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ON THE BORDER

Info & insights from the interface between energy healing & science

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Welcome to the January 2011 edition of 'On the Border'.

Happy New Year!

For those of you new to 'On the Border', this is Jayne's monthly Ezine newsletter about the latest information and insights into energy fields, healing and science. Each month I share with you some of the latest research and how it applies to healing, energy work & (daily) life. There's a Fascinating Facts section and also a 'Freebie' where you get something for nothing, gratis.

How Dogs Can Teach Us About New Year's Resolutions

We Humans like to think that we have much more self-discipline than other animals. We know how to set goals—losing 5 kilos, starting our own businesses—and then we resist temptations and plough through difficulties to achieve them. We are far from perfect at this talent, but in most of our minds there is no question that our powerful self-control is one of the things that sets us apart from more lowly animals.



Scientists have long argued that delaying gratification requires a sense of “self.” Having a personal identity allows us to compare who we are today, at this very moment, with who we want to be— an idealised self. Such aspirations are thought to foster the kind of behaviour that leads to self-improvement. But new research suggests a more primitive source of our powers of self-discipline. It appears that, lofty as our goals may be, we rely on the same basic biological mechanism for self-discipline as our four-legged best friends.

Sit and stay

Experimental psychologist Holly Miller and her colleagues at the University of Kentucky knew from previous research that in people, self-control relies on the brain's “executive” powers, which coordinate planning and action. It is further known that this kind of effortful cognitive processing requires energy

in the form of glucose, the simple sugar that serves as the body's fuel. Studies show that depletion of the brain's glucose supply compromises self-discipline. For instance, passing up a tempting happy-hour drink after work may make it tougher to forgo your favourite television show later on that evening to exercise. Of course, all mental activities require energy, but self-control seems to be one process that is especially compromised when the energy starts running out. But is this a uniquely human phenomenon? To find out, Miller recruited a group of dogs ranging in age from 10 months to more than 10 years old. Some were pure-breds, such as Australian shepherds and vizslas; others were mongrels. All the dogs were familiar with a toy called a Tug-a-Jug,



which is basically a clear cylinder with treats inside; dogs can easily manipulate the Tug-a-Jug to get a tasty reward. In the experiment, some of the dogs were ordered by their owners to "sit" and then "stay" for 10 minutes. That's a long time to sit still; it was meant to exhaust the animals mentally and thus to deplete their fuel reserves. The other dogs, the controls, merely waited in a cage for 10 minutes.

Then all the dogs were given the familiar Tug-a-Jug, except that it had been altered so that it was now impossible to get the treats out. The hungry dogs could see and hear the treats—but they could not get at them. The idea was to see if the previous demand for self-discipline made the dogs less, well, dogged in working for the treats. And it did, unmistakably. Compared with the dogs that had simply been caged, those that had willed themselves to stay still for 10 minutes gave up much more quickly—after less than a minute, as opposed to more than two minutes of effort from the controls. In other words, it seemed as though exerting self-discipline had used up much of the dogs' blood sugar supply—weakening their brain's executive powers and diminishing the animals' ability to exert goal-directed effort.

Sugar-powered discipline

Executive powers? In dogs? These findings suggest that self-control may not be a crowning psychological achievement of human evolution and indeed may have nothing to do with self-awareness. It may simply be biology—and beastly biology at that. These are humbling results, so the scientists decided to double-check them in a different way. In a second experiment, they recruited another group of dogs, this time made up of Shetland sheepdogs and border collies. As before, some of the dogs sat and stayed for 10 minutes, whereas the others were caged. But this time half of the



obedient dogs got a sugar drink following the exercise, whereas the others got an artificially sweetened drink. Miller wanted to see if she could restore the dogs' executive powers by re-fueling their brains.

And that is exactly what happened. The dogs that exerted self-control and then got replenished with sugar performed just like the dogs that had not been exhausted to begin with. They persisted with the Tug-a-Jug, even though it was frustrating and demanding to do so. The depleted dogs that had not received the sugar drink gave up much more quickly. In short, all the dogs acted the way that humans do in similar situations requiring restraint and goal-directed activity.

So perhaps humans are not unique—at least not in this regard. It appears that the hallmark sense of human identity—our selfhood—is not a prerequisite for self-discipline. Whatever it is that makes us go to the gym and save for college is fueled by the same brain mechanisms that enable our hounds to sacrifice their own impulses and obey.



References:

Self-Control without a “Self”?: Common Self-Control Processes in Humans and Dogs. H.T. Miller, K.F. Pattison, C.N. deWall, R. Rayburn-Reeves and T.Z. Zentall. *Psychological Science* (2010), volume. 21, number. 4, pages 534–538.

Dog tired: What mutts can teach us about self-control. W. Herbert. *Scientific American Mind* (2010), volume 21, number 5, pages 66-67.

Fascinating Facts

Did you know that.....?

- The heart beats 3 billion times during an average human lifetime
- 2 million blood cells die every second in the human body – and every second 2 million new ones are born.
- One tiny drop of blood contains 5 million red blood cells, 300 000 platelets and 10 000 white blood cells.
- It takes approximately one minute for a red blood cell to travel through the body.

- Red blood cells 'do the rounds' in the body about 250 000 times before they return to their birthplace (the bone marrow) to die.
- Red blood cells have a life span of approximately 4 months during which they circulate through the entire body and feed 60 billion other blood cells.

January Freebie

In this section you get the chance to get something for nothing. Helemaal gratis. Always a pleasure!

With these cold wintry days, I often find myself just enjoying the warmth of being inside when it is raining hard outside. I came across this website, [1000 Awesome Things](#), that deals at all the little stuff in life that we appreciate.

It is a time-ticking countdown of 1000 awesome things, started in June 2008, and updated every day. Some of the one that have made me smile in recognition include:

- When you arrive at your destination just as a great song ends on the radio
- The first meal you eat after a cold
- Getting buried under piles of heavy blankets on a cold night
- When the bus driver stops the bus to let you off near your home
- Finding good reading material in someone else's bathroom

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