

## Revolution in Washington DC November 2005

Washington DC is arguably the seat of all things Western. It is here that the practices of power and control are honed to peak condition. But for 3 days in November a different set of practices was being put through its paces as the Dalai Lama and neuroscientists came together to *investigate the mind*.

Meditation and mindfulness have finally made it onto the mainstream science agenda as some of the world's leading scientists decide that it is time to put the 2,500 year old practices to the test. On the stage of the quaintly named Daughters of the American Revolution Constitution Hall, a revolution of a new kind unfolded in front of an audience of over 3,000.

*Susan and Martina's view of the stage during the fascinating "Investigating the Mind" conference in Washington DC, 8 – 10 November 2005*



One by one a series of neuroscientists, psychologists, cardiologists and psychiatrists presented the early findings of the effect of meditation on stress, depression, health conditions, and resilience.

Comparisons were made between traditional treatments for depression and the application of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), an approach that teaches sufferers of depression how to train their mind to reduce negative thoughts. Studies indicate that sufferers treated with MBCT are 50-60% less likely to relapse.

Other studies repeatedly reveal beneficial effects on the body for people who take up meditation. After only 8 weeks of practice, immunity levels are increased, the body will heal itself from certain diseases 4 times faster, and cortisol levels (the chemical that rises when we are stressed) are reduced throughout the day.

Respected medical doctor Ralph Snyderman neatly summarised just some of the benefits of mental training that are beginning to be better understood through these scientific studies. Mental training:

- Modifies the brain's structure (in particular, showing increased activity in the part of the brain associated with happiness and positive emotions)
- Increases synchronistic brain patterns (improving memory and learning)
- Modifies chemical effects on the body (eg. reduces stress)
- Enhances awareness and engagement
- Improves overall wellness
- Limits the effects and progression of certain diseases
- Limits suffering from pain

And if those effects are not enough to get you interested, the Dalai Lama reminded us that despite the hardships that Tibetans have faced in recent decades, they have no word for stress, no conception of low self esteem, and no record of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Maybe this is a revolution in which we should all participate!!