



A Personal Journey of Discovery and Inspiration

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In the months preceding the Seeds event, Debra worked tirelessly to secure press credentials on behalf of our small publication so we could savor the experience together.

April 10, 2008

Driving to Seattle to attend the opening days of the Seeds of Compassion (SoC) event as the press representative for GAINS, my thoughts wander and wonder. Daniel J. Siegel, Andrew Meltzoff, Alicia Lieberman, and Richard Davidson, with Daniel Goleman moderating, will be engaging in public dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, addressing the scientific basis of compassion. Science and compassion, intellect and heart, this merging of the human realms of inquiry and reflection/connection, of two formative ways of knowing and two aspects of wisdom, is a synthesis that brings hope and possibility, warming my heart and exciting my mind.

This unique gathering and the widespread interest in serious efforts to cultivate compassion would not be possible without the years of cultural and informational change that have led to many of us experiencing personal and professional worldview shifts as we realized the dialectical, systemic nature of our nature/nurture. This interactive view, rediscovered throughout eons of human thought, is only recently amenable to scientific analysis. In interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB), we bring this philosophical understanding together with the consilient findings from neuroscience, relationship and developmental sciences, complexity and consciousness studies, into rich application when we address the triangle of well-being, the forms of integration, and the process of resilience.

After three hours of freeway driving, with rush hour and Seattle approaching, I consider how true, sustainable compassion requires that felt synthesis of “we,” often minimally evident when we humans surround and empower ourselves with metal and engines on wheels and the feeling we have somewhere else we need to be.

What is happening when we have the felt sense of

interconnection, the energized awareness of interdependence that forms the fertile ground for seeds of compassion? In IPNB, we view these states of well-being as emerging from the way attuned relationships, a coherent mind, and an integrated brain/body foster one another within and between people. These are supported and maintained, in part, by numerous forms of integrative process, whether viewed at the level of self, relationships, or human groups. In this integrative state, we more easily develop and experience mindsight, combining empathy and insight to know others through knowing ourselves (Siegel, 2001, 2006, 2007). Often, the way mindsight links us becomes the impetus for compassionate action. The SoC events show us that this call for change is being heard in all human endeavors – over five days, the Dalai Lama will be on panels with experts focusing on science and application, children and youth, spirituality, business, public policy, and philanthropy. My left-mode cognition continues anticipating and storying, while my heart and emotion circuitry feel glad.

Once settled, I set out for the SoC press preview event, a few interesting blocks away from my hotel. Glancing at the media release I received with my press pass for GAINS, I smile at my sense of connection, a visceral warming, as I silently agree and resonate with their mission “to nurture kindness and compassion in the world, starting with children and all those who touch their lives.”

As a parent and infant walk by, I notice my small ripple of delight during a moment of gaze/smile/connect with this young being, and I think about how scientists are finding neurobiologically observable changes when adults relate to babies. An initial amygdala alarm response to cries can become a self-regulating

middle prefrontal response with experience; the subtle current of oxytocin and dopamine may ebb and flow with various attachment styles (for a review of this research, see Swain, Lorberbaum, Kose, & Strathearn, 2007). Research suggests that for many people, their medial orbitofrontal region lights up at the sight of a baby's face (Kringelbach et al, 2008). I wonder about differences among those, parents or not, who have none of this attraction to human babies, and about those who, naturally or with time, experience, and healing, begin to feel this for their own circle of babies, or those who come to delight in all babies.

As I approach, the police presence indicates this grand hotel is where the Dalai Lama must be staying. I walk slowly to the end of the block and back to the entrance, observing their watching. I am aware of the juxtaposition of a life spent in private reflection and public commitment to compassion and peace, and the global turmoil and controversy surrounding his existence and his country, resulting in this need for secret service and armed protection. My senses sharpen, perhaps mirroring some of their ready state, as I stride into the building.

