

# Hard-wired to experience higher states of consciousness

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We looked at the role attention plays in becoming aware of who we truly are. But there is another process that is put into motion by paying attention; parts of our brain are activated/de-activated, allowing a new and more truthful perception of Reality. Dr Shanida Nataraja explains in her book *‘The Blissful Brain’ – Neuroscience and proof of the power of meditation*:

*“Recent research has shown a chain of processes within the human brain that mediate our access to higher states of consciousness. The sequence is as follows: the pre-frontal cortex in our brain is involved with thoughts, images and daydreams, as well as attention. By focusing our mind in one-pointed attention, for instance on a mantra, we encourage increased activity in these attention cells. As our focus deepens, the activity in the cells involved in thoughts and images on the contrary decreases considerably; this is reflected in a lessening of beta waves, our thinking waves – the ‘ego’ part of our consciousness. Prolonged one-pointed attention also activates cells in the temporal lobe and increased activity there triggers in turn changes in the limbic system, the region dealing with emotional response, allowing a switch from the sympathetic nervous system (flight or fight) to the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and relax), the*

*'relaxation response'. The emotion of fear expressed in the strong survival 'flight or fight' response changes to one of acceptance, relaxation and tranquillity, the 'relaxation response'; these changes are reflected in the increase in alpha and theta waves.*

*However, this is only the beginning. As meditation becomes even deeper, so does the 'relaxation response'. This deepening in turn has a knock-on effect ending in a decreased activity in the parietal cortex, an area in the brain associated with orientation in time and space and creating boundaries: self/non-self, and the world of opposites – in fact, very much the qualities of the 'ego'. This decrease in activity is in turn reflected in a lessening of these abilities, explaining why there is a sense of our separate identity – and time and space – dissolving and all opposites unifying.*

*Humans are therefore not only hard-wired to experience ordinary reality, but they are also hard-wired to experience higher states of consciousness.”*

By paying attention we have switched our brain into a different way of perceiving reality. Our brain is a beautiful God-given receiver, which allows us to switch to different modes of perception, allowing access to different levels of reality.

Our loving attention on our prayer word therefore allows us to tune into Divine Reality, which is Love. We lose our sense of separation and isolation, which purely living from the left-brain, the home of the 'ego', gives us. It allows us in Jesus' words *'to leave self behind'*. Instead, we become aware of our interconnectedness with others and with a loving Divine Reality, and know that we are truly *'Children of God'*.

It is this transforming awareness that is the result of meditation as a spiritual discipline.

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