

MEASURING the IMMEASURABLE

THE
SCIENTIFIC
CASE *for*
SPIRITUALITY



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Contributing Authors: Daniel Goleman, Bruce H. Lipton, Candace Pert, Gary Small, Jeanne Achterberg, Lynne McTaggart, Dan Siegel, Andrew Newberg, Peter Levine, Larry Dossey, Gregg Braden, Robert Emmons, Peter Russell, James Austin, Marilyn Schlitz, Dean Radin, Cassandra Vieten, Tina Amorok, William Tiller, Susanne C. Segerstrom, Rick Hanson, Les Fehmi, Jim Robbins, Charles Tart, Owen Flanagan, Dawson Church, Sandra Ingerman, Stanley Krippner, Garret Yount, Sara Warber, Katherine N. Irvine, Joan H. Hageman, Ian Wickramasekera

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Introduction

TAMI SIMON

I am not a person who needs science or research to convince me of the benefits of spiritual practice or of the power of living in a heart-centered way. As a long-time meditator, it has become clear to me that spiritual discoveries—direct experiences of the interconnectedness and sacredness of all life—are self-authenticating. When I meditate on a regular basis, I feel more fulfilled and more in love with life. I have also found that when I meditate regularly, the people around me enjoy being with me more and find me more available for connection. The feedback I've gotten about the benefits of spiritual practice—both from my internal experience and from the world around me—has been consistent and clear. Additionally, the guiding principles of a spiritual life—for example, living

with compassion, gratitude, and generosity—are values that live in my heart and are perfectly self-evident to me.

Why, then, is Sounds True publishing *Measuring the Immeasurable: The Scientific Case for Spirituality*? Why do we need to measure the benefits of spirituality, if they are so clear to those who seek the truth through direct experience? There are, as it turns out, several important reasons.

As a society, we value what we can count. Without qualitative proof that a system or practice offers benefits, it's an uphill battle toward social acceptance. We need scientific evidence of the results of spiritual practice so that experts in such fields as education, healthcare and medicine, psychology and psychiatry, can seriously consider the inclusion and integration of spiritual approaches in their work. If we are able to measure, for example, how slow, calm breathing lowers cortisol levels in the blood and therefore reduces stress and anxiety, then slow, calm breathing can become a medical prescription—not simply a practice marginalized to the world of yogis and meditators.

Additionally, many people already on a spiritual path may draw strength and validation from having their subjective experiences confirmed by the objective tools of science. For some people, the language of science is the language of the prevailing authority of our time. If there are scientific studies that confirm and validate the experiential realizations of mystics, saints, sages, and intentional healers, this may provide important support and encouragement to some spiritual practitioners.

Moreover, what if research—and specifically the emerging field of neuroscience—can help spiritual practitioners refine and hone the way we approach traditional contemplative practices? It's only in the last century, with the invention of the electroencephalographic (EEG) machine, that scientists have had an objective way to measure brain activity; it's more recent still that researchers have begun to take an active interest in

exploring the correlations between contemplative practice and brain structure and function. From the use of biofeedback in meditation practice to the manipulation of our brainwave patterns through auditory stimulation, the possibilities for scientific discovery are endless. If research findings and “new spiritual technologies” can help accelerate our access to expanded states of consciousness, I am interested and want to know more.

In gathering the essays for this anthology, we heard from some experts in the field that they felt such a volume of essays was “premature”—that further studies needed to be completed before scientific claims about the benefits of spirituality could be made. This is indeed a fledgling field, but one that, in my opinion, calls for the active, creative engagement of the general public *right now*. We need to understand the research that currently exists so that we can encourage and fund additional research in the directions that are most meaningful to us and will yield results with practical applications for our troubled world. *Measuring the Immeasurable: The Scientific Case for Spirituality* introduces the reader to this new field of inquiry through the writings of forty-three different scientific researchers, journalists, healers, and visionaries. Our hope is that it furthers the dialogue in this important new area of inquiry, utilizing the best of our scientific measuring tools to deepen our understanding of what matters most—our moment-to-moment connection with each other and the wholeness of life.