The press meeting is an immersion in the traveling show of journalism: press packets, passes, meeting, greeting, social strata established immediately by the hierarchy of media outlet and length of camera lens. We get numbers: 1,500 volunteers, 150,000 anticipated attendees, over 14,000 children from 443 classrooms studying compassion and attending a Monday event, 40,000 tickets distributed through 186 community organizations. We meet key people, including social innovator and philanthropist Dan Kranzler, founder (with his family) of the Kirlin Charitable Foundation, and co-founder of Seeds of Compassion. We learn that this effort grew from a moment in a 2005 conference with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, where Dan met the Venerable Lama Tenzin Dhonden, the Personal Emissary of Peace for the Dalai Lama, and asked – what if we had a program focused on developing compassion in children? Over months, that idea evolved into these five days of education, discussion, community, and the arts – the start of an ongoing collaboration and commitment among people and organizations who

focus on compassion. In fact, the Dalai Lama has requested follow-up reports over the next year, and many hope this will be the start of a global initiative.

We hear main points: this is a community-engaging event, reaching across the state; tickets were distributed free; many events will be available live and archived as web broadcasts (in 24 languages); and the core message is resonating with practitioners, scientists, policy makers, philanthropists, educators, parents, and children. We are asked to spread the word that the science is clear: we must proactively protect our human future by awakening compassion, by honoring children, by attending to our need for warm relationship, and by nurturing growing brains and allowing tender hearts to stay open to caring action. If we are local broadcasters, we are asked to remind people the traffic tomorrow will be heavy, and mass transportation is encouraged.

Finished with my field reporter duties, I engage in my customary new location activity - I explore - taking my open time to walk the city streets, perusing the territory and the people. Satisfying my seeking system helps my brain build a map of place and space, and of the city's rhythms, which brings a feeling of increased familiarity and safety.

Soon I reach an emptying Pike's Place, fish markets and stores closing at dusk, while those seeking solace in something to numb their night on the streets are quickly replacing early season tourists and regulars. My muscles tighten - not much sense of "we" here for me, and my unease and distrust ignites flight as I scan my surrounds, and turn away, back to the safety of my hotel. Any safe sense of seeking and play has been overwhelmed for now by some fear (not yet panic), and I consider Panksepp's work and how helpful I find it to imagine these various system-states ebbing and flowing in me (see, for example, Panksepp, 2006). If I struggled for survival, how often could I shift into care, play, and seeking? Feeling calm and more caring over dinner, I can reflect on the internal tensions between me and s/he, us and them, safe and not safe. I'm aware of this often when I encounter people begging and experience emotional turmoil while deciding, each

time, whether to offer something (usually food), give simple acknowledgment (eye contact, greeting), or (inhumanely? for safety?) ignore them. These people living on the streets and in the woods, this small enactment in urban America representing hundreds of thousands around the planet who struggle for daily survival: is developing compassion something they get to

April 11, 2008

Awake early, I'm "on alert," making sure I get under way to the morning event; they've predicted serious traffic and I want to be on time. As I wait for a taxi, I am surprised to see a big bus pull up displaying the SoC logo – a heart in a lotus. My brain quickly pattern-matches this symbol (already associated with positive feelings) and so I approach the bus. The friendly driver greets me and I welcome this alternative to a cab. Soon the shuttle departs with only a handful of passengers.

Delightful conversations quickly begin: my seatmate is Linda Lantieri, known for her pioneering work in conflict education and social/emotional learning. We discuss her new book about building emotional intelligence in children, and secular ways to teach compassion and mindful awareness that welcome all spiritual and religious belief systems. She introduces me to her friend sitting near us, Sharon Salzberg, meditation elder, teacher, and author, and cofounder of the Insight Meditation Society. Amazingly, SoC has gathered dozens of teachers like these, all offering free workshops spread over several days, a rich assortment of reflective, expressive, and relational practices. The ride to the University of Washington campus is a joyful start to my day. I reflect on the shifts in my body and state of mind, from the tight hurry of catching a cab alone and getting to an unknown destination, to the relaxed and grounded gratitude I now feel, after connecting with these wise women. With my oxytocin increased from these trusting interactions, and my deep midbrain further activated with dopamine and the sense of reward that oxytocin triggered for release, I am open to more relating, empathy, and generosity (Zak, 2008). As my mind, brain, and body move toward the arena, receptive and curious, breathing in blue sky and

consider? I take another bite and realize that enjoying a good meal and accepting the state of humanity involves a duality of experiencing (dialectics again), and wonder about how others struggle with resolving the balance of giving/receiving and their place on the money and resource chain.

blossoms, my neurobiology and my consciousness are calmly and happily open to the moment-to-moment unfolding of the day.

