

The usual method is to create large synthetic patterns in the brain through attention to planned activities that are largely repetitions. This virtually insures that the memory and the operational controls in the cerebellum are becoming linked. There will eventually be enough associative neural networking to trigger a hormonal response. Since adrenaline release will speed up parts of the brain while intense repetition will exhaust other parts, if we keep both of them up long enough, comparative perception will occasionally short out as input-output faults begin to appear at various levels of the cortical structure.

Eventually, mindful repetition of any complex activity can trigger enough response for mild hormonal body highs, producing pleasant mental and emotional stimulation without either fantasy or frustration. It's not a virtual event, it's a real world experience, and the added hormonal surge greatly heightens our experiential perception. Creating such large networks takes time, however. Unless we are into Eastern meditative practices or artistic obsession, we are not by nature very good at perfect repetition. In fact the way most of us achieve these states takes advantage of combining differing brain areas simultaneously for an effective overkill. We can do this with almost any mind/body activity which requires thoughtful practice, from music to yoga, from drama to dance.

In a 2008 article in *Scientific American*, a Columbia University neuroscientist posited that synchronizing music and movement constitutes a "pleasure double play." Music stimulates the brain's reward centers, while dance activates its sensory and motor circuits. Regions of the brain that contribute to dance learning and performance include the motor cortex, somatosensory cortex, basal ganglia, and cerebellum. The motor cortex is involved in control and execution of voluntary movement. The somatosensory cortex in the mid region of the brain generates the sense of touch and plays a role in eye-hand coordination. The basal ganglia, deep in the brain, helps to smoothly coordinate movement, while the cerebellum, as expected, integrates and times input from the brain and spinal cord, fine-tuning complex actions and thoughts.

The ability of our forebrain and cerebellum to pre-plan these complex patterns of muscular movement evolved, in humans, into our unique ability to derive abstractions and predictions through sequential comparison of the patterns themselves. In the ongoing process of living, we will cross-connect all sorts of neural networks if we repeat any careful activity over and over. The constant repetition involved in the mastery of any skill occurs until we

achieve a desired level of competence, which is an image we project in our own mind. As each repetition occurs in a different time frame, a new pattern is perceived by our senses at that moment. Since mastery requires practice, this will inevitably lead to emotionally charged experiences. Unlike our mental gridlock patterns, unconscious habits we repeat and then try to justify, these are patterns that we created with conscious attention and full knowledge of what we were doing. Far from stressful, this time the feelings are usually marked with enthusiasm; a word again from the Greek - *en theos* – a feeling that God is with us and our endeavor.

This is how artists and athletes, every craftsperson and every musician, and anyone else who has experienced the personal glow of a job well done, creates those moments. When our skill and the circumstance combine in just the right way, we lose ourselves into the moment. Such moments of mild ego loss are instructive, not destructive, because they were sought purposefully. The late geneticist Barbara McClintock won her Nobel prize for discovering high-protein corn hybrids for a hungry world. For her, daily work with chromosomes was a social experience. “When I was really working with them, I wasn’t outside, I was down there, I was part of the system ... these were my friends...they become part of you. And you forget yourself. The main thing about it is you forget yourself.” What makes the experience particularly nice is that it often happens when we really are doing our best and are in the presence of friends or even admirers.

There are hours of days to go, of course, as we set up those deep patterns during days of mindful repetition. There are long hours practicing scales that miss, a dance that doesn't, the steps that slip, and the drinks that don't are all part of this patient assembly of those mental patterns that will let us lose our lives without losing ourselves. Over time, amaturism becomes expertise. The body begins to move in smooth curves of carefully controlled energy. The fingers find the frets without hesitation, the column holds, the dancer's body walks, and the energy begins to flow from within.

Someday or later, the experiences start to happen. Practice and performance are finally in tune; the puck slides into the net, the ball scores over the goalpost, and the moments all musicians know when the music takes over, occupying them into harmonies as mind and body momentarily forsake time and space in the glow we know so well. In *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes the ex-

once in a while, and why Buddhist tradition insists on lifetime of mindful practice. To even start our journey to our fulfillment we must be focused on our daily life and the pleasures we find on a moment-to-moment basis. Our attention must be in the present tense, not wandering about in our past or lost in expectations of some future fulfillment. As it happens, humans are consistently incapable in this type of self-improvement. Real blessings and a growing enlightenment can arrive in less than a few years, often when we least expect it.

If we prepare ourselves and practice diligently, fulfillment will come looking for anyone who is truly ready to accept it, and it inevitably arrives in the present tense. When traditional prayers or practices are done with any consistency, there will always come a time when the practitioner will begin to notice that the world is, for some reason, looking better and more exciting. If we feed the mind a more balanced natural diet, each well-experienced day that away creates expectations of a similar future. We can't change our chaotically woven systems of human consciousness, but we can load up the beam with good times and start to watch the patterns change. We can even darn up the holes in the networks we don't like and live here our virtual reality in the times we enjoy.

