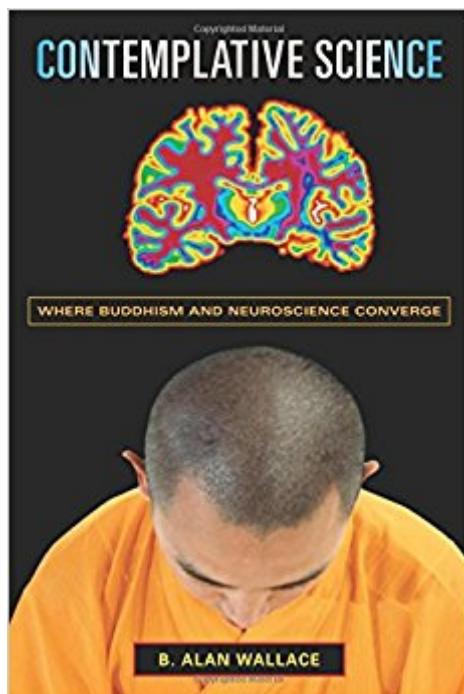


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# Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism And Neuroscience Converge (Columbia Series In Science And Religion)



## **Synopsis**

B. Alan Wallace, renowned Buddhist scholar, integrates the contemplative methodologies of Buddhism and Western science into a single discipline: contemplative science. The science of consciousness investigates the mind through Buddhist contemplative techniques, such as shamatha, an organized, detailed system of training the attention. Just as scientists make observations and conduct experiments with the aid of technology, contemplatives have long tested their theories with the help of highly developed meditative skills of observation and experimentation. Contemplative science allows for a deeper knowledge of mental phenomena, and its emphasis on strict mental discipline counteracts the effects of conative (intention and desire), attentional, cognitive, and affective imbalances. Just as behaviorism, psychology, and neuroscience shed light on the cognitive processes enabling us to survive and flourish, contemplative science offers a groundbreaking perspective for expanding our capacity to realize genuine well-being. It also forges a link between the material world and the realm of the subconscious, transcending a traditional science-based understanding of the self.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Readers be warned: the subtitle to this book, "Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge" is quite misleading--there are only a few very cursory references to anything about neuroscience. Based on the title and introduction, I purchased this assuming it might explain how scientific

research on the brain illuminates the practice of meditation and the contemplative tradition (and vice-versa). It does not. For those interested in the connection between meditation and Western neuroscience, you'll find little here to satisfy you. The book you want is *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, by Sharon Begley. The unfortunate title suggests little more than standard pop-psych self-help, but Ms. Begley's book provides a solid, readable account of neuroscience research from the last 10-15 years that relates specifically to the potential changes brought about in the brain through the practice of meditation, including recent studies on the brains of highly experienced meditators. I cannot recommend that book highly enough.

Unless you are involved in neuroscience, it is difficult to appreciate the magnitude of the seismic shifts that are occurring in our knowledge about the brain, and the extraordinary consequences for our understanding of what it means to be human. Or the important implications of the new brain sciences for such issues as education and legal responsibility. There is a robust and growing literature on Buddhism, Western psychology and cognitive science, consciousness and the brain. And this book is a new installment that summarizes some of this work. The author of this fine book is B. Alan Wallace who spent fourteen years as a Buddhist monk and was ordained by the Dalai Lama. He is also the founder and president of the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies. He has also translated a number of Tibetan Buddhist texts and is the author of several other books. His central thesis is that although objective science has long said that religion, faith, belief and other subjective experiences are no more than epiphenomena of physical processes, that can and should change. He proposes that Western science and contemplative practices of Buddhism, and for that matter Christianity and Taoism, can be integrated to create a single discipline that he calls "Contemplative science." Alan contends that the development of this science is already underway and promises to illuminate both objective Western science and contemplative practices. It will in all likelihood bear many other fruits as well. I am persuaded by what he has to say. I have never felt that we could or should relegate important human experiences to epiphenomena. Not only does it belittle meaningful experiences, it diminishes science. As Albert Einstein once said, "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind." This book presents us with a roadmap to abolish both of those handicaps. This is a must read for anyone interested in consciousness and human potential. Highly recommended. Richard G. Petty, MD, author of *Healing, Meaning and Purpose: The Magical Power of the Emerging Laws of Life*

This is the fifth Alan Wallace book that I have purchased, the fourth that I have finished reading.

This one is more detailed than the others. Alan presents justification for a science of meditation. Then he presents some observations by skilled Buddhist practitioners as seed areas for initial investigation using skilled meditation practitioners in this new proposed contemplative science. Buddhists don't talk about their personal progress, so it is difficult for an interested observer to see details of their path. This book contains the clearest explanation and illustration of what it is like to be at various stages of the path towards enlightenment that I've seen anywhere. I especially like the notes section which gives extensive references. It is surprising just how many of the references that Dr Wallace uses are to his own books and his original translations. I would not recommend this book for those interested in an introduction to contemplation. It is an excellent reference work and ties together many thoughts that are only hinted at in introductory works. Disclaimer: I am an interested observer of Buddhism and follow several different meditative practices. I attended a one week Samatha retreat presented by Alan Wallace several years ago.

Excellent introduction for any Cognitive Scientist (Cognitivist) from any area (neurosciences, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc) to the way in which to build up Bridges of transdisciplinary research with a serious Buddhist perspective in mind. Both Buddhism and Western Scientific perspectives are presented as SERIOUS TRADITIONS of RESEARCH with RIGOROUS METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES. These two different approaches, although different in mode and foundational motivations converge in the same goal: the enrichment of HUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIND PHENOMENA... both serve in the end to SERVE THE HUMAN BEING... THAT ONE WHICH IS THE DOER, AND THE BENEFACTOR OF ALL THE RESEARCH... THAT ONE WHICH IS THE ONLY BEGINNING AND END OF IT ALL

This is a nicely written book that makes you to question the epistemology of materialist western science and its efficacy. It explains how western science could be enriched by contemplative traditions of East, but also explains the limits of those contemplative traditions. On the other hand it provides the fundamentals for an epistemology of Contemplative Science.

Dr Wallace is a sophisticated scientist who is very experienced in talking about the details of Buddhism. He understands the thousands of years of studying the mind from a Buddhist perspective and how to integrate it with modern science. He has the input of the Dalai Lama too, having been a translator for him for years. I encourage the serious reader to take a look.

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