laughter increases the flow of blood and oxygen through our coronary arteries, reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Laughter staves off the anxiety and depression that can severely impact heart functioning. Laughter mitigates the damaging effects of inflammation, reducing the pain of arthritis. Laughter strengthens the immune system, helping the body fight off viruses and cancer. Laughter helps stabilize blood sugar levels in diabetics. Laughter improves respiratory functioning in patients with chronic lung disease. Laughter even burns calories.

"In the human condition, you cannot experience distress and emotional uplift at the same time," says Steven Sultanoff, professor of psychology at Pepperdine University and authority on therapeutic uses of humor. "When you're experiencing mirth, you're not experiencing depression, anxiety or anger. If you increase your humor quotient, it will change your life."

Laughter Promotes Work Productivity

Laughter's ability to counteract the body's physiological responses to stress provides great benefit in the work place, where stress is the number one cause of worker's compensation claims. Many different research studies show: workers who laugh regularly, long and hard, focus better, think more creatively, and problem solve better than co-workers who do not. People who laugh tend to be more efficient, more pro-

ductive, and make fewer mistakes than their stressed out co-workers. Because laughter reduces the damaging effects of stress on the immune system, people who laugh a lot are less vulnerable to illness and take fewer sick days from work.

John Morreall, professor of religious studies at the College of William and Mary tells the story in this *Laughter* issue of a police officer who responded to a domestic violence call after having completed a course of humor training. As the officer walked to the front door, she heard the sound of an argument inside. Suddenly, a television crashed through the window, landing in the yard. She knocked on the door. "Who is it?" yelled an angry voice. "TV repair," the officer replied. Her quick wit caught the quarreling husband and wife off guard, touched them with some amusement and irony, and made handling a tense situation easier.

Laughter Eases Loss, Grief, Trauma

Dacher Keltner, professor of psychology at UC Berkeley, tracked a group of recent widows and widowers, looking for the markers of coping resiliently with devastating loss and grief. He found that the survivors who could smile and laugh as they remembered their loved ones experienced less anxiety and depression at six months after their loss, at 12 months, at 24 months. According to Dr. Keltner, the laughter seemed to give people a brief vacation from mourning, "a little trap door that allows you to escape from toxic stress."

"To laugh in a painful or distressing situation isn't to avoid emotional reckoning but to gain the perspective needed to make the experience productive, to see the dilemma as part of the somewhat absurd human drama, and to seek fellowship in the society of the



living.” – Blaine Greteman.

Laughter Promotes Learning

The word “wit” has the same etymological root as the word “knowledge”: Old English witan – to know. The first definition of wit in the modern dictionary is intelligence. At every age, brain development and learning happen through play and fun. Children learn so quickly because they engage with the world through curiosity and play. Children at age 5 giggle and laugh between 20 and 100 times a day. Without enough amusement, fun, play, and laughter, this learning is stifled.

Babies smile, coo, snort, giggle, chuckle, guffaw long before they speak. Laughter, in fact, helps develop the brain structures necessary for speech.

How Laughter Evolved

Laughter is ancient, pre-dating the development of language. Our hominid ancestors began to laugh about 2-4 million years ago, after we learned to walk on two legs but before we evolved speech. Walking on two legs took pressure off the thorax; humans could now walk and breathe in separate physiological rhythms. This enhanced vocal control re-structured our nervous systems, increasing brain volume in the areas that coordinate breathing, vocalization, and cognitive comprehension, thus laying the foundation for the evolution of speech.

Dacher Keltner, in his book *Born to*

Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life, calls laughter as “significant a shift in our social organization as the evolution of tool making and the evolution of opposable thumbs.”

Laughter is Social Glue

By signaling safety and facilitating group interactions, laughter helped humans evolve sustainable social groups, just as laughter helps create social cohesion today.

The essential ingredient for laughter is other people. Laughter seems to be primarily a social lubricant, not a response to “funny” situations. We are 30 times more likely to laugh in group situations than in soli-



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!

tary ones. We laugh most often when we're nervous or in an awkward situation, when we're talking to people more powerful than we are. Women consistently laugh more than men (signaling submission to the more powerful? Needing to influence of moods of those around them?) Laughter eases tension, deflects bullying, sarcasm, conflict. The absence of laughter predicts divorce far more consistently than the presence of outright animosity, according to psychologist John Gottman.

