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DALAI LAMA UoT VISIT  
SEE PAGE 3

# Wisdom



§ 多倫多大學佛教學生的心靈廣場 §

The Free-spirited Buddhist Publication of the University of Toronto Community  
Volume 9, Issue 1 ~ Winter/Spring

## Buddhism, Health and Well-Being

Daya Hewapathirane, Ph.D.

**T**he interdependence of the mind and body and the impact of emotions and thoughts on health and well-being were well known to ancient Buddhists. Buddhism speaks of the power of the mind and how we can control many functions of our bodies with our minds. Buddhism is emphatic on the inseparable connection between the mind and body - the complex interactions that take place between thoughts, body, and the outside world. According to Buddhist thinking, when dealing with illness and health, the mind, emotions and body must be dealt with in an integrated manner.

Buddhism has impacted the field of health and medicine for many years in countries where Buddhism has been the predominant belief. In Buddhist sutras and ancient Buddhist chronicles, there are countless references to and discussion on health and medicine, and how the mind and emotions affect one's behavior and ultimately one's health.

### Balanced Interaction

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The Buddhist understanding of good health is similar with its emphasis on the balanced interaction between the mind and body as well as between life and its environment. Illness tends to arise when this delicate equilibrium is upset. Buddhist theory and practice aim to restore and strengthen this balance.

### The Integrated Approach

While modern medicine tends to address the ailing part of the body in isolation from the rest, the Buddhist understanding of health sees disease as a reflection of the total somatic system, or life itself, and seeks to cure it through a fundamental reorientation of a person's life-style and outlook. Physical aspects of life are inseparable from the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects. The optimal condition of health is achieved when mind and body are functioning well and interacting together as one. Central to the Buddhist approach to health and healing is its

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### Just Where IS Your Inner Self?



**Ven. Chongwol Sunim of the Hanmaum Buddhist Centre answered many questions at the UTBC lecture last fall.**

By Yoshani De Silva

*The Hanmaum Centre belongs to the most traditional and orthodox form of Buddhism in Korea, the Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism. Early last semester, on September 12th, 2003, Ven. Chongwol Sunim of the Hanmaum Buddhist Centre presented a lecture on 'How to find your inner self'. This article provides a glimpse of the various aspects of Buddhist teachings which were presented in the lecture by Ven. Chongwol Sunim.*

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# A Centre for Buddhist Studies

*University of Hong Kong- restores the distorted image of Buddhism*

*by Chris Ng*

**A**t a Buddhism lecture on reading the Surangama Sutra held at the Presidential Suite of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, I met Professor C.F. Lee, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong (equivalent to Vice-President in other universities) who chairs the Management Committee of the Centre of Buddhist Studies established in September 2000. He shared with me their experience in starting this primarily privately funded centre and conveyed his best wishes for the successful creation of a Centre for Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto.

Prior to their centre, the study of Buddhism was inadequately addressed in the universities in Hong Kong - a few courses were taught under a variety of disciplines at HKU, and a few courses were taught under "Chinese cultures" as a mix of Taoism, folk religions and traditional cultural practices in the Baptist University and the University of Science and Technology.

This is not dissimilar to the situation of Buddhist studies of the past decade at the University of Toronto. The Hong Kong state of affairs is, it appears to me, not an unnatural academic consequence of the European imperial conquest of China and the one hundred years of colonial rule of Hong Kong by Great Britain. Buddhism has been seen, at best, as some quaint oriental museum case, to be studied by the intellectually sophisticated. In the broader society, Christian missionaries have propagandized that Buddhism is a superstitious religion suitable for backward uneducated villagers.

Canada, though a country in her own right for over 100 years, had been under the cultural and political influence of Great Britain. It is not surprising that we see the tendency here in Canada of viewing Buddhism under the imperialist's eye.

After 1997, Hong Kong residents ought to cease seeing themselves as colonial people in order to find themselves a unique place in the history of China. For decades, Hong Kong has been well recognized as the world's economic gateway to China, but its position as a cultural crossroads of the east and the west is not so well known. "A new surge of religious fervour and a rich potential of talents and resources for serious Buddhist studies" in China and the witnessing of the high level of study and research in Buddhism in academic religious centres overseas are key reasons for the surge of energy that fueled the establishment of their centre of Buddhist studies.