Being allowed in the press entrance, having a press pass, covering this important event for GAINS – my neural systems get involved in processing social status and reward, which brain research is now suggesting we process similarly to monetary rewards, fire away with a zing! The press section has an excellent view of the stage, which is set simply with a lectern, chairs, the Dalai Lama's special maroon chair, and a SoC backdrop. I spend the waiting time connecting with some others seated in the press section, and reflect on how I learned early to respond to social uncertainty with social engagement strategies.

After several dignitaries give introductory comments, the Dalai Lama speaks, focusing on how understanding emotions is central to personal well-being, but more essentially is the key to solving the species-threatening problems of our world, as these problems are mainly the result of ignorance and negative emotions like anger, hatred, and jealousy. He says simply - we must teach children about the health of their minds.

After introductions and some video, the panelists begin. Each has been asked to relate a story about a time that transformed their work, followed by an opportunity for some spontaneous dialogue with the Dalai Lama. I'm glad the entire discussion will be available online through the SoC website (www.seedsofcompassion.org), so I can see it again. Some of my favorite moments are:

- Andrew Meltzoff, whose powerful research done in a nursery-based lab was the first to document the

responsiveness of infants (within minutes of birth, human babies imitate gestures and have a sense of relationship or similarity), recounts that years later, after the birth of his own child, in that same hospital, he felt with the first deep gaze how his baby would transform him.

- Richard Davidson talks about his classic research, how when he first saw evidence documenting a dramatic brain activity shift when an experienced meditator began compassion meditation, he thought the equipment must be faulty, or the data an artifact. He says he tested many practitioners before feeling sure of the findings.

- Alicia Lieberman tells a story about how understanding changed the fate of a young boy who had been expelled from daycare, illustrating the connection between hurt and fear and aggression. From this, she learned to focus her work on healing cycles of violence for children by also helping parents connect to their own experiences, so they can then feel and teach compassion to their children.

- Dan Siegel shares the hand model of the brain and the nine functions of the medial prefrontal cortex within a tapestry of story and IPNB

essentials. He then asks what I believe is the key question for many of us: “Especially under threat, what can we do to awaken people out of this automatic reaction where we shut down the very circuits of seeing the mind, of what you could call mindsight...that are essential for compassion?”

- The Dalai Lama’s response is about two forms of compassion - one natural, biological, and limited; and the other, which develops with intelligence, right view, education, experience, environment, and can be expanded beyond those we love, or who we see as like us, to our enemies, to all sentient beings, ultimately unlimited in its scope (discussed further in the reflections from Dan Siegel that precede this article). Looking at the panel, he notes that the promotion of human value will require the continuing contributions of scientists, that religion has not been sufficient.

- The refreshing experience of a panel of famous scientists and a Nobel Peace Prize recipient sharing illustrative moments from their personal relationships as part of a public presentation provides a powerful commentary about human evolution through the valuing and integrating of all kinds of knowing.