Laughter is contagious, sometimes uncontrollably so. Mirror neurons fire when we see someone else laughing; our body responds with an impulse to laugh, too. Laughter facilitates group cohesion and solidarity because people are sharing a mental and acoustic space with each other. Our laughter builds a reciprocal resonance; we laugh together with another like a duet or chorus, especially with friends. Laughter signals a shared understanding of the world; it's foundational to like-mindedness, interdependency, and intimacy.

Laughter as a Survival Tactic for People under Siege

Ron Jenkins, professor of theater at Wesleyan University, shared his personal experiences in South Africa, Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia in this issue of Ode, documenting how laughter can be a powerful tool to confront, ridicule, and criticize oppressive

regimes. "Humor is one of the animating forces that keeps the spirit alive when things look bleak. Humor helped provide the unstoppable energy of the movement against apartheid, as it typically does for any struggle for justice."

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You can order the August 2009 Laughter issue of Ode magazine, if it's sold out at your local newsstand/bookstore, at www.odemagazine.com. The website has links to the editors' favorite laughter videos. Ode for Intelligent Optimists is a gem of a monthly magazine – politically-socially-environmentally-culturally-spiritually correct. When you subscribe, they plant a tree.

This article was revised from the August 2009 newsletter Healing and Awakening into Aliveness and Wholeness, archived on www.lindagraham-mft.com.

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Excerpts from The Time Being

Zen Master Dogen

(trans. by Dan Welch and Kazuaki Tanahashi)

1 *An ancient buddha said:*

For the time being stand on top of the highest peak.

*For the time being proceed along the bottom
of the deepest ocean . . .*

For the time being the earth and sky.

*“For the time being” here means time itself
is being, and all being is time.*

3 *The way the self arrays itself is the form
of the entire world. See each thing in this entire world
as a moment of time.*

*Things do not hinder one another,
just as moments do not hinder one another. . . .*

4 *Know that in this way there are myriads of forms and
hundreds of grasses throughout the entire earth, and yet
each grass and each form itself is the entire earth.*

The study of this is the beginning of practice.

*When you are at this place, there is just one grass,
there is just one form; there is understanding of form and
no-understanding of form; there is understanding of
grass and no-understanding of grass. Since there
is nothing but just this moment, the time-being is all
the time there is.*

*Grass-being, form-being are both time.
Each moment is all being, is the entire world.
Reflect now whether any being or any world
is left out of the present moment.*

7 *Do not think that time merely flies away. Do not see
flying away as the only function of time. If time merely
flies away, you would be separated from time. The reason
you do not clearly understand the time-being is that
you think of time only as passing.*

*In essence, all things in the entire world
are linked with one another as moments.
Because all moments are the time-being,
they are your time-being.*

11 *Just actualize all time as all being;
there is nothing extra. . . .*

Vigorously abiding in each moment is the time-being.

Do not mistakenly confuse it as nonbeing.

Do not forcefully assert it as being.

15 . . . *Mountains are time. Oceans are time. If they were
not time, there would be no mountains or oceans. Do not
think that mountains and oceans here and now are not
time. If time is annihilated, mountains and oceans are
annihilated. As time is not annihilated,
mountains and oceans are not annihilated.*

*This being so, the morning star appears, the Tathagata
appears, the eye appears, and raising a flower appears.
Each is time. If it were not time, it could not be thus.*

16 *Zen master Guixing of She Prefecture is the heir of
Shoushan, a dharma descendant of Linji.
One day he taught the assembly:*

*“For the time being mind arrives, but words do not.
For the time being words arrive, but mind does not.*

*For the time being both mind and words arrive.
For the time being neither mind nor words arrive."*

*Both mind and words are the time-being. Both
arriving and not-arriving are the time-being. When the
moment of arriving has not appeared, the moment of
not-arriving is here. . . . Having-already-arrived is words
and not-having-left is mind. Arriving is not "coming,"
not-arriving is not "not yet."*

*17 The time-being is like this. . . .
[Y]ou go out and meet someone.
Someone meets someone.
You meet yourself.
Going out meets going out. . . .*

*18 . . . Arriving is the moment of casting off the body;
not-arriving is the moment of being one with just this,
while being free from just this. In this way
you must endeavor to actualize the time-being.*

