

# Spiritual Themes and Challenges in Global Health

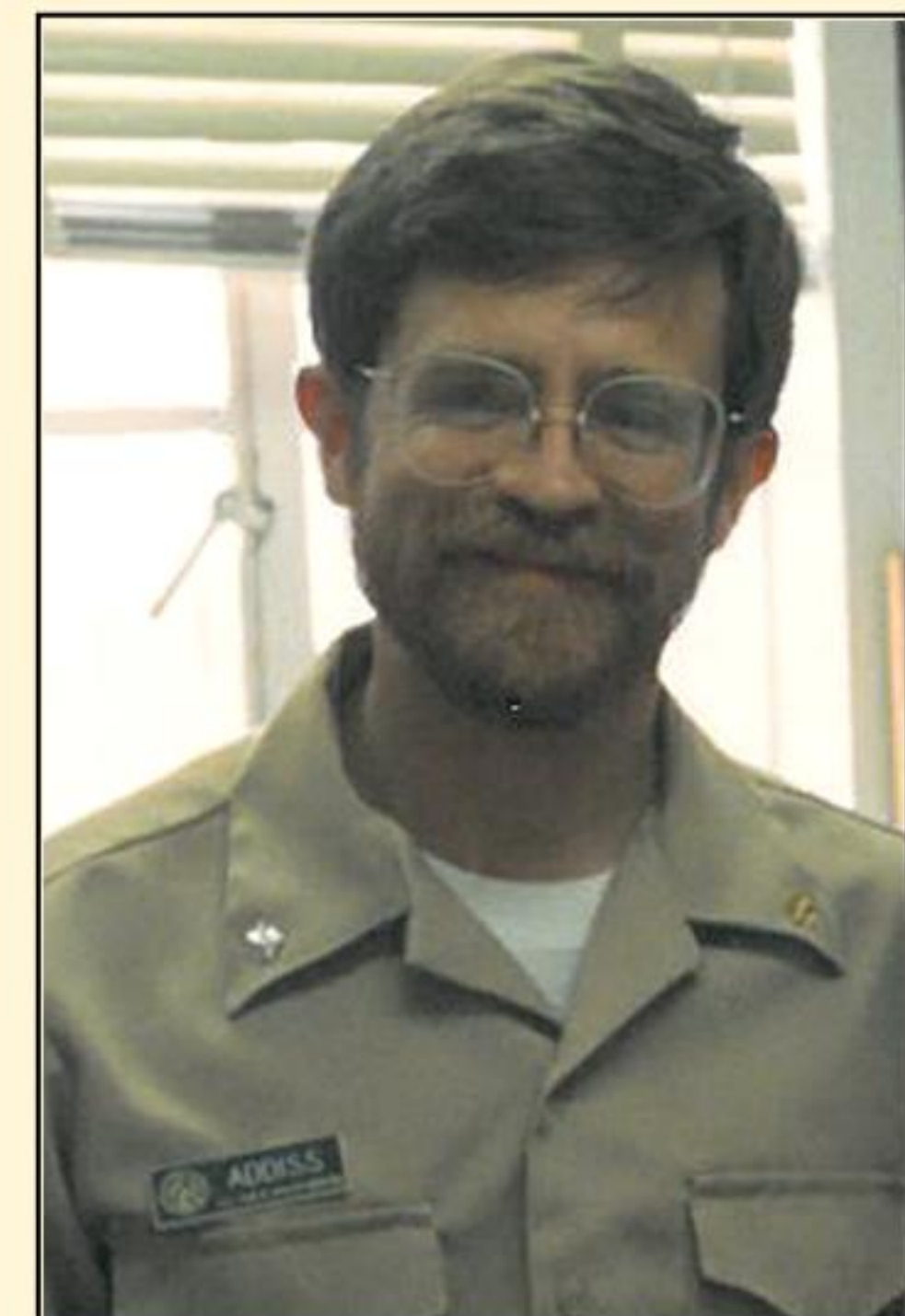
World Vision International  
Global Health, Nutrition and  
HIV Community of Practice

David Addiss, MD, MPH  
March 9, 2016



# My journey into global health

- Dan Fountain, MD
  - Boyhood hero
- General practice, migrant health
- MPH – Johns Hopkins University
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)





