

# Re: OT – Brain Scans Show That Buddhists Really Are Happier!

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Mozz wrote:

>

> *LONDON (Reuters) – Buddhists really are happy, calm and serene people*  
> *-- at least according to their brain scans.*

Brain scans are not very useful for evaluating emotions.

> *Using latest scanning techniques, neuroscientists have discovered that*  
> *certain areas of the brain light up constantly in Buddhists, and not*  
> *just when they are meditating, which indicates positive emotions and*  
> *good mood.*

When areas of the brain light up in a PET scan, that indicates activity and not necessarily emotions.

> *"We can now hypothesise with some confidence that those apparently*  
> *happy, calm Buddhist souls one regularly comes across in places such*  
> *as Dharamsala, India, really are happy," Professor Owen Flanagan, of*  
> *Duke University in North Carolina, said on Wednesday.*

For a scientist, to hypothesise means to guess. There are no confidence intervals for guesses.

> *Dharamsala is the home base of exiled Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama.*  
>  
> *The scanning studies by scientists at the University of Wisconsin at*  
> *Madison showed activity in the left prefrontal lobes of experienced*  
> *Buddhist practitioners. The area is linked to positive emotions,*  
> *self–control and temperament.*

These areas are also linked to ego.

> *Other research by Paul Ekman, of the University of California San*  
> *Francisco Medical Centre, suggests that meditation and mindfulness can*  
> *tame the amygdala, an area of the brain which is the hub of fear*  
> *memory.*

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Meditation for a Christian (and other spiritually minded people) is prayer. This may be mediated by endorphins (which can also arise from regular physical exercise) known to affect the amygdala.

> *Ekman discovered that experienced Buddhists were less likely to be shocked, flustered, surprised or as angry as other people.*

I would be interested in knowing how they determined a Buddhist was experienced or not. I would also be interested to know about these "other people" who were presumably controls (for example, are these folks sedentary, did they pray, etc).

> *Flanagan believes that if the findings of the studies can be confirmed they could be of major importance.*

I do not believe they have been confirmed. However, there have been studies that have confirmed the positive effects of prayer.

> *"The most reasonable hypothesis is that there is something about conscientious Buddhist practice that results in the kind of happiness we all seek," Flanagan said in a report in New Scientist magazine.*

The changes in the left prefrontal cortex of those who meditate/pray may have nothing to do with feelings of happiness but more to do with exercising the ego (self-control).

Would be interesting to see if prayer/meditation might help those with complications arising from either diabetes and/or obesity.

Servant to the humblest person in the universe,

Andrew

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