

Spirituality Imagination Retreat

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Participants



Roy Baumeister, Professor of Social Psychology at University of Queensland



Bill Bradley, Former U.S. Senator & Former NBA Basketball Player



Betty Sue Flowers, Former Director of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum & Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin



Jim Hovey, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Eisenhower Fellowships



Elizabeth Hyde, Research Specialist at the Imagination Institute



Serene Jones, President of the Faculty & Johnston Family Professor for Religion and Democracy at Union Theological Seminary



Scott Barry Kaufman, Scientific Director of the Imagination Institute & Lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania



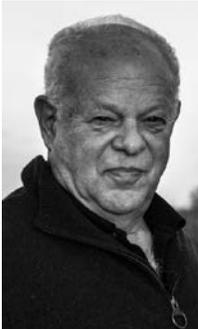
Darren Levine, Founding Rabbi at Tamid: The Downtown Synagogue & the Creator of Positive Judaism



Chikako Matsumoto, Ordained Buddhist Priest & CEO, Sorraia Consulting Inc.



Mandy Seligman, Independent Researcher & Photographer. All photos in this report were provided by Mandy Seligman.



Martin E.P. Seligman, Executive Director of the Imagination Institute & Zellerbach Family Professor of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania



Naomi Shihab Nye, Poet



Arthur Schwartz, Professor of Leadership Studies & Executive Director of the Oskin Leadership Institute at Widener University



Krista Tippett, Radio Broadcaster, Journalist, Author & Entrepreneur



Stuart Warren, Retired Attorney & Past President of Kehillat Ma'Arav, the Westside
Congregation, Los Angeles



David Yaden, Research Scientist & Doctoral student in the Department of Psychology at the
University of Pennsylvania

Introduction: The Space Between



Photo by Mandy Seligman

Near the base of Uluru – a rock formation that forms the holiest site of one of the world’s oldest religions¹ – a group of scientists, spiritual and political leaders, artists, and writers gathered to imagine the future of religion and spirituality. Over the course of several days, the group wondered what roles religion and science may play in the unfolding future of humankind. Debates ensued. Dreams and visions were shared. Some common ground was found. Possible paths forward emerged.

Pieces of this conversation were recorded for further study by the event’s host, The Imagination Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, led by Scott Barry Kaufman (Scientific Director) and Martin E. P. Seligman (Executive Director).

¹ The Anangu people are an Aboriginal tribe that practices what some historians consider the oldest continuous religion on Earth.

On the first night, the group sat together in a circle after hiking the perimeter of Uluru. Martin Seligman, psychologist and leader of the meeting, addressed the group. He began by acknowledging that Jack Templeton had conceived the event, having discussed with Seligman the need for a conclave tasked with better understanding the spiritual imagination. Seligman dedicated the event to Jack Templeton in honor of the boldness of his vision and pioneering approach to philanthropy in science.

Seligman then shared the story of how he came to testify at Jack Templeton's funeral service. Seligman had undergone back surgery and was at home recovering from the anesthesia when he suddenly awoke in the middle of the night with the name for the neurological circuit that he had been studying with his colleague Steven Maier. This circuit represents the neurobiological underpinning of resilient responses to difficult circumstances. He had discussed this finding at length with Jack Templeton. The name, he realized, should be the "hope circuit." Seligman then wrote this in an email to Steven Maier, his wife Mandy, and two of his graduate students (Annie Roepke and David Yaden) – but the moment that he pressed send, all of the power in his neighborhood went out. Seligman was unsure of the meaning of this – if it had any meaning at all – but he felt moved by the seeming synchronicity of the event. The next day, against his doctor's orders, Seligman felt called to attend Jack Templeton's funeral and give one of the three eulogies.

For Seligman, the Uluru meeting held a significance that was tied up with Jack Templeton's vision and legacy as well as the events surrounding his naming of the hope circuit.

Grasping



Photo by Mandy Seligman

Seligman launched into the proceedings by offering the group a kind of modern Koan, a Zen word referring to a paradoxical statement meant to spark insight. He quoted the words of Nobel Prize winning physicist Sir William Bragg:

From religion comes a man's purpose; from science, his power to achieve it.

Sometimes people ask if religion and science are not opposed to one another.

They are: in the sense that the thumb and fingers of my hands are opposed to one another. It is an opposition by means of which anything can be grasped.

