

Spirituality

The Spirituality of Peace operates in conjunction with our biology. “We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves.” *Dalai Lama*

Intrapersonal Peace is “tuned in” by the prefrontal cortex (PFC). The PFC directs attention and interprets phenomena to engage brain waves, neurotransmitters and brain locations to experience a clear “signal” of Peace. Peace is experienced throughout the body as calm and as pleasurable.

Peace can be activated in many varied ways. Thoughts of gratitude, compassion, empathy, love and other self perpetuated thinking activate the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC). The ACC is an area activated in mindful prayer. Bonding is another experience for Peace and activates the neurotransmitter oxytocin.

The contemplation of a loving Creator provides a sense of security and engages the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) which provides calm throughout our body. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled.” (John 14: 27).

The “Singularity” which encompasses our Peace and that of others is Love. The expression of our Creator’s wish for us is Peace in all its capacities including the synergy between intrapersonal Peace and interpersonal Peace.

Recommended Readings

How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist. Andrew Newberg, M.D. and Mark Robert Waldman.

The neuroscience of the brain as it relates to faith is examined. The authors describe how the brain operates during prayer, meditation and other exercise related to communing with God and the impact it has on living.

Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love and Wisdom. Rick Hanson, Ph.D. and Richard Mendius, M.D.

This book is a non-denominational text by a neuropsychologist who has studied meditation and mindfulness. This is a very easy read. It includes exercises and the neuroscience behind the exercises.

The Neuropsychology of Grace: Awakening the Brain. Charlotte A Tomaino, Ph.D

Dr. Tomaino is a neuropsychologist in practice and a former Maryknoll Nun. Her clinical and research base along with the graphics makes this very good reading.

My Gray Matters

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Introduction

The word Peace connotes many different concepts, such as World Peace, Peaceful Coexistence, Non-Violence, and maybe just calm in a chaotic household. The Peace that will be discussed is personal Peace, which is reflected in calm, a lack of stress and a healthy quality of life.



I don't think it would surprise anyone that experiences we all have are represented and executed with the biology with which we were born. The feeling of Peace is no different. There is a physiology to Peace in the autonomic nervous system as well as

specific brain waves and locations in our neurology.



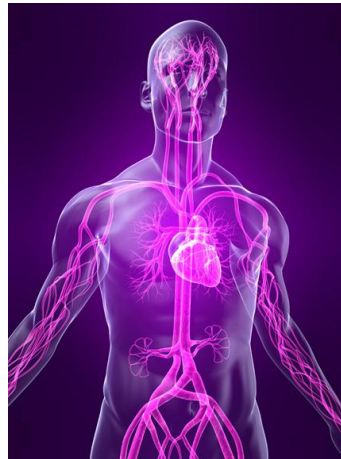
The following narratives will discuss the physiology, neurology and spirituality of personal Peace. The texts will integrate the three

areas along with suggestions on how to access personal Peace.

Physiology

There are two facets of the autonomic nervous system that control the mental states in which we live. Simply stated, if we feel threatened or stressed we are operating in the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS). The SNS dictates the states of the majority of our internal organs as well as our external physiological expression (muscles, eyes, skin etc.). The SNS at its extreme expresses the fight/freeze/fight response. SNS is the autonomic nervous system of quick action, short term. The SNS is the autonomic nervous system that helps us survive lethal situations. Our species will default to the SNS under real or even perceived threat. If our brain tells us we are under threat the reality of the threat is irrelevant; we will default to the SNS. Perceived threat is called "stress." The SNS with "stress" is the underpinnings for most of the deaths (heart attack, stroke etc.) of our species.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) influences the same physiology although in the exact opposite manner. PNS is the autonomic nervous system of calm. Peace can be found no where but during the expression of the PNS. Where do you spend most of your time, SNS or PNS?



Neurology

Peace begins in our brain. Even though the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is necessary, our brain's perception of threat or peace begins with our neural networks and specific locations in the brain. The brain emits alpha and theta waves during mindful meditation along with activating the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), prefrontal cortex (PFC) and cerebral areas related to attention (Psychological Medicine, 2009). The ACC functioning is activated during experiences of gratitude, empathy, and compassion which relates us to others in a peaceful manner.

The PFC is sometimes referred to as the executive part of our brain. The PFC connects through neural networks to all parts of our brain. It evaluates threat, plans for the future, inhibits anger, calibrates attention, makes decisions and a vast array of other functions. If the PFC begins to initiate the alpha and theta waves which produce calm, engaging the PNS and activation of the ACC Peace follows.

Peace is a decision. Attention can be trained to focus on Peace (calm). Peace initiates the PNS and promotes health throughout our physiology as well as our mental state. The most important part of this scenario is the PFC can initiate the Peaceful process by focusing attention to thoughts and stimuli that promote Peace.