Unlike the studies of Buddhism under British rule, this centre

will not only delve into its traditional disciplines of history, culture, anthropology, art, language and philosophy, but will also seek to research Buddhism from the disciplines of western sciences such as psychology and psychotherapy to contribute to the fields of education, health care and social work. And perhaps, above all, the studies of Buddhism offer to the scientifically oriented men and women of our age a rational and sensible way of understanding oneself and one's relation to the rapidly changing world, enlightening the human mind along side of the advances in science and technology.

A distorted image of Buddhism gives people an erroneous preconception of what the Buddha taught.

The efforts to restore the image of Buddhism continue on another front. Professor Poon, Chung-kwong, the President of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, organizes the lecture on the Surangama Sutra that I attended, gives lectures and publishes books himself to present the Buddha's teachings to the public. He is a renowned scientist and his approach is both modern and scientific. When I spoke with him in his office, he told me that because Buddhism has been misunderstood as being superstitious, he tries to take advantage of his position as a scientist and a President of a university to break through the distorted image of Buddhism to explain to the people the importance and usefulness of Buddhism in modern living.

Arguably the most culturally vibrant city of the world, the living Buddhist traditions of the entire world thrive together here in Toronto like no where else. The University of Toronto is in a strong position to take the teaching and research of international Buddhism to a new height. Not only do the teaching and research of Buddhism affirm the cultural heritage of its students, they could also spawn research and new programs from physiology and physics to practical medicine.

As Canadians of Asian background, we see the creation of an inter-disciplinary centre for Buddhist studies here at U of T in this new millennium as a beacon of our future together as equal partners with Canadians of British background and indeed with Canadians from all over the world. Buddhism, properly studied, is a beneficial and worthwhile endeavour and can mitigate the distortion of Buddhism suffered by Asians all over the world in earlier centuries.



# U of T Buddhist News — the Dalai Lama Visit

by Sarah English

**A**s this newsletter is published, the organization of a number of auspicious events is underway at UofT. The New Year having only begun, both the Buddhist community and the university itself prepare for unique opportunities, including both the emergence of the Buddhist Studies Centre and the anticipated visit of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

The Buddhist Studies Centre is a proposed interdisciplinary effort, currently supported by Department for the Study of Religion and the East Asian Studies Department and New College. The Working Committee for Buddhist Studies, chaired by Professor Franklin Tall, envisages this world class Buddhist Studies Centre to offer both undergraduate and post-graduate programs, and to be the university's vital hub of leading-edge inter-disciplinary research in Buddhism and related fields, international Buddhist culture, engaging academic activities, and community outreach. Presently, a course designed by Professor Toneatto, entitled "The Healing Mind - the Theories and Applications of Buddhist Psychology" has been approved by the New College Council and is to be offered in January, 2005. In fact, the course itself is to be funded by the same foundation that sponsored the hugely successful 2003 fundraising banquet, the 450 seats of which were entirely sold-out.

Equally as exciting, a visit by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, is scheduled for April of this year. He will be in Toronto from April 25th to May 5th, and will be receiving both a peace award and an honorary degree from the university. The Acharya Sushil Kumar Peace Award, which was established by Jain communities in both Toronto and the US, will be given to His Holiness; the award itself commemorates Acharya Sushil Kumarji (1926-1994), the most revered Jain teacher of non-violence and religious non-absolutism in recent times. As Principle Clandfield of New College elucidated, the decision to center the award in Toronto was based on the fact that UofT's own New College boasts a robust South Asian Studies program, and

also houses the temporary multi-faith centre. These factors evince strong commitment to diversity; such an environment of tolerance was thought most suitable to the care of the award. Recipients are chosen, according to Professor Clandfield, by a committee of four, which, in addition to himself, consists of the Academic Director of South Asian Studies, Toronto's Jain Community's Dr. Shantih Shah, and Mr. Ajit Jain, editor of India Abroad. The selection of a candidate is based largely on an individual's active and sustained dedication to peace. As the second person to be chosen for the award (John Polanyi having been the first in 2003), the Dalai Lama indisputably demonstrates this salient characteristic. For this, and his ongoing efforts to raise awareness about the necessity of peaceful cultivation of human rights, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. The ceremony to bestow the Acharya Sushil Kumar Peace Award will be held on April 27, at 4 p.m. in Convocation Hall. Due to an understandable disparity between the vast number of people who would like to attend, and inevitable facility limitations, admittance is by invitation-only. Fortunately, a designated phone-line has been set up for public inquiries; should tickets become

available closer to the 27th, those interested should call (416) 946-5818, leaving both name and contact information.

