

fight-or-flight mode to one of acceptance, a shift that increases contentment. People who have a negative disposition tend to be right-prefrontal oriented; left-prefrontals have more enthusiasms, more interests, relax more and tend to be happier, though perhaps with less real estate.

Studies on meditation moved into the modern era in March 2000, when the Dalai Lama met with Western-trained psychologists and neuroscientists in Dharamsala, India, and urged the Mind and Life Institute to organize studies of highly accomplished meditation masters using the most advanced imaging technology, the results of which will be discussed in September at a conference at M.I.T. (which will also plan the next stages of research). Not only did these studies allow for a more detailed understanding of how the brain works during meditation, but they also provided a lot of cool shots of monks wearing electrodes.

What scientists are discovering through these studies is that with enough practice, the neurons in the brain will adapt themselves to direct activity in that frontal, concentration-oriented area of the brain. It's what samurais and kamikaze pilots are trained to do and what Phil Jackson preaches: to learn to be totally aware of the moment. "Meditation is like gasoline," says Robert Thurman, director of the Tibet House (and father of actress Uma Thurman). "In Asia meditation was a sort of a natural tool anyone could use. We should detach it from just being Buddhist."

Increasingly it is being detached from Buddhism. Along with the more obscure Zen techniques (such as sitting for hours in positions that look painful to me and asking to be hit with sticks if you feel you are about to doze off), Americans are trying Vipassana (which begins by focusing on your breath), walking meditation (at first walking really, really slowly and then being hyperaware of each step), Transcendental Meditation (or TM, repeating a Sanskrit syllable over and over), Dzogchen (cultivating a clear but even-keeled awareness) and even trance dance (spinning with a blindfold on for an hour to dance music). And early next year a new book, *Eight Minutes That Will Change Your Life*, by Victor Davich, will advocate the most American form of meditation yet: a daily practice that he claims takes just eight minutes. That, it turns out, is exactly how long we're conditioned by modern society to concentrate, since it's the amount of time between TV commercials.

Josh Baran, author of the upcoming book *365 Nirvana Here and Now*, says when his brain wanders in a distinctly unfocused, nonmeditative way--that deal when you've flipped five pages of a book and read nothing--it actually causes him discomfort. Roger Walsh, a professor of psychiatry, philosophy and anthropology at the University of California at Irvine, has been studying the extent to which meditators can control their psychological states. "Only in recent years has Western psychiatry recognized attention-deficit disorder, but the meditative-contemplative traditions have maintained for thousands of years that we all suffer from some kind of ADD and just don't recognize it." It's the kind of basic human attention deficit that makes it hard to keep reading a paragraph if it doesn't end with a joke.

Psychologists are trying to discover whether meditation can reprogram minds with an antisocial bent. A study at the Kings County North Rehabilitation Facility, a jail near Seattle, asked prisoners serving time for nonviolent drug-or alcohol-related crimes to sit through Vipassana meditation for 10 days, 11 hours a day,