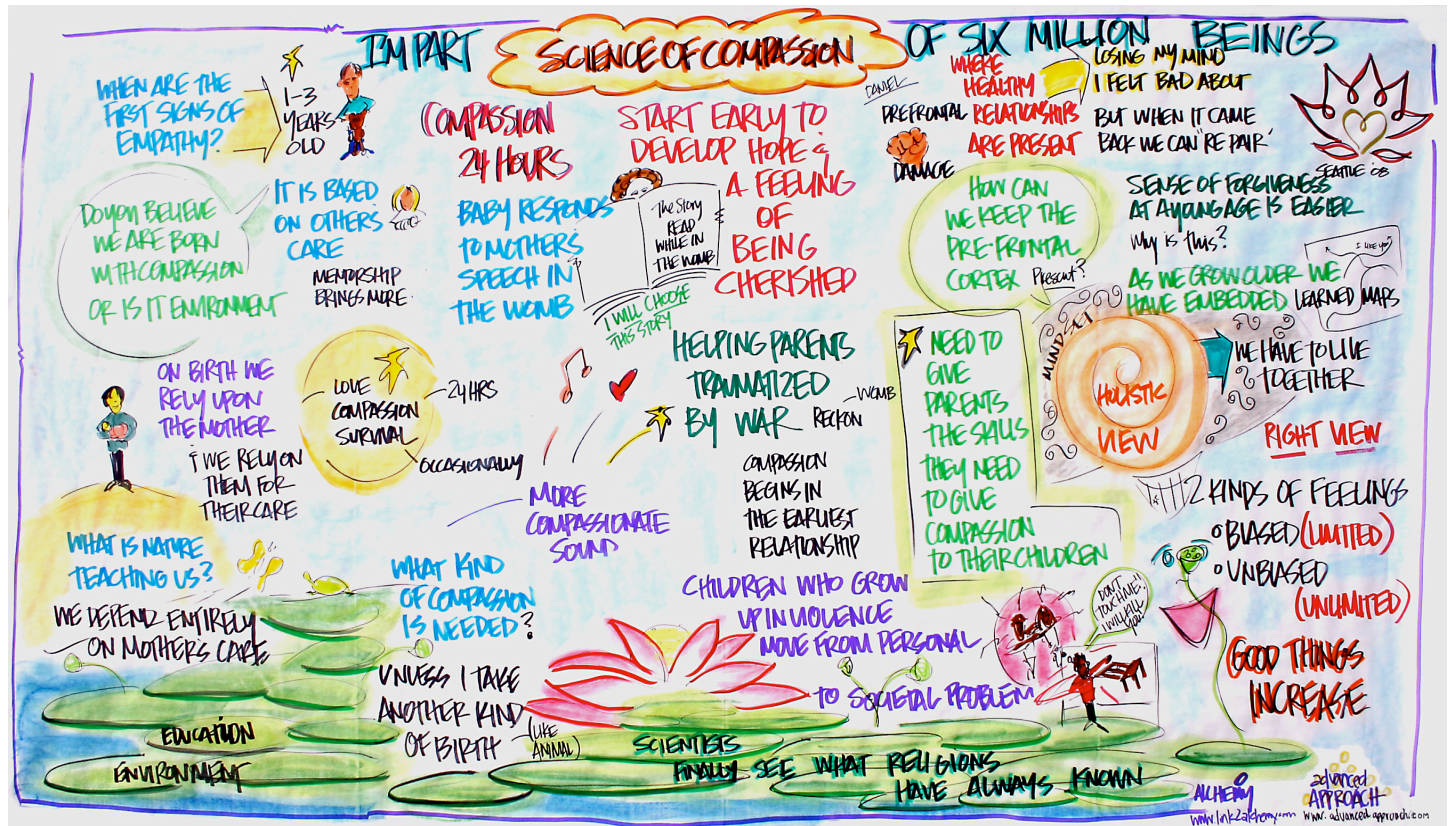


Across the arena, people are drawing on large papers taped to the wall. Later, at the end of the afternoon panel, I pass someone rolling up one large drawing and find out about “graphic recording,” a delightfully right-hemisphere-friendly approach to synthesizing the message of a meeting. These will be posted on the SoC website. Think about the arc of communication and

civilization, about our motivation to preserve our uniquely human ideas, from cave drawings to written language to printing presses to these hand-drawn graphic records preserved in digital files. Think about the dialectic of all the knowledge we need to preserve outside ourselves, more than any mind could hold, to continue our civilizations. Yet, the most primal knowledge of trust, survival, and

love is learned between us, moment by moment,

and often without words.



April 12, 2008

The public event at Qwest field will be crowded and I've been given a "press entry deadline," so today I am the sole rider on the bus, and sit up front talking with the driver. Other early arrivals include performers with puppets strapped to their cars, volunteers, and vendors. Following instructions (calms uncertainty), I report to the press door on time and wait as the pros slowly arrive. I enjoy the focus-softening view over rooftops to the shades of blue water and sky beyond. This warm, sunny weather, a rare spring treat in the northwest, stirs implicit memories of renewal and creative energy. I notice again the folks from the NY Times, Reuters, and major media sources, and how this event appears to be just another day on the job for some of them. Clearly, this was not the case last night, when Ann Curry interviewed the Dalai Lama, and the musician, Dave Matthews. Her engagement in her journalism and her presence in her interviews make her one of our most compelling newscasters. I am