The Dalai Lama will also receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree; interestingly, the agreement was reached to confer the degree five years ago. Scheduling difficulties necessitated the university to wait until His Holiness returned to North America in order to present the degree, and though UofT habitually bestows such awards in June, extraordinary arrangements have in this case been made. It is the hope of both the Buddhist Student Association and the Working Committee that the Dalai Lama himself will advocate the Buddhist Studies Centre's relevance.

At present, all involved parties are generating further fund-raising momentum, as it is hoped that a Dalai Lama Chair in Buddhism and its Applications would be endowed to the Centre in commemoration of His Holiness' visit. Such efforts are evident in the generous participation of UofT's Emeritus Professor Metta Spencer, who has agreed to give a lecture on peacemaking. The lecture promises to be an engaging examination, focusing on the integration of the spiritual and the concrete aspects of activism.

## A BUDDHISM LECTURE

In honour of H.H. the Dalai Lama's Spring Visit to U of T (2004), Professor Emeritus Metta Spencer of the Dept. of Sociology, U of T, will present

# Peacemaking:

The Experiences of the Dalai Lama, Aung San Suu Kyi and other Buddhists

DATE Thursday, February 26, 2004

TIME 5:15 pm - Reception & Refreshments  
6:00 pm - Lecture

PLACE William Doo Auditorium, 45 Willcocks Street (Basement)

All Welcome - Free Admission.

For further information: email [peacemaking@rogers.com](mailto:peacemaking@rogers.com) or call (416) 993-1940

H.H. will be receiving an honorary Doctorate Degree and a Peace Prize from U of T.

Scholar and peace activist, Professor Spencer headed a Peace Studies Program at UTM and served (along with some 2000 others) with the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs that was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1995.

Event co-sponsored by: New College, The Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies, The U of T Buddhist Community, Buddhist Student Association ([www.buddha-dharma.ca](http://www.buddha-dharma.ca))



The Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi are the 1989 and 1991 Nobel Prize Laureates in Peace respectively.





# THE INNER SELF

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## ***Being a Buddhist***

There are two basic criteria that one needs to fulfill to technically become a Buddhist: (i) to pay homage to the Buddha, the Dhamma (His teachings) and the Sangha (Buddhist monks and nuns); (ii) to bow to the five precepts of morality - to abstain from killing, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from intoxicants and from lying.

This has become the basic outline that is honoured by every Buddhist temple and is followed by an individual to progress on the path of learning Buddhist philosophies. Practicing and incorporating the Buddha's teachings into daily living and society, is the basis of Buddhism.

## ***Buddhist Practice***

The nature of loving-kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity are enshrined in a Buddhist society. The popularity of Buddhism has increased dramatically in many countries, including North America, primarily because it does not follow a set of rules. The practice of Buddhism allows individuals to learn more about themselves, to follow the insights of their heart, to learn from the wisdom they possess, and to make the right choices all the time.

In a traditional Zen monastery, for instance, monks are disciplined by a teacher for at least three years during which curriculums are set for every individual, moment to moment. The daily routine involves rigorous exercises, meditation and other activities. Monks do not realize that they are being taught and disciplined, but at the end of three years of training, they are almost enlightened. They have a clear vision and understanding of the reasons that they chose the Buddhist practice.

## ***True-self vs. Non-self***

The principle of non-self (that there is no permanency) and an individual's true-self, in reality, refer to the same idea. To visualize it, each wave in an ocean can be imagined as an individual. Since the ocean gives rise to all individuals, it is full of energy, forming small waves and at times, typhoons, that emerge from cycles of birth and death. In order to truly appreciate the diversity of waves in the ocean, one has to find divinity within the ocean and appreciate the unity of waves. Every wave is important, just as every individual and their contribution to society, is important.

