

## Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message:

### *Notes from the "Happiness and Its Causes" Conference*

In November, I had a wonderful opportunity to attend the "Happiness and Its Causes" conference in San Francisco. It is the first American conference under this title following the 2006 and 2007 conferences in Sydney. The conference brought together world-class neuroscientists, physicians, psychologists, philosophers, and Buddhists.

Dr. Paul Ekman was one of them. The American Psychological Association judged him to be one of the 100 most influential psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is the co-discoverer of "microexpressions," very brief facial expressions that occur when emotions are being revealed. He established universals in facial expressions and producing the first comprehensive tool for measuring any and all facial movement. He also developed training to recognize microexpressions as part of his research on why we lie, why and when lies fail and succeed, how to detect lying and why without training people are so easily misled.

Another participant was Dr. Dacher Keltner, the author of over 100 scientific papers, two best-selling textbooks (one on emotion, the other on social psychology), and a trade book on the evolution of pro social emotion, *Born to Be Good, The Science of a Meaningful Life*. He also is a director of Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center -- and co-editor of its magazine, Greater Good -- an interdisciplinary center that is translating the new science of happiness and compassion to thousands of educators, parents, and interested readers.

Dr. James R. Doty also presented insightful data. He, a clinical professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at Stanford University, is a founder and director of the Center for Compassion & Altruism Research & Education at Stanford, where he works with both the Stanford Neuroscience Institute and a variety of scientists from a number of disciplines examining the neural, moral and social bases for compassion and altruism. These scientists are only a small fraction of the conference presenters.

If you read the following passage by Dr. Dacher Keltner, you'll see why I am so interested in recent scientific discoveries and excited with them:

In much of Western thought, we assume that our basic nature is that of *homo economicus*: selfish and competitive at the core and wired to give priority to the bad in the world over the good. Given this view of human nature, several things readily follow: Altruism is an illusion; Aggression and adversarial relations are natural states; Happiness derives from the pursuit of self-interest.

What the new science that I summarize is revealing is, instead, we are also wired for good in a recent study, perhaps derived greater happiness spending \$ 20 on someone else than on themselves to indulge some desire. New neuroscience suggests when we give to others, or act cooperatively, the nucleus accumbens, a region of the brain known to have many dopamine receptors and to process rewards, lights up. New discoveries are finding that oxytocin, a neuropeptide that floats through the bloodstream, promotes trust and devotion. Modest expressions of gratitude, the simple "thank you," smile, or warm gaze, prompts the recipients of such kindness to be kind in ensuing interactions.

The studies in our lab take a Darwin-inspired approach to understanding how pro-social emotions like compassion, love and awe enable humans to be good to others. Survival of the kindest may be a more apt description of human nature rather than survival of the most selfish.

This is what the Buddha discovered and explained to the world 2500 years ago: selfishness is the cause of suffering and pain. Compassion and selflessness go hand in hand. Where there is peace of mind, there is kindness and warmth.

Based on recent scientific discoveries, Western thought is radically remodeling itself with a new direction and perspective that it did not have before. It is wonderful to know that some recent natural scientists are directing themselves to connect scientific research with the wholesome and spiritual teachings of compassion, kindness, and

altruism. Buddhism is 100% about the Mind. I am anxiously waiting further discoveries in neuroscience and natural science.

(Continues)

Namu Amida Butsu  
Shaku Shoyo