



Mystics and Scientists 35th Anniversary Conference 'The Mystery of Consciousness and Western Meditation Traditions'

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Dr Peter Fenwick, president of the SMN, introduced the subject by saying that neuroscience has discovered that there are 'altered states of consciousness' (ASCs) as well as the normal state, which we call normal 'knowing'. The Buddha became 'enlightened' under a Bodhi tree, and lived permanently in that altered state for the next 40 years.

David Lorimer, SMN programme director, quoted Sir George Trevelyan, that Goethean science's communication with plants is a 'new way of knowing.' These other ways of knowing are the subjects of research into clairvoyance, pre-cognition, and other psychical phenomena. Many have written about this, including Plotinus: 'we are in a reality that is also within us,' St Thomas Aquinas, William James, Ken Wilber, Radakrishnan, Iain McGilchrist, Larry Dossey, Thomas Hudson, Zerah Colburn, Walter Russell, and Richard Tarnas, who said: 'a developed inner life is indispensable for cognition.'

Fr Laurence Freeman is director of the World Community of Christian Meditation, who have introduced meditation into Australian and British schools with good effect. He spoke on '**ways of knowing and unknowing**', and explored how the 'way of unknowing' in the Christian tradition relates to the other forms of understanding that are unified in the 'vision of God'.

He said that organised religion is like lottery tickets, which makes you feel better, but does not have a very good track record. He said that prayer is the putting aside of thought, and contemplation detaches us from dualistic thinking to become like God, divinised. He quoted Meister Eckhart: 'Nothing is more like God than silence.'

We find spirituality, not in religious baggage or churches, but in non-religious ways, known as 'secular spirituality'. Mindfulness meditation training is now open to everyone, and its practice can integrate us into a whole person, increasing our happiness and wellbeing. Neuroscience shows that meditation is good for us at all levels, and helps us to control anger and addictions.

In meditation we seek the place where wisdom lies by integrating the many ways of knowing. What is a monk? Someone who asks himself every day '*what is a monk?*' We have to let go of ourselves before the other appears. Mind is never blank. If it were, how would we know?

He described how a 14th century sage cured monks of negative thoughts about one another by feeding each other with long spoons, which trained them to see what was on each other's plates. Meditation is now practised daily in more than 100 schools in England.

Professor Sheikh Robert Frager is the founder of the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California, where he is a professor of psychology, and founding director of the masters degree in spiritual guidance. He is a Sufi teacher, and an Aikido instructor. He has written many books, and edits several journals on Sufism. He spoke on **models of consciousness in the Sufi tradition**.

Sufism is a spiritual path that is rooted in everyday life to develop self-analysis and compassion. The term 'sheikh' is a Bedouin leader or master. Some of the practices of Sufism are known through the poems of Rumi and the whirling dervishes. He described the stages of development of consciousness from the models of the heart, (virtues) known in Arabic as the *nafs*, which are about the self, or ego, in the following levels.

- 1 The narcissistic, tyrannical ego, who fell in love with his own image, and is incapable of loving anything or anybody else, and is prone to predatory rage.
- 2 The basic primal wounded victim of blaming, guilt, shame, who has no unconditional love.
- 3 The partially-inspired beggar who says of others: 'who does *he* think he is, thinking he is *nothing*?' He is half way up the mountain, but thinks he is at the top. The Nasrudin legends illustrate this well.
- 4 The pure feeling of unity from the loss of the ego, and the finding of the serene self, like a still lake reflecting the moon. We then may experience: 'the human heart is a shrine, built by God to worship God.' We may see ourself as: 'a floating bridge between heaven and earth', or 'a wave of symphonic harmony'. We might say: 'I am the light of the world,' or 'I am divine.' Or, in Christian mythology: 'I am Christ reborn'.

Experiential workshop of Aikido as a transformative process

Robert studied Aikido with the Japanese Zen master who created it from judo, ju jitsu, karate, and other martial arts. The essence of Aikido is love, and its goal is to transform your enemy into your friend. The question is: 'can I be open-hearted when attacked?' If so, this is the way to self-transformation. 'You can't wash out blood with blood.'

He demonstrated how Aikido is a meditation practice of centring ourselves by focussing our consciousness into our hara (our centre of gravity, 2 inches below our navel) The art of Aikido is to remain settled in our belly, with relaxed shoulders, feeling humble. Centring is the antidote to stress, which is what great athletes do. We can then become resilient, and cannot be knocked over by anyone or anything.

In pairs we tested this in practice by trying to push each other over. This was easy while we were thinking normally in our head, but was difficult when we were centred, focussing on our hara.