The waves don't melt together, allowing individuality to be maintained at the core. Yet, each wave is intricately connected and affects the surrounding waves. This hides the appearance of the true-self, or spiritual-self, of a wave. Originally, every individual is pure and filled with emptiness, a phenomenon which is also known as 'Buddha-nature'. However, in the real world, as the wave (or individual) interacts with others, it does not remain as

pure, but becomes a manifestation of the ocean.

## ***The mind during meditation***

Meditation is learnt from experience and one needs to observe it every moment. The mind is not an object with any form or shape, but it encompasses the realm of thoughts. It is the mind that does the sitting, the thinking and the relaxing. The aim of meditation is to calm the mind by observing and controlling undesirable thoughts so that they can be channeled without harming oneself and others. Restraining the mind and body, alike, is important to get rid of a habit. People often become attached to experiences and they develop a sense of craving for that experience. In that frame of mind, they lose the ability to enjoy and satisfy the mind with any other type of experience. Yet, time is only a moment and is constantly moving, while our thoughts and actions do bear consequences. Meditation allows one to lose attachments to these thoughts.

## ***Suffering***

A basic phenomenon that we learn from the Buddha's teachings is that every result has a proper cause. When the Buddha saw a sick person, another who was old and another who was dying, he intensely contemplated the situation. He removed the three arrogances - that he himself was healthy, young and alive. He realized that someday he too would get sick, old and die. He realized that there must be a cause for this suffering and he went in search of these causes. Yet, in many societies today, there are diseased, elderly, and dying people, that because they are isolated, and ignored, thus suffer all the more. The Buddha realized that one needs to be close to society and individuals, to be familiar with them and share experiences. This helps to dissipate the feeling of fear and being under threat. We also learn from the Buddha's actions that if people don't like something they see today, they should begin to change those causes so that they can steer it towards something different.

Suffering can also be a consequence of pleasure. The psychological and physiological need of the human mind is to constantly desire something, even though the body is comfortable. It caters towards happiness, but in many instances, people are in pursuit of the happiness it will provide rather than the object or person itself. For example some people find themselves attached to the idea of *being in love* rather than actually loving the object of their desire. The mechanics of attachment cause the mind to pursue happiness in excess of the comforts that an individual already possesses.

## ***Experiencing Buddhism***

In modern society, people are taught to take note of everything so that it becomes an objective observation that can be analyzed and accepted. But one should be able to validate facts and thoughts through experience rather than belief. Initially, experience does require belief. For instance, one has to believe in the

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# FRANCES GARRETT

## *From Virginia to Tibet to Toronto*

**A**ssistant Professor Frances Garrett has brought her keen interest and knowledge in Tibetan Religion to the Department of Religion at U of T. Originally a philosophy major at Columbia University, she became fascinated by Tibetan Buddhism while studying under the dynamic Professor Robert A.F. Thurman and would go on to earn her Ph.D. in Religious Studies at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Garrett's degree is in History of Religions, with a specialization in Indian and Tibetan Religions. Now she brings a much needed academic injection of knowledge to the collection of Buddhist studies at U of T.

Garrett's fascination with Tibetan literature and culture goes beyond the three courses she is currently teaching in the Department of Religion - Introduction to Buddhist Traditions (RLG206Y), East Asian Buddhism (RLG371H) and Women in Asian Religions (RLG236H). Garrett has a keen interest in the study of embryology, i.e. the growth of the human being in the womb, from conception to birth. Says Garrett, "Descriptions of embryology are commonly found in Tibetan medical and religious texts. In religious texts, the growth of the embryo is compared to the spiritual growth a person can experience along the path to enlightenment. For example, in Buddhist countries across Asia there are caves that represent wombs, with stalactites that are said to be umbilical cords and pools of red mercuric oxide that are said to be menstrual blood, where laypeople enter and perform certain rituals, after which they are 'reborn' into a more spiritually advanced state of existence. My own research focuses on 2-16th century Tibetan narrative descriptions of the growth of the embryo in medical and religious texts, and on what these say more generally about the interactions between medicine and religion at this time in Tibet."

Perhaps her interest in the genesis of life



is symbolic of her interest in the creation of a Buddhist Studies Centre at U of T.

