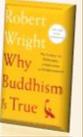


WHY BUDDHISM IS TRUE

by Robert Wright



Overview

Western Culture is adapting to Eastern Buddhism in a secular way, focusing on mindfulness meditation rather than reincarnation. Brain scans and psychological studies show that mindfulness meditation positively impacts our emotions, neural receptors, and mood. While social constructs delude us into believing that meditation always leads to insight and clarity, in truth mindfulness simply allows better understanding of ourselves and our relationship with our feelings, actions, and the environment around us.

"If these basic sources of human suffering and human cruelty are indeed a large part of the product of delusion – there is value in exposing this delusion to light."

Taking The Red Pill

Western culture likens Buddhism to the movie *The Matrix* in which the protagonist Neo must make a choice to take the blue pill and stay in a delusional reality, or take the red pill and awaken to a reality free of entrapments by the mind, social constructs, and evolutionary psychology.

We have consciously, or perhaps subconsciously, built our culture to encourage procreation. The dynamic of being drawn to sensory pleasures like sex is a fundamental lesson explored by the Buddha; the pleasures we seek are fleeting and inevitably leave us craving more. Many of our cravings and feelings are delusions connected to evolutionary psychology.

Dukkha: Suffering or Unsatisfactoriness

The problem with sensory pleasure is the inaccurate overestimation of the joy it will bring. There is more pleasure in *wanting* the candy bar than *eating* it. This is one way natural selection unconsciously compels us toward perpetuating our genes. There are 3 principles that tell our brains to pursue the goal of reproduction:

1. Humans and animals tend to pursue what makes them feel good (orgasm).

2. Pleasure shouldn't last forever. If we only had sex once, our species would quickly become extinct.

3. The animal's brain should be focused on the fact that pleasure will activate when reaching for a goal rather than the fact that pleasure will fade shortly after. Scientists have measured levels of dopamine (the 'happy chemical'), and the largest spike comes the moment *before* you bite into the candy bar.

"Ultimately, happiness comes down to choosing between the discomfort of being aware of your mental affiliations and the discomfort of being ruled by them."

The Truth About Mindfulness

To live mindfully is to pay attention to the Now (discussed in [The Power of Now](#)) and to experience it in a non-jaded way. Modern mindfulness may not delve as 'deeply' into what it means to be human, but the roots are the same: being aware and connected to the present moment. People today are always on the go and thus have trouble remaining present.

Paradoxes of Meditation

There is not supposed to be 'success' at meditating. Thinking about succeeding during meditation, when you are trying to *remove* extraneous thoughts, actually gets in the way and defeats the purpose of meditation!

Another paradox is that often, those who could most benefit from meditation are the least likely to practice. The same problems that meditation helps you overcome are often what make it difficult to meditate.

Wright's 'big breakthrough' came from over-caffeination during meditation: He noticed that agitation and tension kept breaking his focus. Finally, once he surrendered to the agitation, the tension in his jaw released and he started to observe the raw unpleasant feelings from caffeine. He was free to view them objectively, until slowly the anxiety began to dissipate. *"In the space of a moment it had entirely lost its grip on me."* He understood that carefully observing an uncomfortable feeling, and coming to accept it, can be the mechanism to reduce unpleasantness.