The image of science and religion as the figurative thumb and forefinger of humanity became a guide for the conversations. In particular, the group discussed the fertile possibilities in the space between these two paradigms.



Seligman mentioned that a charcoal drawing from the German artist, Albrecht Dürer, came to mind as an illustration of this metaphor.

Love was the central concept offered by the religious leaders in the group. Serene Jones, theologian and president of Union Theological Seminary, noted how every five hundred years or so, an idea comes around that transforms political and religious institutions.

Jones insisted that love must be the core of any new collective transformation. Several other concepts were offered around the hub of love. Mandy Seligman, photographer and wife of Martin Seligman, introduced “dignity” as a complement to, and aspect of, love.

Betty Sue Flowers, professor of English and past Director of the LBJ Presidential

Library, raised the notion of “grace.” Flowers cited the example of a saying, popular in Texas, by Cathleen Falsani:

Justice is getting what you deserve.

Mercy is not getting what you deserve.

And grace is getting what you absolutely don't deserve.

Benign good will. Unprovoked compassion. The unearnable gift.

Krista Tippett – author, host of the public radio podcast, *On Being*, and recipient of the National Humanities Medal – noted that one must bring one’s whole intelligence and intuition to the concept of love. Tippett was dismissive of any characterization of love that fell short of appreciating the potential complexity and wisdom inherent in a robust representation of love. Supplementing this view, Chikako Matsumoto, a Buddhist teacher, described how this more expansive characterization of love fits better with Buddhist perspectives that focus on compassion and serenity over the passion and Eros that Western perspectives of love often connote.

Some of the scientists then answered with their perspectives. Social psychologist Roy Baumeister took a position from history, pointing out that encouraging people to love each other more is a rather old idea, promoted by religious leaders like Jesus and others. According to Baumeister, merely promoting this concept has not done much good. He also argued that love, if only relegated to one’s kin, can be a detriment to the greater

good. Creating systems that promote fairness may be more effective than religions encouraging people to love more.

Scott Barry Kaufman discussed some of the moral nuances surrounding love as a motivation. He illustrated how some people are driven by love to commit heinous acts whereas others are driven to generosity. Some of his emerging work focuses on the differences in character that may predict variations in outcomes that result from love as a motivation.

Seligman described his research on “the hope circuit.” This concept emerged out of neuroscience findings from Seligman’s collaborator, Steven Maier. This finding involves the neural circuitry that underpins a resilient response of continuing to rise to a challenge, as opposed to one characterized by helplessness. Seligman wondered whether religious and spiritual imagination might play a role in triggering this circuit, reducing helplessness and promoting hope.

A previous meeting of scientists and scholars, held at Canterbury Cathedral, was referenced a number of times throughout the meeting at Uluru. At the Canterbury meeting, participants discussed their individual callings, and what they might mean. This meeting is described in a book edited by University of Pennsylvania Doctoral Student David Yaden (who was at the Canterbury meeting), titled *Being Called: Scientific, Secular, and Sacred Perspectives*. At the Uluru meeting, the topic was expanded from individual callings to discussing a collective calling.

Lastly, Seligman wondered what Flowers had meant by a comment made years ago. She had said – despite their differences in vocation, religious tradition, and geographic location – that he and she belonged to “the same church.” Taking this as a leaping off point, Seligman charged the group with uncovering what might be the ‘500 year idea’ that is currently transforming our world and could consist of a collective calling.

Visions, Voices, and Deep Listening



Photo by Mandy Seligman

Out in the desert, under – as poet Naomi Shihab Nye noted – “a dome of stars,” the group shared a dinner of food made from native ingredients served on plates with their own small domes. Lit by star and candle light, the group participated in “Mystics

Anonymous,” a group format invented by Australian Priest and Vicar Hugh Kempster to encourage the sharing of any variety of spiritual experiences one may have had. As the name of the group suggests, these experiences remain confidential. A number of experiences were shared during the normal proceedings, however.

Chikako shared a dream that she had in which she was late for a train but was having trouble getting to the platform on time because of all of the luggage she was carrying. In the dream, she realized that she needed to let go of her baggage if she wanted to make the train. She felt that the dream represented the need to let go of some parts of the past in order to move forward – and that this may be relevant to the future of religion and spirituality as well.