When asked if she would contribute to the creation of a Centre she was enthusiastic, for Garrett sees Buddhism as a religious and philosophical tradition that has immediate applications in the real world. She is working with Sue MacRae from the University of Toronto's Joint Centre for Bioethics ([www.utoronto.ca/jcb/index.html](http://www.utoronto.ca/jcb/index.html)) and with Toronto's Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies ([www.nalandacollege.ca/](http://www.nalandacollege.ca/)) to investigate the connections between Buddhism and issues in Bioethics. She emphasizes that along with the growing public and academic interest in Buddhist perspectives on religion and spirituality, there is also a strong interest in Buddhist medicine in the West.

Garrett is also intrigued by modern methods of delivering and sharing information. "Given the University of Toronto's excellent technological infrastructure, I am

looking forward to bringing international partnerships to U of T in the continued effort to generate cutting-edge research methods and apply them to Buddhist studies. I would hope that the new U of T Buddhist Studies Centre would stand at the forefront of research in Buddhist studies, and maintaining this position will require delivery of the very best research resources involving new technologies." In a time when Sanskrit is no longer available to undergraduate students, when a tenured Professor teaching Buddhism has just retired and whose replacement is uncertain, and when there is little graduate level instruction available for a degree in any form of Buddhism, it is reassuring to hear Frances Garrett talk about her hopes and aspirations for Buddhism at the University of Toronto.

That is just the kind of medicine Buddhist Studies at the University of Toronto needs to build for the future.

# BUDDHISM AND HEALTH

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emphasis on spiritual strength and an overriding sense of purpose in life based on compassionate action for others.

## **Spirituality and Health**

According to Buddhism, to be active and healthy, one needs to live a spiritual life. Buddhist spirituality is founded on “maithri” or loving-kindness and compassion towards all living beings.

Spirituality with meditation as an essential element of daily life, has a direct impact on the overall health of people.

A sense of purpose makes people live longer, feel better and stay physically healthier. Also compassion, generosity and patience are qualities that make people strong and resilient. Buddhism directs its energy inwardly to train the mind to understand the mental state of happiness, to identify and defuse sources of negative emotions and to cultivate emotional states like “metta, mudita, karuna upekkha”, or loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, in order to improve personal and societal well-being.

Although modern medical science has made great strides, it has not necessarily furthered the cause of human happiness. The emergence of the holistic and psychosomatic movements testifies to the need for something deeper in understanding the human being.

## **State of Mind and Health**

In recent years focused scientific studies have revealed the decisive influence of people’s states of mind, emotions, attitudes and beliefs on how they get sick and how they stay well. Upsets or shocks to the mind such as divorce, death of a loved one, have direct bearing on the biochemistry of the immune system. Similarly, wear and tear on the mind such as boredom, self-obsession, sense of not being in control, alienation, wears down the physical systems of the body.

## **Pioneer in Scientific Research on Meditation**

Dr. Herbert Benson, Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School was a pioneer in modern scientific research on meditation. He says that he gives a biological explanation of meditation, which has been practiced in the East for thousands of years. In the 1970’s he published “The Relaxation Response” where he showed how meditation could increase concentration and counteract the harmful effects of stress. He founded the Mind-Body Medical Institute and argued that meditators counteracted the stress-induced fight-or-flight response and achieved a calmer, happier state.

## **Richard Davidson and the Mind and Life Institute**

Dr. Richard Davidson, Director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin at Madison is the founder of the Mind and Life Institute which is dedicated to creating a powerful working collaboration and research partnership between modern science and Buddhism – the world’s two most

powerful traditions for understanding the nature of reality and investigating the mind. Its first purpose is to promote the creation of a contemplative, compassionate, and rigorous experimental and experiential science of the mind which could guide and inform medicine, neuroscience, psychology, education and human development. Secondly it is to contribute to the epistemological revolution which is taking place through modern physics and philosophy, in order to expand our knowledge of the diverse dimensions of our world.

## **Mind and Life Scientists**

In 1990 Mind and Life scientists initiated research projects to investigate the neurobiological effects of meditation on long-term meditators. These western scientists were intrigued by the ability of Buddhist meditators to intentionally manipulate basic physiological processes and to catalyze psychological and biological healing effects, all through the directed mental processes of meditation practices.

In recent years Mind and Life scientists at the University of Wisconsin Madison, University of California-San Francisco, University of California-Berkeley and Harvard University have conducted experiments and are developing in-depth research projects to deepen scientific understanding of Buddhist theory and practices.

