

## **Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message:**

**“Helping others brings the same pleasure we get  
from the gratification of personal desire.”**

**(Dr. James Riling and Dr. Gregory Berns, neuroscientists at Emory University)**

In the last month, I introduced a Harvard psychologist's finding on happiness and selfishness: “When people spend money on others, they actually feel happier than after spending it on themselves.” Then, I also wrote that this is what the Buddha already discovered 2500 years ago by the teachings of the Causal Conditional Relationship between Selfishness and Happiness:

When there is less selfishness, there is more happiness.

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This is one good example that the Buddha's ancient teachings are scientifically proved by today's new discoveries and scientific data obtained by the study of the brain. And, indeed, there are more and more. Neuroscientists James Riling and Gregory Berns of Emory University found that helping others brings the same pleasure we get from the gratification of personal desire. Participants were given the chance to help someone else while their brain activity was recorded. Helping others triggered activity in the caudate nucleus and anterior cingulate, portions of the brain that turn on when people receive rewards or experience pleasure. This is a rather remarkable finding. According to new neuroscientific study, in our body there is the autonomic nervous system (ANS) such as glands, organs, and cardiovascular and respiratory systems. The ANS plays a primary role in regulating our blood flow and breathing patterns for different kinds of actions. When we feel threatened, for example, our heart and breathing rates usually increase, to prepare either to confront or flee from the threat – thus, the so-called “fight or flight” response. And there is also the ANS profile of compassion. It is very interesting to know that when a person feels compassion for others, this emotion is reflected in very real physiological changes: His or her heart rate goes down from baseline levels, which prepares them not to fight or flee, but to approach and sooth. Then, there is Oxitocin, a hormone that floats through the blood-stream. Oxitocin is said to not only stimulate contractions during labor and then the production of milk, but also enhance a trusting and passionate atmosphere,

According to Dr. Dacher Keltner, a U.C. Berkeley psychologist, when people perform behaviors associated with compassionate love – warm smiles, friendly hand gestures, affirmative forward leans – their bodies produce more exitocin. This suggests, says he, compassion may be self-perpetuating: Being compassionate causes a chemical reaction in the body that motivates us to be even more compassionate.

Again,, this seems what the Buddha taught 2500 years ago by the teaching of “Self-benefit and benefit for others go hand in hand.” Self and others are interconnected, interrelated and interdependent.

I am glad to know this new data. In a society where self-centeredness is regarded as the key factor for happiness, recent scientific findings by neuroscientists and psychologists may have more persuasive power compared to some “religious” teachings. But, it does never underestimate the Buddha’s value. The Law of Causal Conditionality that the Buddha discovered operated both in the material (body) and the psychological world. Therefore, it is not surprising that new scientific data and Buddha-Dharma arrive at the same conclusion.

Namu Amida Butsu  
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