Another dream or vision was reported that also has to do with the future, though its meaning is less straightforward. Bill Bradley, former US Senator and Olympic gold medal winner, described a dream in which he was part of a council of advisors for a king. The advisors go upstairs to speak with the king, then, after providing technical advice, are sent back downstairs. On the third trip up to speak with the king, the group instead speaks in terms of nobility and joy. The king asks Bradley to stay behind for a moment longer, and when he walks back down the stairs, the rest of the advisors had turned into a beautiful, white eagle.

Bradley felt that his dream had to do with virtue, politics, and the future. Jones responded that it reminded her of the current political situation in the United States, and a hope that

the political climate will begin to swing back to virtue. It also reminded her of the Emily Dickinson poem:

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all –*

Inner experiences such as these cannot be interpreted in any definite ways, but through sharing them, people can occasionally connect on a deeper level than differences in belief and circumstance. This is easier said than done. The act of sharing involves the courage to be vulnerable, and listening deeply to them also involves the courage to expose one’s self to the sufferings and joys and differences of others. Tippett voiced, again and again, the need for deep listening – this became a kind of guiding principle for the group and major takeaway about the spiritual imagination. The spiritual imagination may be unique in its capacity to listen to other people, one’s own inner depths, and the world as a whole.

Nye described how voices and visions figure into her creative process while writing poetry – and how deep listening is required to channel them into her work. She told the story of how her world-renowned poem “Kindness” came to her. While she was traveling on her honeymoon with her husband, their room was robbed. While he traveled to a nearby town to request new documentation, she sat alone in the town’s small square, contemplating what had just happened and watching the people passing by. She then

heard a voice from across the square “speak” the poem to her. Line-by-line, she said that she felt as if she was transcribing. Here is her poem:

*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.*

*What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.*

*How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.*

*You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans*

and the simple breath that kept him alive.

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.*

You must wake up with sorrow.

*You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes*

and sends you out into the day to gaze at bread,

only kindness that raises its head

from the crowd of the world to say

It is I you have been looking for,

and then goes with you everywhere

like a shadow or a friend.

The group decided to adopt an unusual attitude towards the inner voices and visions that might occur over the course of the event; that these messages should be taken seriously and expressed to the group as they occur. While Yaden's research shows that anywhere between 20% and 40% of the population have had such experiences, they are typically treated as taboo and not openly discussed – for a review see the academic book *Being Called: Scientific, Secular, and Sacred Perspectives*. Kaufman brought this insight from

the individual level to the collective level by quoting Abraham Maslow, “by understanding our own depths, we better understand humanity.” This spirit of openness to one’s own and others’ depths felt like a refreshing change away from the mundane – and certainly different from ordinary gatherings of scholars.

The Light



Photo by Mandy Seligman

Any serious discussion of religion and science is bound to produce some tensions and this was no exception; though, in this case, the ensuing debate was both respectful and productive.

Seligman introduced the group to the work of Steven Pinker, who in his new book *Enlightenment Now*, makes the argument that the world is getting better in almost every way that matters: literacy, health, and well-being are increasing, and poverty, disease, and violence are decreasing. Despite the widespread belief that things are getting worse, the data show that the world is improving. Science, reason, trade, and increasing communication are the primary drivers of these improvements. Religions, though, are often the institutions most at odds with these influences.

Kaufman then posed a provocative thought experiment in terms explicitly resonant with John Lennon's classic song "Imagine":

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people living life in peace, you

You may say I'm a dreamer...

Kaufman asked the group, "Can we imagine a world without religion? Is that possible? Would that be a better world?" In a group composed of both non-believers and believers of, this question was sure to stir some controversy. It did.

Matsumoto, the Buddhist of the group, was willing to engage with the thought experiment. She thought that though it is indeed possible that religion could largely fade from the developed world, there will always be a need of “wisdom for living.” This wisdom would be contained in some kind of community setting, even if not explicitly religious.

Darren Levine, a Rabbi and proponent of “Positive Judaism,” which embraces scientific findings, believes that it is worthwhile to differentiate various aspects of religion. He introduced a model used in Yaden’s work to differentiate various aspects of religion through an acronym – PRAISE Be (practices, rituals, affiliation, institutions, scripture, experiences, and beliefs). Flowers invoked the model to suggest that there may, perhaps, come to be less of an emphasis on beliefs, but that the rest – the PRAISE part of the model (practices, rituals, affiliation, institutions, scripture, and experiences) – will remain important.