*19 The old masters have thus uttered these words,
but is there nothing further to say?*

*. . . [T]o study thoroughly, coming and going, and to
study thoroughly, arriving and not-arriving,
is the time-being of this moment.*

*On the first day of winter, first year of Ninji [1240],
this was written at Kosho Horin Monastery.*

*Enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water.
The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken.
Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected
even in a puddle an inch wide.
The whole moon and the entire sky are reflected
in dewdrops on the grass,
or even in one drop of water.
Enlightenment does not divide you,
just as the moon does not break the water.
You cannot hinder enlightenment,
just as a drop of water
does not hinder the moon in the sky. The depth of the
drop is the height of the moon.
Each reflection, however long or short its duration,
manifests the vastness of the dewdrop, and realizes
the limitlessness of the moonlight in the sky.
Dogen*



Finding Possibility in the Midst of Adversity

Alison Bonds Shapiro
Author of *Healing into Possibility:*
The Transformational Lessons of a Stroke

What do we do when adversity hits? Is there a way to work with adversity that makes a difference and is it something we have influence over? The answer is yes. The way we approach whatever happens to us can have a profound affect on the outcome. Call it the power of positive thinking. Call it finding the good in any situation. Call it making lemonade out of lemons. Call it any cliché you like, but the truth is, our approach makes a difference.

When I was growing up I thought these clichés were ridiculous. I thought they simply meant taking a dismal picture and pretending it looked better than it was. I was naïve. Life is much more complicated than that and neurological research has amply substantiated the power of the way we think to affect our bodies, our minds, and the people around us, and, therefore, the outcome of our situations.

The sequence of emotional reactions most people have to adversity is disbelief, followed by fear, followed by grief and anger. Anger may then be followed by despair and depression. In between anger and despair we make decisions that affect the outcome of what has happened to us. We can decide to stay stuck in those feelings leading to despair and savor being a victim or we can decide to deal with whatever has befallen us and discover what is now possible. Here are four ways we can help ourselves make this choice.

First: Forgive ourselves. Most of the time we hold

ourselves accountable in some way for what happened to us. Even if we don't think we are directly responsible, we might think we shouldn't have been in that particular place at that particular time. It's one thing to acknowledge responsibility, take corrective action and move on. It's another thing altogether to get stuck in self-blame. Self-blame is wasted energy. The sooner we can acknowledge and then forgive ourselves for whatever part we have had in what has happened, whether large or small, the sooner we can use the energy we have available to deal with the problem.

Second: Start from where we are. That seems self evident, but often it's not. We wouldn't consider it adversity if we were happy with whatever we are dealing with. The word adversity comes from the same root as adversary. Many times our immediate response is to fight what has happened and try to push it away and refuse to look at it. If we don't look, we don't have information.

Instead of fighting what happened, we can sit quietly and notice our internal conversation. Are we talking about "poor me?" Are we telling ourselves that whatever happened to us just isn't fair? Are we making up a story about the way things ought to be? If we are, we have an immediate clue that we are either holding onto the past or trying to live in the future. We are not looking at the present and paying attention to things just as they are.

Try being genuinely curious. Practice letting go of believing that things “should” be one way or another. Just look and pay attention. The situation is what it is. The more information we can gather, the more we will have to work with.

Third: Believe in the power of our own creativity to help us work through the problem. Every human being is creative in many ways. Getting through just one day of our daily lives demands creative problem solving abilities moment to moment whether we realize it or not. We respond to everything we encounter from choosing how we dress ourselves to choosing how we open a can with our own unique approach. We all have practice solving problems. If we look at adversity as a problem to solve, we can put our creativity to work on it.

Fourth, and perhaps most important: Look for the possibilities, the good things, in whatever we encounter and keep our minds open to change. The world is bigger and more complex than we can begin to imagine or take in and it is constantly changing. We are human. Our brains and our five senses can only process so much information. No matter how intently we try we won’t immediately see everything that is possible.

Because we can only take in a part of the available information, we make choices about where we focus our attention. We see what we set out to see.

Adversity hits. We don’t like it. We assume nothing good can come from it. When we assume nothing good can occur, we don’t look for the good. Instead



we look for the difficulties and say: “See! See how hard this!” Once we have decided this is hard, hard is what we see. We find what we look for. It’s as simple as that.