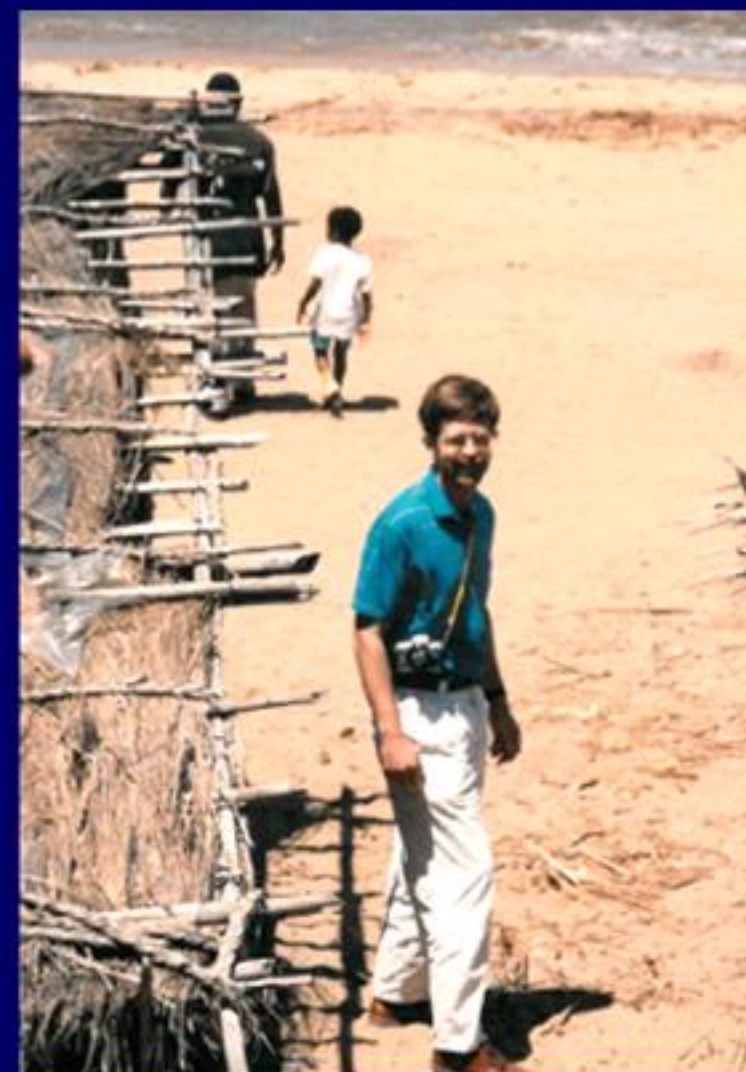
# Global Health at CDC



Leogane, Haiti



China, 2004



Malawi, 1993



Abbottabad, Pakistan, 1988



# The New York Times

September 10, 2002

## **At Disease Centers, a Shift In Mission and Metabolism**

By LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is going through an uncomfortable metamorphosis, from an agency that focused on controlling naturally transmitted diseases to one heavily involved with bioterrorism and its possible effects on national security.