Tippett found the question problematic. She characterized religions as “containers” that bring important values, invoking the many millions of people that draw deep meaning from religion. She suggested that science is about ‘what is’ while theology is about ‘what could be.’

Jones also took issue with the question. She described the question as arising from post-Enlightenment thinking. In other words, that it is a modern notion to put religion in a box with all things superstitious. Besides feeling that this characterization of religion is too

narrow, she voiced other problems with Enlightenment thinking, providing a mixed assessment of the Enlightenment itself. The elements that she believed were valuable include: human rights, the scientific enterprise, and reason in discourse. But she suggested that Enlightenment thought diminished ‘the domestic sphere’ and ‘affect.’ That is, reason and rationalism have borne good fruits for civilization but may diminish other aspects of our phenomenological experience, especially in emotional and interpersonal domains.

The gap between religious and scientific perspectives, in terms of both beliefs and epistemology was already made clear through the discussions. However, in this gap between science and religion – to invoke the thumb and forefinger image that the group continued to refer – there is also possibility for creative kinds of social structures. This potential manifested in a multitude of examples in which science and religions complement one another.

In terms of *science in religion*, Levine described his work in promoting ‘Positive Judaism.’ His aim is to include evidence-based ways to enhance well-being as a standard part of one’s religious education. His interventions and syllabi are practical and provide education on scientific findings to children in religious education settings, who may not otherwise be exposed to scientific research.

Jones also commented on how many aspects of science are already incorporated in religion. She described how the story of creation, Genesis, is now taken as a metaphor in

most liberal Protestant churches, with evolution and the Big Bang filling in the details. She reiterated the importance of religions embracing scientific findings.

As for *religion in science*, religion has an important place in well-being research, as it is a contributor to the well-being of many individuals. A number of studies have demonstrated that religious attendance, beliefs, and practices can reduce addiction, enhance happiness, increase longevity, and promote altruistic behavior. Understanding the mechanisms through which religion boosts well-being is a primary goal for positive psychology research. The issue is complex, though, as Baumeister pointed out by citing several studies showing that more religious societies are usually less healthy and happy overall.

Returning to the topic of the Enlightenment, Seligman told an old story of a man who has lost his keys. A police officer happens upon the man and asks what he is doing. The man responds that he is looking for his keys under the street lamp. After a few minutes of searching the police officer asks if he dropped his keys here. The man responds that no, he had dropped his keys up the road. The police officer asked why, then, is he looking for them here? The man responds, “because the light is here.”

Taking the message of the story in a creative direction, Seligman said “‘the light’ of the Enlightenment is science... but what to do with the darkness?”

The Background Hum of Love



Photo by Mandy Seligman

Tipett began one of the days by reading a poem from Brad Aaron Modlin:

*Mrs. Nelson explained how to stand still and listen
to the wind, how to find meaning in pumping gas,
how peeling potatoes can be a form of prayer. She took questions on how not to
feel lost in the dark.*

*After lunch she distributed worksheets
that covered ways to remember your grandfather's
voice. Then the class discussed falling asleep
without feeling you had forgotten to do something else—
something important—and how to believe*

*the house you wake in is your home. This prompted
Mrs. Nelson to draw a chalkboard diagram detailing
how to chant the Psalms during cigarette breaks,
and how not to squirm for sound when your own thoughts
are all you hear; also, that you have enough.*

*The English lesson was that I am
is a complete sentence.*

*And just before the afternoon bell, she made the math equation look easy. The one
that proves that hundreds of questions,
and feeling cold, and all those nights spent looking
for whatever it was you lost, and one person
add up to something.*

Taking a cue from the feeling that the poem created in the room, Yaden raised the topic of ‘spiritual genius’ – a close facsimile of William James’s notion of ‘religious genius.’ Arthur Schwartz, a professor and former John Templeton Foundation Director, had remarked that humor and spirituality are both in the transcendence cluster of Seligman’s Character Strength and Virtue Classification. Yaden mentioned that in the same way that comedians are able create the significant physical response of laughter with words, it seems that certain spiritual geniuses are also able to create a physical response – a warm feeling in the chest and an outpouring of fellow-feeling – by articulating certain sentiments. He referred to how reading Nye’s poetry is an example of how this feeling can be raised and wondered what specific elements tend to trigger these feelings.