## **Collaborative Research**

In order for a dialogue between Buddhism and science to have a durable contribution to humanity, collaborative research programs are being conducted in first rate Western scientific laboratories and the results of these studies will be published in prominent peer-reviewed scientific journals. Data have been collected from highly trained Buddhist meditative adepts using EEG, fMRI, and MEG neuro-imaging techniques and other psychological, neurological and immunological measures.

In 2001, in a laboratory at the University of Wisconsin, a Tibetan Buddhist monk donned a cap studded with hundreds of sensors that were connected to a state-of-the-art EEG, the brain-scanning device, capable of recording changes in his brain with speed and precision. When the monk began meditating in a way that was designed to generate compassion, the sensors registered a dramatic shift to a state of great joy. The very act of concern for others well-being creates a greater state of well-being within oneself.

## **Study Using Brain Imaging Techniques**

What goes on in the brain during meditation was the theme of a recent study led by Dr. Richard Davidson, Director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and Centre for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Discovery of the technique of brain imaging led to increased sophistication of research on the meditating brain. This powerful brain scanning technologies not only can reveal a mind in the midst of meditation, but also can detect enduring changes in brain activity



months after a prolonged course of meditation.

The Richard Davidson- Jon Kabat-Zinn study involved a group of stressed-out volunteers of a high-technology firm in Madison, who were tested with electroencephalographs in which electrodes were placed on the scalp to collect brain wave information. The volunteers were then separated into two groups – a meditation and a non-meditation control group. The meditators were given an eight-week course on meditation by an expert in meditation, Kabat-Zinn. At the end of the eight weeks, both meditators and controls were again tested with electroencephalographs and a flu shot. They also got blood tests to check for antibody response. Four months later, all got electroencephalographs again.

## **Results of the Study**

At the end of the study the meditators brains showed a pronounced shift toward the left frontal lobe while the non-meditators brains did not. Each person has a baseline frontal cortex activity level that is characteristically tipped left or right, and around which daily fluctuations of mood swirl. In people who are stressed, anxious or depressed, the right frontal cortex of the brain is overactive and the left frontal cortex under active. Such people sometimes show heightened activation of the amygdala, a key centre in the brain for processing fear. On the other hand, people who are habitually calm and happy typically show greater activity in the left frontal cortex. They produce less of the stress hormone cortisol, recover faster from negative events and have higher levels of certain immune cells.

## **Meditation Reshapes the Brain**

This study using sophisticated imaging techniques suggested that meditation could actually reset, train and reshape the brain. Richard Davidson used brain imaging to show that meditation shifts activity in the prefrontal cortex (right behind our foreheads) from the right hemisphere to the left. His research suggests that by meditating regularly the brain is reoriented from a stressful fight-or-flight mode to one of acceptance, a shift that increases contentment. People who have a negative disposition tend to be right prefrontal oriented as opposed to left pre-frontals who have more positive emotions, self control, enthusiasm, more interests, relax more and tend to be happier.

## **Positive Impacts Of Regular Meditation**

Areas of the brain associated with good mood and positive feelings are more active among Buddhists who practice meditation. Those who meditate regularly are less likely to be angry, shocked, surprised or confused as compared to other people. Scientists have announced that experiments suggest that Buddhists, who try to focus on achieving inner peace, really did seem to enjoy life more.

For decades scientific research in the USA has focused on the short-term effects of meditation on the nervous system, finding that meditation reduces stress. This was followed by Professor Herbert Benson's research related to meditation. Several medical studies on meditation have shown that it helps to lower blood pressure, heart rate and respiration. It reduces anxiety, anger, hostility and mild to moderate depression. It helps to alleviate

insomnia, premenstrual syndrome, hot flashes and infertility. It relieves some types of pain, most notably tension headaches.

## **Impacts on the Immune System**

Also, studies have shown that meditation leads to significant improvement in the immune system. Women who meditate have a higher level of the immune cells known to combat tumors in the breast. Meditation can significantly reduce blood pressure, stress and depression. Meditation along with dieting and yoga helps to reverse the build-up of plaque in coronary arteries. The most recent finding is that meditation slows prostate cancer.