He then demonstrated energy (chi, prana) flowing, which is the life force that gives rise to health, but can be drawn out of us by sick people, say in hospital. Again the protection is to work from our centre. Violence stops the energy flow, so the art is to use it softly, without forcing. We imagined the energy like water flowing freely out of our pointed finger, when it was strong. Making a fist messed it up, as the energy was rolled round back towards us.

Robert demonstrated warding off an attack by an experienced Aikido practitioner by turning the enemy into a friend, co-operating, and deflecting their energy to turn it around. The Chinese film 'Crouching Tiger' demonstrates this principle graphically.

Rabbi Nilton Bonder leads one of Brazil's most influential Jewish congregations, and has written many books on civil rights and ecological causes. He spoke on the **Mystics of Media**, and showed how the prophets devised the principles of the world wide web, and virtual reality. We are prisoners of linear space time, big heads, small bodies. The ultimate frontier is the resurrection of the dead. The most important thing is meaningful connection without fear between us.

Prof Les Lancaster of the University of Northampton introduced his new masters degree course in **Consciousness and Transpersonal Studies**, which he will run jointly with the Scientific and Medical Network from September. See www.transpersonalstudies.org.uk.

Jonathan Stedall introduced the premier showing of his new documentary film about the life of **Rudolf Steiner**, who promoted a meditative approach in everything he did. This is *The Challenge of Rudolf Steiner* – see www.rudolfsteinerfilm.com

Dr Anne Runehof is a researcher in the systems theology department of the University of Copenhagen. She is author of many books on science and religion, and is the editor of the forthcoming Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religion. She answered the question: **'do neuro-scientific explanations of religious experiences lead to naturalism?'**

She contrasted the views of Michael Persinger (helmet) and Andrew Newberg, who believe, with Francis Crick, that we are just a 2 kg 'bag of neurons'. She said that only 4% of the brain's energy is known, and 96% is 'dark', unknown. She quoted research on transcendental meditation, and epilepsy.

In the discussion, the case of Jill Bolte-Taylor was mentioned. She gave a TED talk in which she described her experience of having a stroke 15 years ago. The haemorrhage gradually

paralysed the left hemisphere of her brain, so that she could not speak or write. However, with the remaining right hemisphere functioning normally, she experience unity with everything, and could not define the boundary of herself with anything else.

Dr Raymond Tallis specialises in stroke as a professor and consultant physician of geriatric medicine at the University of Manchester. He is a prolific author. He spoke on **'why neuroscience will never explain consciousness.'**

He said that the widespread belief that: *'consciousness is identical with activity in the brain, so 'you are your brain'* is mistaken. While the brain is necessary for every aspect of consciousness, neural activity is not sufficient by itself to explain consciousness. A fundamental re-think of their relationship is necessary.

Neuroscientists that promote that belief (such as Daniel Dennett) are practicing neuro-mythology or neuro-scientism, not science. The mistake that they make is that if A (a thought) correlates with B (light up in the brain), it does not follow that A=B, or that A causes B. They cross the mind brain barrier without thinking, and have a viewless view of reality which apes mankind. They are in an ego-centric space, requisitioning consciousness to make it 'mine', but denying self as an illusion.

Free will (and free won't) obviously exist, but there is no place for them in materialism. The map is not the territory. Consciousness studies have been high jacked by neuro-science, and stuffed into inter-cranial darkness. The brain cannot be its own observer. We are embodied *subjects*, not *objects*. Can it be an illusion that we have illusions?

The final session was a **panel discussion** taking questions from the floor, such as: If meditation is scientifically proven to be so good for us, why aren't we all doing it? Why is consciousness the elephant in the room? How is it that music, dance, yoga, deep chaotic breathing, etc, can affect the bodymind so beneficially?

Science needs to develop the psychology of meditation, mindfulness, and altered states of consciousness, as Charles Tart has sought to do. We need to think outside the box, and develop a new philosophy of reality, and terminology that works across religious faiths. This new paradigm is happening visibly everywhere, if we only have eyes to see it.

Experiencing Expanded Consciousness

Dr. Stephen Fulder, fulder@zahav.net.il

I filled out the recent questionnaire from SMN dutifully, and it encouraged me to reflect on how the SMN is today compared to its beginnings when I joined. At that time it was almost a secret society, a dialogue between scientists whose soul was reaching for the sublime while their life was spent in laboratories and research centres. Today the Network is much bigger and more open, yet if you read the articles that appeared 30 years ago compared to those today, not that much has changed. But the world has changed and the needs have changed.

One of the shifts is that millions of people are practicing ways to inner freedom, such as meditation, rather than just reading about it or discussing it or thinking about it. My personal view is that the Network needs to keep abreast of this. What is the Network doing to help its members experience expanded view and expanded consciousness, not just discuss it in meetings.