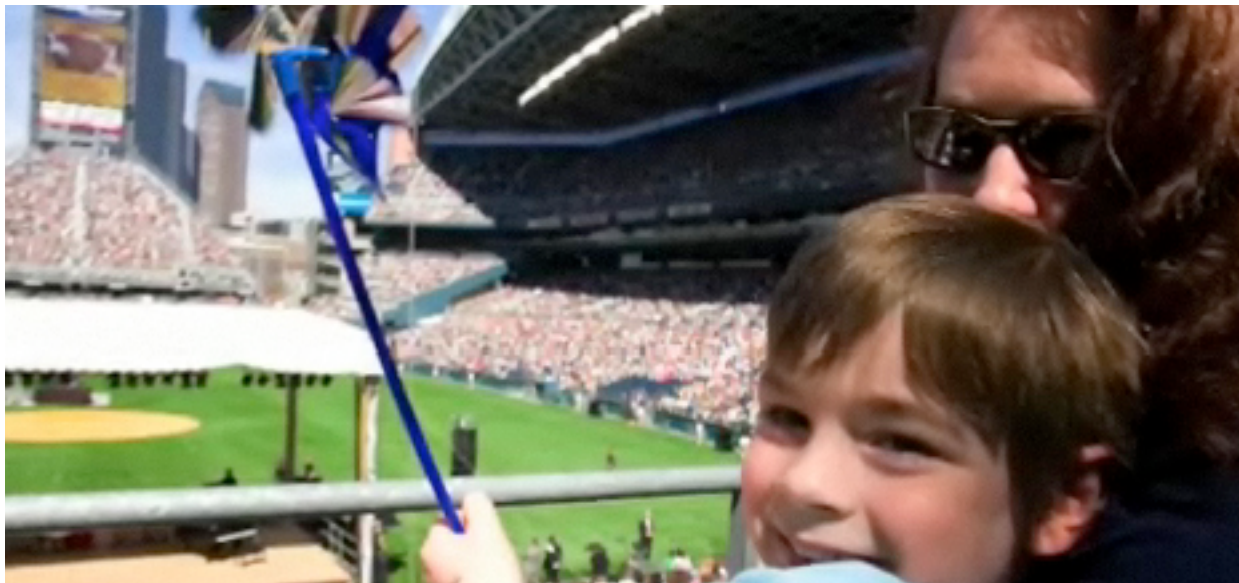
joined by a woman I met in the press section yesterday, Corey Heller, who shares her excitement about writing about SoC in the magazine at her resource-filled site for bicultural families (<http://www.biculturalfamily.org/>). We connect with a friendly familiarity as we wait until we are finally admitted, searched, and led to the press section.

Once I know where to sit, I am up and exploring. The stadium has transformed into a small village of compassion, with booths from more than 60 organizations, some with uplifting names like Project Happiness, Art with Heart, or Giraffe Heroes, and all chosen for the outstanding work they do to help children, families, and communities. I marvel at the intricate parade of puppets passing through the halls, colorful multi-personations making circuits, connecting the crowd. People are invited to participate: write about compassion on cards (selected quotes will be

used in a slide show later today); receive a symbolic bracelet to be braided and tied on as part of the ceremonies. Booths offer activities and information, and some give items to keep, like a bookmark imprinted with parenting ideas. Returning to the press section, I sit with Cory and discuss how it feels when “non-press” people come into our section. How basic is our experience of that us/them division! As there is plenty of room, we can easily move past this, and I reflect on how hard that becomes with limited resources. I find out a woman near us, Suzanne Kryder, hosts a radio show called Peace Talks and is hoping to do a show featuring Dan Siegel and Richard Davidson, and we feel our excitement surge as I share some IPNB ideas with her. (Visit <http://www.goodradioshows.org/peaceTalksL61.htm> to hear this interview).