Studies show that meditation is boosting the immune system and helps to reduce stress. Ten million American adults practice meditation regularly, twice as many as a decade ago. Meditation classes are very popular among mainstream Americans.

## **Depression and Other Mental Disorders**

Meditation is being used to restore balance in the face of such psychiatric disturbances as depression, hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder. Scientists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who have studied the links between a person's psychological state and his/her immune response have shown that depression does not just make people feel bad mentally, it can leave them vulnerable to physical illness too.

Depression is rivaling heart disease and cancer for the toll they are taking on Canadian lives. New figures from 2003, released by Statistics Canada show that one in ten Canadians aged 15 or older, or about 2.6 million reported symptoms of mental illness – depression, mania disorder, panic disorder, social phobia and agoraphobia and 1.1 million (42%) of those were not able to get appropriate care. The latter includes mostly teenagers and young adults. It is estimated that depression and other mental disorders are already responsible for nearly \$5 billion of direct health care costs. The Canadian Mental Health Association and Health Canada released a report on Mental Illness in Canada in October 2002, showing that one in five Canadians will personally experience a mental illness during their lifetime.

## **Alleviating Depression**

Although drugs have treated depression in many people, the precise causes and controls for the disorder remain elusive. Often patients must go through a trial and error period before the appropriate treatment is identified. Meditation has helped to alleviate depression, stress and related ailments in millions of people. Being free, portable and not having any harmful side effects, meditation is strongly and freely recommended by physicians for those suffering from, or prone to depression and stress.

## **Coping with Stress**

Modern life frequently results in on-going stressful situations. Psychological pressures such as relationship problems, loneliness and financial worries that can lead to chronic stress. Physical illness, especially chronic conditions is another common source of stress. Long-term stress can lead to physical or psychological

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damage to the body. People under a great deal of stress are likely to have high blood pressure, which can increase the risk of coronary artery disease or stroke. Chronic stress causes the immune system to become less effective leaving the person more vulnerable to colds, flus and digestive problems.

### **Efficacy of Meditation**

Studies show that between 60% and 90% of all physician visits are for stress-related complaints. The efficacy of meditation practices has been proven in the treatment of stress and ailments caused by or made worse by stress. Regular meditation practice has helped millions of men and women in the USA to reduce the stress that can cause or exacerbate conditions such as: Joint Pain, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Hypertension, Repetitive strain injury, Cardiac disorders, Chronic pain, Infertility, Migraine headaches, Diabetes, Perimenopause/menopause, and Gastrointestinal disorders.

### **An Extraordinary Symposium**

“Investigating the Mind” was the theme of an extraordinary symposium held at the MIT Cambridge, USA on September 13 and 14th, 2003. This was a meeting of some of North America’s leading neuroscientists, behavioural scientists, Buddhist scholar-practitioners and the Dalai Lama of Tibet. This was an exchange between Buddhism and Biobehavioural Science. It was co-sponsored by the McGovern Institute at MIT and the Mind and Life Institute, of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.

Buddhism has refined meditation methods in order to probe the nature of mind, using the mind itself as the instrument of investigation. It is only in recent years that scientists in fields such as psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience and medical science have begun to show interest in this vast field of Buddhist knowledge. Today, biobehavioural scientists in increasing numbers are extending their methods and expanding their conceptual frameworks realizing the complementary nature of the two approaches.

Among the speakers and panelists were outstanding Buddhist practitioners and university professors from universities such as MIT, Princeton, Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, UCLA, Michigan, Carnegie Mellon, Pittsburgh, Wisconsin Madison, Virginia, Cambridge UK, Oregon, UC Berkeley, and Canada’s York University.

The many collaborative research programs that are being conducted in universities in the West will facilitate the continued close interaction between Buddhism and science to have a lasting contribution to humanity. Look for the results of these studies to be published in prominent peer-reviewed scientific journals.

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*We would like to thank Mrs. Sheila Ng  
as an Honourary Patron.*

*Her support is greatly appreciated.*

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enlightenment of the Buddha and His teachings, to experience this himself/herself. It must be noted that before the passing away of the Buddha (Nibbana), He never said to believe in Him, His name or to worship Him or His image. He said to understand the Dhamma and to observe the precepts as a guide to learn more about oneself and to understand the causes of suffering.

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