

**Invitation to the Mindfulness Community:
MBSR, MBCT, researchers, therapist, and teachers**

Dear Community,

Andrew Newberg, MD and I are conducting research on meditation at the University of Pennsylvania. You are probably familiar with Newberg's brain-scan studies focusing on a wide range of meditation and yoga practices (see a list of our books below that explain these ongoing projects), but we've recently engaged in an exploration and development of two relatively new strategies for integrating mindfulness into psychotherapy, medicine, and education. The first is called "Compassionate Communication," a 15-minute breathing, relaxation-and-dialogue exercise to be used in couple counseling, and that can be easily taught in workshop and classroom formats. Our preliminary evidence (to be published early next year) suggests that it may be particularly effective in lowering defensiveness, generating empathy between conflicted couples, and increasing social intimacy between individuals in a variety of group situations. We initially have trained a group of psychotherapists in the Philadelphia area to test Compassionate Communication with patients (who use an instructional CD to practice with), and we will track their neurological changes with single photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) scans.

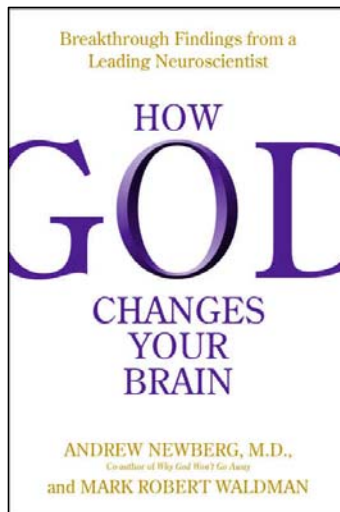
The second technique we are looking into concerns the potential therapeutic benefits of yawning. Based on a growing body of neurological, sociological, and theoretical data concerning the effects of yawning (and in specific, its ability to increase activity in the precuneus), we hypothesize that yawning should rapidly stimulate neurological attentiveness and physiological relaxation in adults and adolescents, and may have additional uses in the treatment of various medical, psychological, and neuropsychiatric disorders. Preliminary clinical observation suggests that a few minutes of deliberate yawning may be as effective as other breathing and relaxation techniques in reducing stress, anxiety, and depressive rumination, and since the precuneus appears to be part of the human mirror-neuron system, yawning may enhance empathic awareness of others. Yawning is both interpersonally and self-contagious; thus it may be one of the easiest ways to induce relaxation and alertness in individuals and in groups. We are beginning to design studies to test this hypothesis in classroom, group, and counseling situations, and are inviting others to contribute their thoughts and participate in related research.

We are also exploring possible applications and integration of Compassionate Communication and yawning into various mindfulness-based stress reduction and cognitive therapy programs. Since it is my preference to conduct and share this research through inter-disciplinary and collaborative venues, we have begun to establish formal and informal liaisons with a variety of research organizations, colleges, community groups, and spiritual organizations. Currently our informal "consortium" of interested parties includes the Council for Relationships in Pennsylvania, therapists in the psychiatry department at Harbor/UCLA and the UCLA Mindful Awareness Research

Center, teachers at Moorpark Community College in Southern California, psychology researchers at State University of New York, and with various members of the mindfulness, neuroscientific, and religious/spiritual communities.

I would be delighted if you would like to be included in the dialogues that are emerging from this collaborative effort. Please drop me a note, or call me, if you would like to receive progress reports concerning this work. And if you have specific interests in conducting collaborative or separate research on Compassionate Communication (and several variations that are under development at other universities) and/or yawning as a therapeutic adjunct—or wish to share other innovative techniques relating to the application of mindfulness to interpersonal interactions and group dynamics—please let me know. I look forward to our continuing and future exchange.

Regards,
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How God Changes

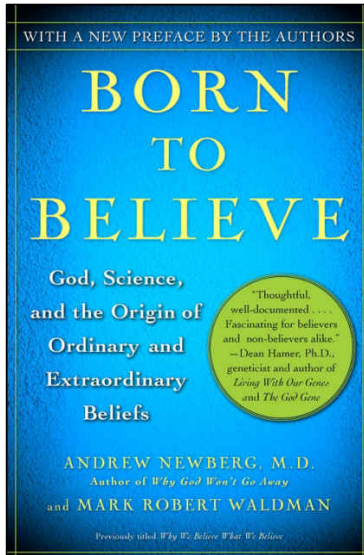
Your Brain:

Breakthrough Findings by a

Leading Neuroscientist

by Andrew Newberg, MD and Mark Robert Waldman

Ballantine Books, March 2009

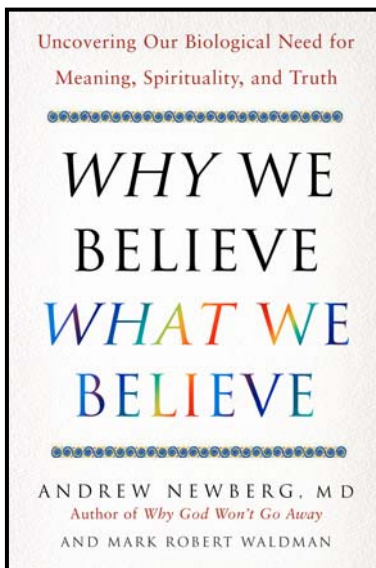


Born to Believe:

**God, Science, and the Origin of
Ordinary and Extraordinary Beliefs**

by Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman

(October, 2007)



Why We Believe What We Believe:

**Uncovering Our Biological Need
for Meaning, Spirituality, and Truth**

by Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman

(September, 2006)