

Guest Contributors with Reflections on
Seeds of Compassion
Community Gathering with His Holiness the Dalai Lama
April 11-15, Seattle, Washington
Daniel J. Siegel, MD and Debra Pearce-McCall, PhD



Reflections on "Seeds"

The "Seeds of Compassion" five-day event in Seattle in April taught so many things. We are at the beginning of a movement in our global community in which awakening our minds to the importance of compassion is essential to our own survival as a human family. One perspective that emerged from The Dalai Lama's responses to the scientists' panel was the notion that there are two forms of compassion. The first form is that of a "biased and limited" compassion in which we care about those nearest to us. This form is what we can call a direct form of compassion that can be seen to grow from our relationships early in life and continues to support attuned, empathic connections with those within our circle of compassion.

The second form of compassion is what The Dalai Lama called an "unbiased and unlimited" form, a concern for others beyond those we know. We can call this an extended form of compassion that enables us to "widen our circles of compassion," as Albert Einstein suggested, as we dissolve the "optical delusion" of our separateness. This extended form of compassion does not emerge naturally in most people from secure attachment relationships as the first limited or direct form does. Instead, to achieve this widening of our circles of compassion we achieve an extended form by way of training the mind. Though His Holiness in the Seeds event refrained from pushing his own form of mind training--meditation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, saying that that was "confidential" and "private" (and then chuckling that contagious laugh of his), such mental training may overlap with the notion of mindful awareness practices, or MAPs as we call them at the Mindful Awareness Research Center (www.MARC.ucla.edu). Training the mind in mindfulness is a form of reflective skill building that can involve a wide array of MAPs. In sum, we can suggest these three R's of compassion: Relationships build the first direct form of compassion; Reflection is necessary to acquire the extended form of compassion. Both relationships and reflection are necessary to build resilience--for the individual, families, communities, and, perhaps, for our planet.

Daniel J. Siegel, MD