Don’t be in a hurry. Practice patience. Look for the possibilities. No matter how difficult the adversity, new possibilities are always unfolding and are always more amazing than our limited imaginations can see.

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Alison Bonds Shapiro works with stroke survivors and their families, offers motivational talks for rehabilitation patients and their care networks in numerous locations including a leading HMO in Northern California, and advises a nonprofit dedicated to stroke survivors. She is also a highly regarded business consultant and leads the board of trustees of a graduate school in San Francisco. Her website is www.alisonb-shapiro.com.

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An Interview with Allison Bonds Shapiro

What does it mean when you say the disability habituates?

Our bodies make habits as a way to make actions efficient. When a part of the body has been injured, disabled, the brain will concentrate on the parts that work well and create something called “learned non-use.” In other words, our brains will ignore the part of the body that is not working and make a habit of the disability. Habits become hard-wired in the brain and, as you may have experienced, become increasingly harder to change – not impossible, but increasingly harder. If the habituation of the disability is actively challenged from the beginning and throughout the recovery, the opportunity to gain more function is improved.

What does self-care mean?

Self-care is the basis of health and satisfaction in our lives. It literally means holding our selves with kindness, concern, and care, just as we would someone outside of ourselves whom we love dearly. It means loving ourselves. Self care starts with two fundamental understandings: One: that we are the only tool we will ever be given to build our own lives. We only get one body, one mind, one spirit. It only makes sense to take the best care of that tool that we can. And, two: with the understanding that we are part of the whole of life. When we care for ourselves, we care for life. If we care for life, we include caring for ourselves. By caring for ourselves we give a gift to those who love us by taking care of the person they love.

Why do you say it is important not to give up –

how long can change occur?

Giving up cuts short our ability to do anything. Each one of us has profound influence over the outcome of what happens to us. If we give up on ourselves we give up building a life. In stroke recovery this is particularly important. When we stop asking the brain to reconnect the functions that were lost due to the injury, the brain quits trying and the injury habituates. I have seen no limit to either the time or the age in which change can occur. Change may slow down as time progresses but it does not have to stop unless we let it.

What is living around your limitations?

We each have the capacity to be stopped by what we perceive to be something which limits us – our age, our education, our physical ability – or to find ways to make a satisfying life with what we have. A tree root grows around a rock and finds nourishment. It doesn’t stop growing when it encounters something that blocks its path. This is a fundamentally creative approach to life. If I cannot accomplish what I want to do one way, I find another way. If we spend out time crying over what we do not have, we never discover what we do have and what we can with it.

What part does humor play?

When something difficult happens in our lives we often think that it would be wrong to laugh – that somehow we have to insist that nothing can be funny in the face of a serious problem. If we focus on only the hardship we lose something essentially life giving.

Laughter lowers blood pressure, calms the mind, and invites others into our lives. All those things have a powerful effect on recovery. Life seems more livable and problems seem more solvable when we remember to laugh. That doesn't mean we are laughing at somebody else or are trying to be cruel. We are remembering that it is possible to find joy even in hardship.

How important is paying attention?

Paying attention is critical. First by paying attention we find out what actually is happening. We don't make a story about what is happening. We honestly look. When we have as much information about what we can do in this moment as we can get, we can make wise, safe choices about how to work on our recoveries or any other aspect of our lives. The second way that paying attention is critical is that paying attention helps the brain use itself well. We literally form what we study. If we study music, we become better musicians. If we study walking we become better

walkers. If we study ourselves during recovery we create fuller recoveries.

What can family members do to help?

Life is a team effort. Our families, those we are born with and those we choose, can provide us with the strength and comfort to face life's challenges. Family members can inspire us by helping us believe in ourselves and our capacity to continue to improve. They can provide a social network while we recover so we remember that we are still a part of life. They can help us do things while we relearn how to do them for ourselves. They can remind us to stay safe and not hurt ourselves in our eagerness to recover function.

Why is letting go important?

It's hard to walk facing backwards. The moment a major injury or challenge occurs our lives are irrevocably changed. That injury or challenge often leaves us with little energy to waste as we are trying



***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.

to understand what has happened to us and find a way to deal with it. Letting go of what we thought our lives would be frees up our energy and makes space in our hearts to discover who we can be now. This is the key to transforming our lives. The possibilities are always greater than either our imagination or our fixed ideas. Letting go allows us to see the possibilities and reach for life.