Flowers responded to this idea by discussing the capacity of metaphor to switch frames of reference. She elaborated on how she is sometimes able to switch from the mundane to the ‘background hum of love’ in the universe. This capacity to switch frames of reference in the direction of the ideal as a mark of spiritual genius may be worth further study, perhaps especially in the context of coping with grief.

Baumeister testified to the profound difficulty of grief and the power that certain habits can have during those times. He specifically mentioned having music on all the time through the day and absorbing oneself in meaningful (not extraneous) work. These are non-spiritual means of coping with personal and existential angst.

Bradley supplemented Baumeister’s advice by telling the story of former Vice President Joe Biden, who lost multiple members of his family in one car crash the year that he was sworn into the Senate. The advice given to Biden by another senator (from the opposing party) who had also lost his family was: “work, work, work.” Bradley further recommended making a list of the ten things that would be meaningful and enjoyable to do in the future. These are ways to, in Baumeister’s words, avoid “cutting off the world” during grief.

Levine described the role religion plays in grief, offering a structure to find consolation. To illustrate, he told the story of a man who had not been to Temple in thirty years, but as soon as the man heard of the death of his daughter, he walked directly to the rabbi to talk.

Levine wondered what knowledge science could provide about the best ways to help mourners cope with their grief. Warren, a lawyer and Jewish scholar, echoed this point – can science help us to understand why some religious rituals are so consoling and meaningful?

Awe and Wisdom



Photo by Mandy Seligman

Early in the conversations, it became apparent that the religious leaders often spoke a different language than the scientists – and vice versa. Many terms carried connotations that did not sit well with one or the other of the groups. For the religious, the word “faith” connotes the courage of conviction – a virtue. For scientists, however, the same word

could be taken to mean a willingness to go beyond the evidence for the sake of one's own personal beliefs – a cardinal sin in science. Differences in beliefs, faith, and ways of knowing, especially those between scripture and science, continued to be debated throughout the proceedings.

However, a different word – awe – was embraced by the entire group, and was injected naturally into a number of discussions. This embrace may have had something to do with the location of the event. After all, the meeting was held in one of the most awe-inspiring locations on the planet and constitutes a geological wonder of the world. But there were likely other reasons for why this word formed such a natural bridge between naturalist and supernaturalist worldviews. First, awe refers to a mental state – an emotion – without reference to the trigger of the mental state. This is somewhat different than other terms for intensely altered states of consciousness like 'numinous' and 'spiritual,' which both imply the involvement of divinity.

Awe expresses well the profundity of some moments without the metaphysical baggage. While most people have experienced awe at some point in their lives, it shares a degree of phenomenological qualities with other intensely altered and sometimes transformative mental states. The perception of time is altered during awe experiences – people experience time slow down, or dilate, while feeling awe. The sense of self is also altered during experiences of awe – people report feeling their sense of self temporarily fade away while simultaneously feeling more connectedness with other people and things

around them. Yaden and Kaufman have conducted empirical work confirming these anecdotal observations.

In these ways, awe is similar to mystical experiences, in which people reportedly feel somehow ‘beyond’ the senses of time, space, and self. While psychologists have tended to pathologize such experiences in the past, Positive Psychology offers a perspective that allows one to ask the question: *how do these experiences relate to well-being?* The data show that these experiences are generally associated with well-being – but *why* do these experiences lead to well-being? This remains an open scientific question.

Levine provided some religious insight on the relationship between awe and well-being by translating a line from Proverbs 9:10 that is often interpreted as “The beginning of wisdom is to fear the LORD,” but he commented that scholars have begun to translate this line as: “awe is the beginning of wisdom.”

Positive Religious Education



Photo by Mandy Seligman

In addition to elevated concepts and special experiences, the group also discussed practical initiatives. Religion plays an important role in the well-being of billions of people. While religion is decreasing in developed countries, the majority of people are still religious – and in the developing world, religion is increasing. Through religious communities and weekly services, religion plays an important part in most people’s educational upbringing. Positive Psychology, too, is beginning to play a role in education for the purpose of well-being. What, if anything, could religious education and positive education learn from one another?

Many aspects of religion were mentioned that positive psychology could test in terms of their capacity to enhance well-being. Many forms of prayer, for example, include concepts that when read in an affirmation-like way could, perhaps, enhance well-being through their mindful invocation. Meditation has also received substantial empirical support as a means to enhance well-being.