As the program begins, I am immersed in experience: movement meditation, music, a

procession of over 1,000 costumed people representing 40 cultures; then, a young violinist playing so beautifully; compelling videos and speeches with children voicing compassion intentions; and speakers, including Washington’s Governor Gregoire. Then, His Holiness the Dalai Lama addresses the attentive crowd. As I listen for the third time in two days, similar themes surface, but I am struck most by the simplicity of his wisdom, the lightheartedness of his seriousness, the power of his humility, and the joy and presence he emanates in a timeless way. I think about the neuroscience findings examining the brain structures and processes of highly experienced meditators, physiological corroboration of their expanded compassion and emotional regulation (for example, Lazar et al., 2005; Lutz, Brefczynski-Lewis, Johnstone, & Davidson, 2008). I wonder what forms of emotional resonance and co-regulation might occur in the presence of these extraordinarily practiced minds.



The Dalai Lama offers more about the two levels of compassion. He envisions that we have begun the “century of dialogue,” an antidote to escalating conflicts, stating that in today’s world, we/they can no longer exist. Bursts of applause punctuate his statements that we need women leaders to counter our “man-made problems” and that “the concept of war is outdated.” He calls for the elimination of all nuclear weapons, as well as inner disarmament of the negative emotions that block our compassion.

He emphasizes that this expanded form of secular, cultivatable, active compassion does not happen by simply meditating upon it, nor through prayer, that it can’t be bought or prescribed - it occurs through relationship, perspective, determination, and practice. To finish the event, a few questions selected from those submitted via the SoC website are asked. They may echo yours as they did mine: How can we change the mindset of our leaders from domination and violence to nonviolence and

compassion? How do we remain hopeful? How do we turn empathy into compassionate action? The Dalai Lama responds with humor and wisdom, reminding us the world may seem worse, but is also better than ever, as we are making commonplace these pivotal ways of being - educating ourselves and our children about compassion, and bringing a sensitive, caring ethic

April 14, 2008

At home, my mind returns to Seattle, where a panoply of free, public workshops are being offered on topics relevant to mindful practice, parenting, education, making a difference, growing compassion. I want to feel part of the continuing events, so I watch the main Children and Youth Day event online. This program is an outstanding one, with an audience of over 15,000 children, teachers, and chaperones, bused to Seattle for a day of sharing, performance, resources, and learning. Eduardo Mendonça, a percussionist and musician from Brazil, leads us in an interactive piece where we use our own heartbeats to generate rhythm together. Neuroscience investigations of music are showing that “the enhanced functional and effective connectivity between brain regions mediating reward, autonomic, and cognitive processing provides insight into understanding why listening to music is one of the most rewarding and pleasurable human experiences” (Menon & Levitin, 2005, p. 175). And when we combine that internal integration with the interpersonal attunement of a co-attending audience and a

into leadership. Taken together, these can profoundly alter the path of human experience. All too soon, my time at SoC is over and I’m on the road again. Sad I need to depart, I become aware that during the first hour of my drive, a hope keeps surfacing as my eyes glance into the next car – the hope that I will catch a glimpse of a SoC t-shirt or friendship bracelet in another vehicle, as if to carry the community with me.

charismatic leader/entertainer - this becomes totally entraining and I feel connected - through my computer - to an arena full of people. (Our minds truly are incredible.) The eloquent moderator is Raj Manhas, Executive Director of Seeds of Compassion, and former superintendent of Seattle Public Schools.

We are gifted with several powerful creative performances that provide inspiration and integration – Righteous Rainbow children’s choir, Laura “Piece” Kelley - poet and spoken word artist, multitalented Native American storyteller Gene Tagaban. Ishmael Beah - author of *A LONG WAY GONE: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. Beah relates how loving people helped him heal and transcend a horrific, violent, loss-filled childhood to know true connection, deep empathy, and a profound commitment to help humanity. Official SoC “youth ambassadors,” who have taken on leadership roles in bringing this initiative to their schools and their communities, offer a lyrical, rhythmic group message.