I have expressed this view before in the pages of the Network, which is a call for each of us to research our own genuine experience in the present momentⁱ so as to be able to discuss, for example consciousnessⁱⁱ, with any authority and meaning. Every year, I teach a 4-day silent meditation and mindfulness retreat for brain scientists in Israel. We usually get 50 participants. They report how exciting it is to research the mind from the inside not only the outside. Should not the Network be sponsoring more practical inner investigations, even pioneering such explorations, in addition to the discussions about them?

ⁱFulder, S. The Scientist is the Concept Not the Science, *Network*. No. 79. pp. 19-21 (August 2002)

ⁱⁱFulder, S. To Prove Consciousness or to Trust It? *Network*. pp. 31 (Summer 2006)

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Peeping through Galileo's Telescope

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personal experiences

The recent article by Larry Dossey 'Why are Scientists Afraid of Daryl Bem?' printed in the Network Review (No. 106) was a disturbing read, illustrating the adverse reaction of mainstream science to unorthodox ideas. Towards the end of the article he referred to the time when learned men refused to look at Jupiter through Galileo's telescope as they considered there was nothing to be gained in so doing.

Whilst reading the article some words leapt out of the page and galvanised me. Dossey describes experiments carried out by Bem, where students are viewing a computer screen showing two curtains, and they have to decide behind which curtain is an image. At that moment in time, however, there is actually no image at all, and *it is only after the student has made a decision that the computer makes a random choice and assigns a picture to one of the curtains.* Instead of the expected 50% correct guesses, the results showed a small but significant bias towards the student choosing the curtain behind which the image would appear. In this description I

have put some words in italics. Why did I find these words so important?

Back in 2002 I wrote a short article that appeared in The Network Review (No 60) entitled 'Another Mind-Machine Interaction?' Here I expressed the view that readings from a Geiger counter appear to be influenced by human intent or emotion, with some graphs to illustrate the point. The counter registers a count when an ionising particle of sufficient energy enters the Geiger tube. What I felt was happening was that particles just on the borderline of having sufficient energy to trigger a count had this borderline value influenced by the addition of the human emotion at these critical moments.

The effect was as though the sensitivity of the instrument was being slightly altered by human input. I noted in this article that others had reported this effect, from the 1940's (J.C. Maby) through to the beginning of this century (M.S. Benford, Journal of Theoretics); an Internet search will also bring up more examples.



As an illustration of the type of result I feel portrays this effect I show two recordings taken on days of Royal occasions when one can expect a substantial tide of human emotion or excitement with a common cause. An unattended Geiger counter was left recording counts per minute for some hours on suitable days and the graphs plotted, with some smoothing of short term fluctuations by taking a rolling average of the counts. One can, of course, produce a maze of statistics around these results but as the eye can easily pick out the significant excursions of the graphs and relate them to events, it is often satisfactory to leave it this way. A temporary increase in the counts per minute frequently correlates to a moment the crowd emotion can be expected to be at a high. At the same time it must be remembered that other events are also taking place around the world, and space, so it is not a simple matter!

Back to the words I put in italics. I need to say something here about computers, and I will try to keep the technicalities to a minimum. Every single action in a computer takes place when a rising or falling voltage reaches a certain critical value at a certain time somewhere in the circuit. These values are normally accurate enough for the computer to perform its functions very satisfactorily, but hidden in all this is the fact that there are actually small variations, generally classified as 'jitter'. Jitter arises from small unavoidable irregularities present in all electrical circuits, and this variability causes 'decisions' made by the computer to suffer small timing inaccuracies.

It is at this point I take the step of adding the student's intent, already established at this moment, as another input to put alongside jitter, so the moment that the computer makes its 'random' selection of image placement has now an extra factor. I suggest the human intent field, whatever its nature may be, modifies the critical moment of 'decision' and slightly advances or delays the selection to favour the student's choice to bring about the unexpected deviation of results.

In Bem's experiment a deviation of 3.1% from the expected 50% is quoted. I am not surprised at this finding, since this value is entirely in keeping with values I have found with my own work. I conclude that his experiments are revealing a further instance of how human emotion or intent can have a subtle effect upon an electronic device. Whether 'quantum entanglement' plays a part here I am not able to say, but I hope that others may be able to follow this further. Take a look down my Galilean telescope, not pointed at Jupiter, but at the nature of randomness.

Rodney Hale C.Eng MIET formed a company for the design and manufacture of electronic equipment which he ran for 38 years until his retirement. He developed an interest in exploring the effect human intent or emotion has on remote electronic equipment, and has gently pursued this topic for the last 19 years.