Jones described the passion for social justice and human flourishing in her students at Union Theological Seminary, one of the finest religious education institutions in the world. While her students are deeply motivated to make change for good, there is often confusion around which specific initiatives work best or have the greatest positive impact on those in need. The fruits of one's call of conscience can be enhanced if it is channeled into supporting interventions and charities whose effectiveness has been empirically demonstrated. In Serene words, "the social sciences can make things easier."

Positive education involves the packaging of evidence-based skills to increase well-being, testing their effectiveness, and then teaching them to students. Positive psychology, it should be noted, has a research aspect as well as an application aspect. Positive psychology research is descriptive – it is basic research intended to discover the causes and consequences of well-being. The application aspect of positive psychology involves attempts to apply evidence-based practices to increase well-being in the world.

Positive education initiatives have been tested in the United States, Bhutan, Peru, Mexico, Australia, and the United Kingdom – with more applications in the works. The

upshot of these studies has been, as Seligman described while drawing on his former student Alejandro Adler's work, the demonstration that enhancing well-being also tends to raise standardized test scores. In other words, there is not a trade-off between well-being and achievement, but a synergy. Could positive education inform religious education? There is some precedent for this line of thinking. Medical information related to physical health and hygiene has been distributed in religious contexts for many decades. Could mental hygiene, in the form of positive psychology, similarly be infused in religious education?

Levine, Yaden, and Kaufman discussed the possibility of gathering a group of religious leaders who are interested in creating positive psychology curricula that could be included in religious education contexts. It was mentioned that 'religious' education contexts ought to also include Humanist and Ethical Culture contexts. Convening a group of psychologists and religious leaders to work on this project at the University of Pennsylvania emerged as a possible tangible next step for the group.

As Seligman has said, when he asks parents what they want their children to learn in educational settings, they typically list aspects of the character and well-being above achievement and knowledge. To return to Jones's comment, positive religious education could be an example of how social science can help "make things easier." Together, Seligman's and Jones's points in combination with the proceedings at Uluru suggest that Positive Psychology could usefully inform religious education.

Rising



Photo by Mandy Seligman

“The story one tells of the future creates their present” is the key point that Jim Hovey, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Eisenhower Fellowships, took from his experiences attending this and other Imagination Institute events. Much of Seligman’s scientific contributions, especially in the areas of optimism and prospection, demonstrate this point. Bradley pointed out that continuing to look to the future takes courage. On the last day of the conversations, he shared the line – almost as an admonishment – to “sing songs of courage of being led by the heart.”

So, what insights about the future of religion and spirituality emerged from this unique group at this ancient religious site? There were some concrete descriptions from the scientific side and some inspiring insights from the religious.

Seligman spoke from the perspective of the scientific worldview, citing a number of studies that demonstrate three major changes afoot in the world:

1. There is less suffering in the world.
2. There is more well-being in the world.
3. We are future-minded beings.

For Seligman, the upshot of these insights amounts to a 500-year idea – that the “political-religious-spiritual yearning” felt by many today can be filled by working to promote human flourishing. That is, people can gain a sense of meaning by helping to promote well-being in other people.

Tippett spoke for the religious worldview. She mentioned three key insights that might help to foster, as she said earlier in the conversations, “spiritual evolution.” She thought that we ought to:

1. Bring the best of our respective traditions forward.
2. Include insights from psychology and neuroscience.
3. Try to rise to our better selves.

Conclusion



Photo by Mandy Seligman

A quote from Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit Paleontologist who was mentioned multiple times throughout the discussions by Tippett, Seligman, and others, provides a fitting vision of the sentiment expressed by the group as the proceedings came to a close. The following quote, raised by Tippett, captures the spirit of future-orientation and emphasis on human well-being that the group hopes will inform the future of spirituality, coupled with a spirit of almost ecstatic optimism:

Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.

Seligman closed the meeting by returning to Jack Templeton's initial vision for the event. For Seligman, the meeting represented a first step towards fulfilling Jack Templeton's ideas about addressing the big questions with a synthesis of science and the spiritual imagination. Many of the insights discussed at Uluru have practical applications in the domains of education, politics, psychology – and for the inner spiritual life of millions of people. The Uluru meeting provided hope for the creative possibilities that may emerge in the space between science and religion as long as this fertile realm of the imagination remains valued and cultivated.

Photos of the Participants During the Proceedings

All photos by Mandy Seligman.









Photos of the Participants Near Uluru









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