*Sand Mandala
coincidentally created
by Tibetan monks in
Everett, Washington, on
April 12th*

The Dalai Lama stands and speaks to all the children, at length, about compassion, about the need for warm-heartedness to be a secular value. He shares with them how their generation can grow and sow these seeds, fostering the affection, respect, and responsibility to act that embody compassion, recognizing this as the key factor in good health and harmonious societies. He says that this will allow us to balance our science and technology with inner valuing and treasuring of humans and our global interconnectedness. I wonder how many of the children present will form a powerful, nodal memory of this, so that the resonant ripples of compassion will indeed become a theme in their lives. Many of these children studied and reflected on compassion before the

event, and have made action commitments as part of it, increasing the possibilities. (The compassion curriculum developed for Washington's classrooms, and many other resources, are freely available for download through the SoC website.) I mind-time travel back to elementary school, when I chose "the mind" as my first research paper topic, feeling how that has spiraled through my relationships, passions, and life's work, and I think about the spirals being generated by SoC. I would have loved being a child or adolescent at this event, as I watch through eyes of many ages. The Dalai Lama is visibly delighted, amused, entertained, and grateful for this celebration of compassion and children.



More days and events remain – the Dalai Lama meets publicly with business leaders and philanthropists, and with religious and spiritual leaders, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The multiple mediums used to create SoC events illustrate the many ways humans have evolved to promote connection and reflection: the expressive arts (music, dance, storytelling, drawing), contemplation and inquiry, dialogue, humor, information, technology, intentionality, community. The messages, powerful and simple, are the kind that, if enacted globally, could save our world. Many of us are involved in work intentionally promoting compassion, through encouraging safer and healthier brain/bodies; expanding awareness, empathy, and healthy

interdependence; facilitating justice, respect, and attunement in relationships. Some of the most recent research investigating those who practice compassion meditation suggests "cultivating the intent to be compassionate and kind can enhance empathic responses to social stimuli" in measurable neural responses (Lutz et al, 2008). One recent study showed that our motivational state (in this study, hunger) influences the extent of mirror neuron activity (Cheng, Meltzoff, & Decety, 2007), while another investigated the neural systems involved in learning fear by observing others (Ollson, Nearing, & Phelps, 2007). Mirror neuron expert, Marco Iacoboni, closes his recent book, *Mirroring People*, with a description of his "existential neuroscience" view, convinced that

recent research clearly shows we are “wired for empathy” (Iacoboni, 2008, p. 268).

So – what do we do to develop these capacities, to build societies and circumstances where people retain their basic, in-born compassion and have opportunities to build that into far-reaching compassion, where we lead with love instead of fear? The Dalai Lama and others hoping to turn humanity toward peace are writing and speaking about the imperative need to make this learning part of our societies. Many practices lead in this direction, with effectiveness increased by embracing the power of relationship, mind, and brain/body. SoC brought together a wealth of community programs, teachers, healers, and artists who are exemplifying this in their lives. Self-awareness and compassion, and the deep felt sense of connection to all, the synthesis of the dichotomy

of self/other into what Dan Siegel has termed “the neurobiology of we,” can be grown in a multitude of ways. My experience teaching IPNB to practitioners of the healing arts and sciences, education, and leadership, is that they all find some of their field’s “best-practices” are richly illuminated and extended by considering concepts like the triangle of well-being and the nine forms of integration. IPNB principles give us a multilevel framework for grounding ourselves in scientific and subjective knowledge as we build more pathways, programs, and policies that promote coherence, integration, and compassion in our selves and our world.

A peaceful planet is possible. At the end of a message about world peace, the Dalai Lama expresses unlimited compassion like this:



*Whenever I meet even a ‘foreigner,’
I have always the same feeling:
‘I am meeting another member of the
human family.’
This attitude has deepened
my affection and respect for all beings.
May this natural wish be
my small contribution to world peace.
I pray for a more friendly,
more caring, and more understanding
human family on this planet.
To all who dislike suffering,
who cherish lasting happiness -
this is my heartfelt appeal.*

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Debra Pearce-McCall, PhD, LP, LMFT delights in the interdisciplinary, integrative, emergent, and hopeful perspective of IPNB, and enjoys applying it every day. A charter member of GAINS, Debra serves on the board and happily assists in editing the Quarterly. She maintains a private clinical practice in Portland, Oregon, and works with couples, adults, and adolescents, as well as providing supervision and executive/organizational consultation. She helped develop and is an adjunct professor in the IPNB certificate program at Portland State University. You can reach Debra via email at dpearcemccall@gmail.com.

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