What do you do with the grief and anger?

Grief and anger get in the way of letting go. There is only one way through grief and anger and that is to acknowledge the feelings and allow ourselves to feel them. Not to act out and hurt other people with them, particularly those who love us – that is never a successful way to deal with feelings. We need to be willing to face the grief and anger and hold ourselves with love and compassion until the grief and anger move through us and we are able once again to remember those things for which we are grateful. Other people who have faced similar challenges and professional counselors can be a great source of support in talking through and holding our grief and anger. This process will occur throughout our recoveries and our lives. Realizing this and building support to deal it can be a great benefit.

How do you apply what you have learned to other places?

Fundamentally I learned that how we approach prob-

lems is far more important than the problem itself. Whatever problem we face is something that has already happened. Now that it has happened, the useful approach to find out what can be done with situation. I ask myself: What is the opportunity embedded in this problem? I pay close attention to fully understanding what the situation is, just as it is, then I look for creative responses that I can make – I seek the possibilities I can discover. It takes practice and once we know how to do it, we can help other people do the same thing.. The 8 principles I teach are simple steps that allow us to move quickly through problems. When they are practiced, we begin to discover possibilities beyond anything we could imagine.

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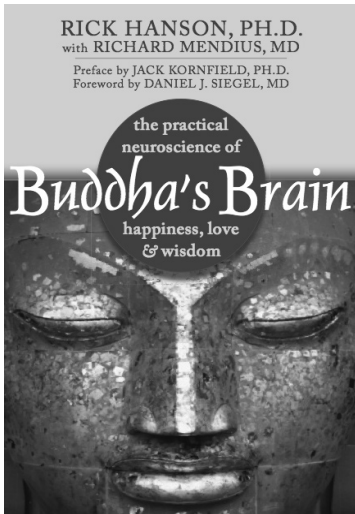
Alison Bonds Shapiro works with stroke survivors and their families, offers motivational talks for rehabilitation patients and their care networks in numerous locations including a leading HMO in Northern California, and advises a nonprofit dedicated to stroke survivors. She is also a highly regarded business consultant and leads the board of trustees of a graduate school in San Francisco. Her website is www.alisonb-shapiro.com.



Offerings

Rick Hanson, PhD, and Rick Mendius, MD

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 at www.newharbinger.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=852 or from New Harbinger at www.newharbinger.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=852. By Rick Hanson, PhD (with Rick Mendius, MD; preface by Jack Kornfield, PhD and Foreword by Dan Siegel, MD), this book draws on the historical

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 (www.amazon.com/Meditations-Change-Your-Brain-Hanson/dp/159179711X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1247945310&sr=8-1) or Sounds True (<http://shop.soundstrue.com/shop.soundstrue.com/SelectProd.do;jsessionid=D684B884BEAF8107013C3B4395A03811?prodId=1979&manufacturer=Sounds%20True&category=Spiritual%20Teachings&name=Meditations%20to%20Chan->

www.newharbinger.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=852 or from New Harbinger at www.newharbinger.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=852).

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.

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 person-

ally – 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. With the **Dharma Zephyr Insight Meditation Community** in Nevada, Rick will be leading a two day workshop September 12 and 13 on using brain-savvy methods to steady the mind, quiet it, bring it to singleness, and concentrate it, following the road map of the Buddha. See www.nevadadharm.net/zephyr.html for more information.

7. 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 several talks and a workshop. Contact Dr. Patrizia Collard at drcollard@stressminus.co.uk for more information.

8. At the London Insight Meditation Center, Rick Hanson will be presenting **The Neurology of Awakening** on Sunday November 22. See [\[doninsightmeditation.org.uk/programme/schedule\]\(http://doninsightmeditation.org.uk/programme/schedule\) for more information \(click on Daylong Retreats\).](http://www.lon-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

9. 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>.

10. 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?sessionId=91E06512A8A5D4D222A639DA4C1ED2F9?prodId=1715&manufacturer=Sounds%20True&category=Exploring%20the%20Psyche&name=Meditations%20for%20Happiness>

Fare Well.

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