

Reflecting on what meditation can tell psychology

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"Don't believe everything you think," reads a popular bumper sticker in the University of California, Berkeley, community. And that, in many ways, summarizes what Buddhist meditation can teach psychology about the human mind, argued Berkeley psychology professor Eleanor Rosch, PhD, in a paper delivered at APA's 2002 Annual Convention. Psychology has traditionally viewed religious or meditative experience as separate from consciousness. Instead, Rosch holds that the field ought to study such experience "to challenge our image of what normal everyday consciousness itself may be." In her view, consciousness is a limited way of knowing, while meditation-induced "awareness" is a broader, wiser way of knowing--a sort of expanded consciousness.

We can work toward that expanded consciousness, she argued, by raising our awareness through:

- * **Finding the unbiased mind.** Allowing ourselves to let in and experience the world by doing more listening, observing and learning, and less judging.
- * **Expanding our vision.** Seeing ourselves as part of, and one with, the larger world--the way we feel when beholding a sweeping view--rather than always focusing on our own lives.
- * **Experiencing the moment.** Concentrating on what we're doing right now to maximize the present activity and allay distraction.
- * **Welcoming emptiness.** Releasing stress by letting go of fear and anxiety, through, for example, laughter.
- * **Acting spontaneously.** Being motivated by our experience of the moment, rather than by force of habit.

"Spontaneous action is compassionate and can be shockingly effective," Rosch observed. "Think of the continuity of conversing with friends (you're not reading your replies off a teleprompter) and the sudden clarity of writing a paper when the deadline looms. Note how the concepts of 'flow' and 'being in the zone' have resonated with the popular imagination."

By folding in more such ideas from meditation and Eastern spirituality, psychology would, Rosch believes, do more to "offer a path a path of

compassionate action."

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