The whole purpose, of course, is to reach the point in our life where, from a Western religious perspective the Kingdom of God is at hand or when, from an Eastern perspective, we are living in the Dharma or the Tao, on our true and natural path. From a systems perspective, we would say that we acquired and uploaded some debugging apps to override some glitches in the original software, letting us reset our goals and restart our life. In reviving and maintaining a full and active involvement in the world around us, we are freed from the habitual gridlock of virtual ego and returned to an exciting, moving world with a peaceful, personal center.

Those drawn to complex ceremony and ritual rarely have time to reach out to others who do not dance in the same circle or chant the same prayers to the same God or spiritual guide. The sincere and simple paths to empowerment are there to lift us out of both past and future and rededicate us again to the present - the only place shared by us all. In finding ourselves again we are not confined to co-practitioners, we are liberated to go and involve ourselves even more fully in the world around us. The big secret, if there ever was one, is that we each have within us the ability to do it all by ourselves. There is a good reason that Jesus directed his

followers to pray in the privacy of their rooms and why the Buddha directed his students to find calm and quiet places for meditation. The practices which reach the deepest are truly self-tailored. They are not group events, they are personal, and they are precious.

Finding lasting fulfillment for a human, then, is nearly the opposite of the rat with its pleasure button. While animals drive themselves quickly to exhaustion, only a small percentage of humans are that compulsive. In fact, most of us do learn to enjoy the conscious generation of joy and happiness as a regular experience that makes life itself more vibrant. We can get excited about our art, our craft, our dance, our friends, our family, our skills, and even our mystical mental spirituality. We can all learn to live inside and outside our limits, learning about ourselves daily in a full involvement with the life we are actually living.

It's true that along with all the advantages of a fully evolved human consciousness we still experience unique problems. We slip easily into so many forms of mental mind-block, re-cycling, and repetition, not to mention finding ourselves caught in the gridlock of chronological time. On the other hand, it seems that we have developed some impressive mental retrofits and even specific applications to enhance and improve our own consciousness. This is what we've always been told, but we never really thought of it that way.

Applications? We call them "Loving," "Giving," and "Forgiving". Loving and giving keep us open and aware to the best life has to offer, leading us each into our better future. We all have enough love within us that we need never go searching. Forgiving is the permanent delete that patches the past. Prophets and teachers have been telling us this forever. Putting these words into practice, we see why the great religious leaders had so little to say about ritual. Jesus never mentions speaking in tongues, nor did Muhammed do Sufi dances. The Buddha walked with his monks teaching from town to town; he did not sit Zazen in a cave. Our guides were not telling us to give up on life, they were urging us to give ourselves out to life and to enjoy the greater community of the entire human family. This is why they speak not of power and wealth, but of simple consideration, forgiveness, generosity, and above all, compassion, love, and kindness.

These are the sorts of pleasures that only humans know anything about, and when we practice them, they bring us closer to the best of our own humanity. As natural pleasure seekers, then, we have so many ways that we can travel. There is everything from

full-blown fantasy to real self-discovery and all the stages in between. We can be angry at life's obstacles and get our excitement stressfully, or we can be enthusiastic about life's challenges and get it cheerfully. We can all find ways to make life as stimulating as we want it to be, we generally use the ways we've become accustomed to, and most of the time it works. But the careful and graduated steps to inner tranquility and personal fulfillment are also there and available to all with the will to improve and the patience to keep at it. Day by day, step by step, and moment by moment, we can update the tapestry of our own virtual perception with mindful attention to our craft, our art, our hopes, our practice, and our prayers.

With these to help us, we can re-pattern our mind for easy gladness, and make personal happiness into a habit. Our tools may be rudimentary, and heavenly experiences are still dependent on heavenly status, but we can get an entirely new outlook if we give it a try. This is one world that gives us more chances for a good time than we ever thought possible. It is, after all home of the Big Apple, Fat City, the Garden of Eden, the Kingdom of God, and we are right smack in the middle of it. In going beyond our personal, cultural, and even our conscious limitations, we have a chance to awaken to a better world that was always there for the taking, and the vision will change us forever. With a fully evolved human mind and body, we can have a better time of our lives than any other creature on this earth.

Sadly, our recent record in this area hasn't been very good. As a species, we haven't been able to do a lot of damage for very long, and yet for most of that time we've practiced exploitation, destruction, and extinction. At the same time, we have the best opportunity that we have ever had to start acting like humans for once. At the moment, our greatest challenge is saving the earth itself from the mistakes we have made. If we can cooperate in this extraordinary work and return our world to the state it was when we woke up and realized we were here, it would be the greatest monument of all, the sort of undertaking that only a united human mission could accomplish. We could all be missionaries of that faith. Now that we have available the tools to organize and work together, we can get something done. The Tower of Babel is prophetic. Can we talk?

With a task like this, for all the beauty and poetry of the multiple languages of our planet, it is perhaps our greatest blessing that we share and accept the common language of science. We can