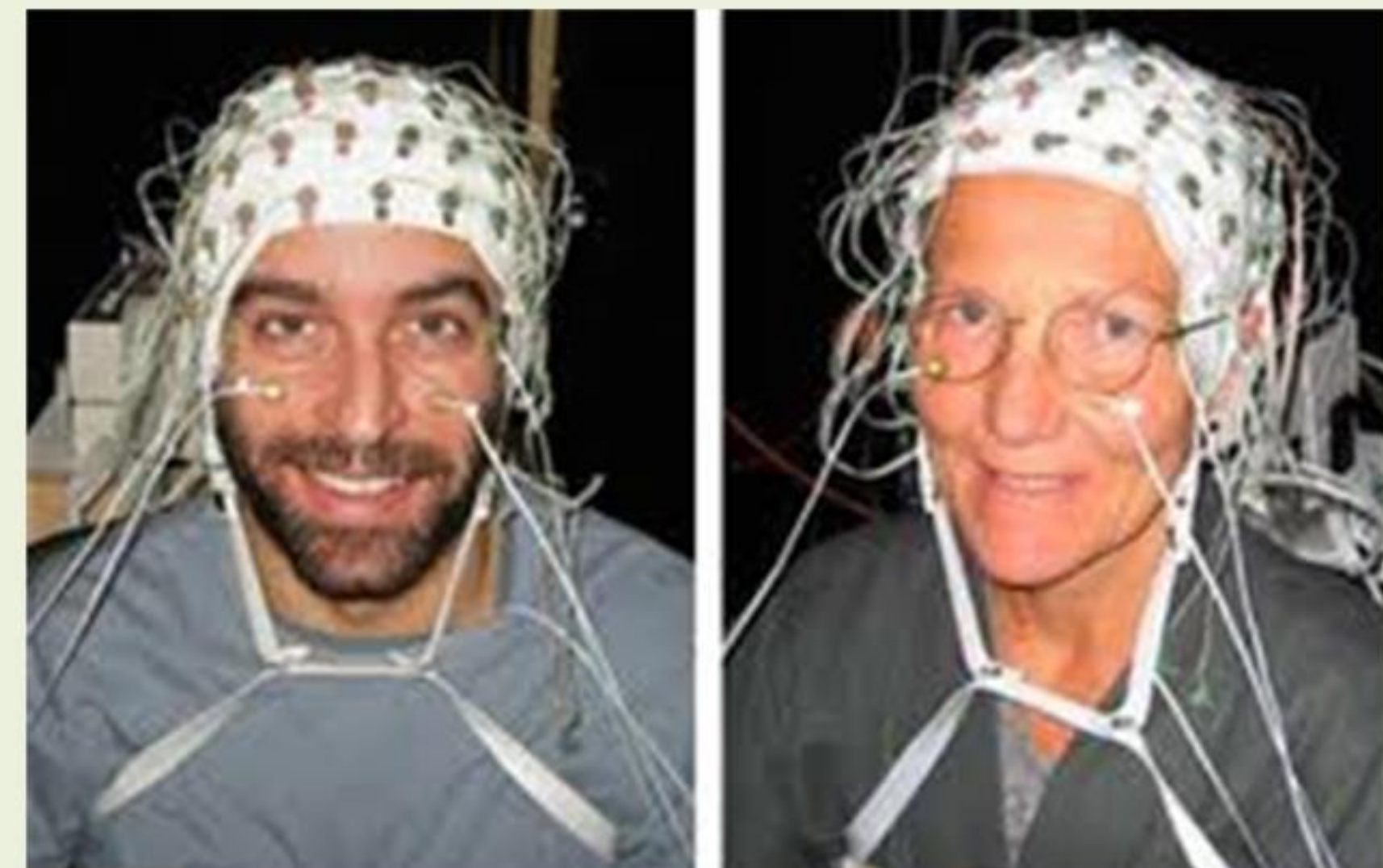
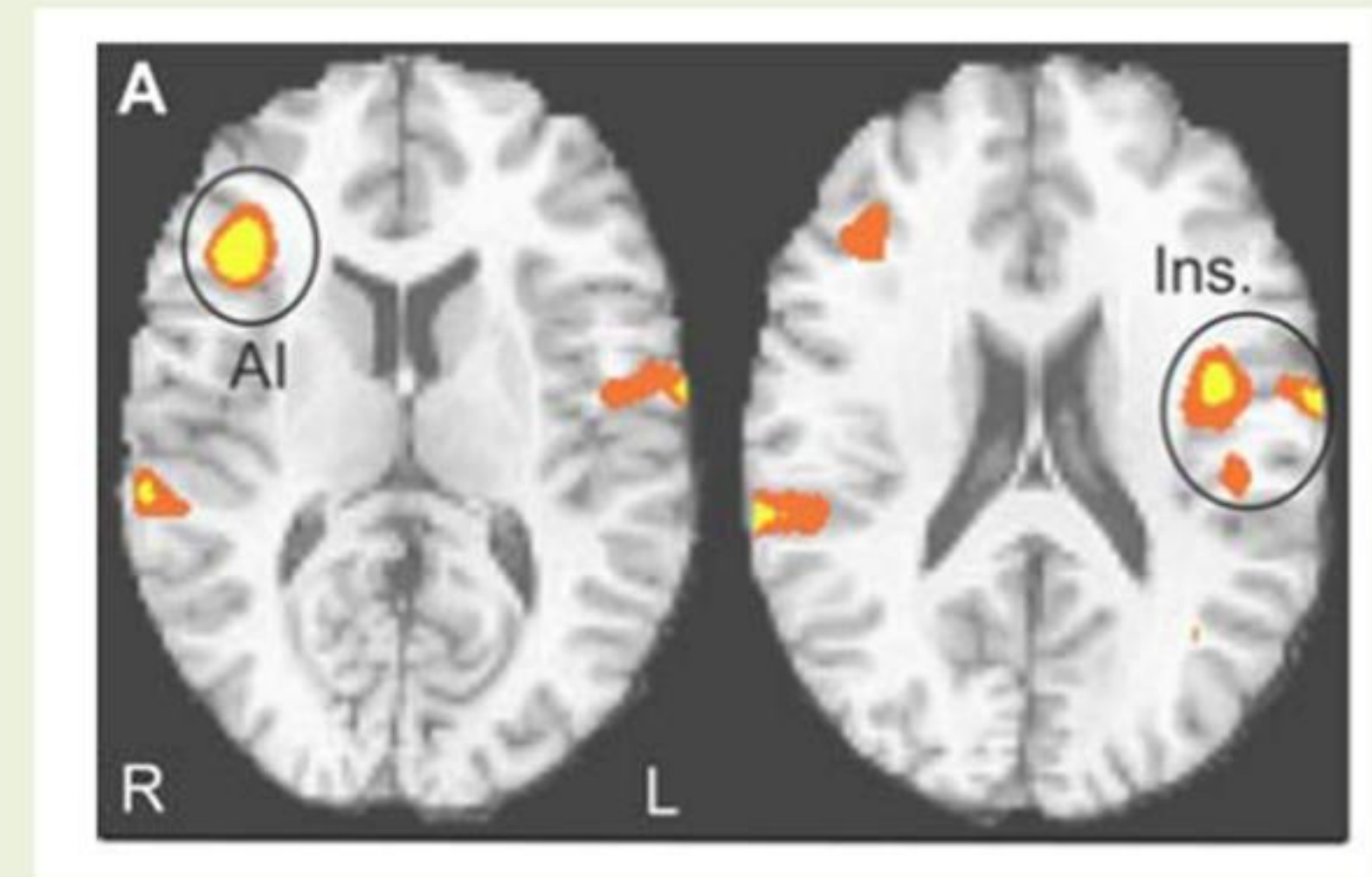
So in 2006 I took a break...





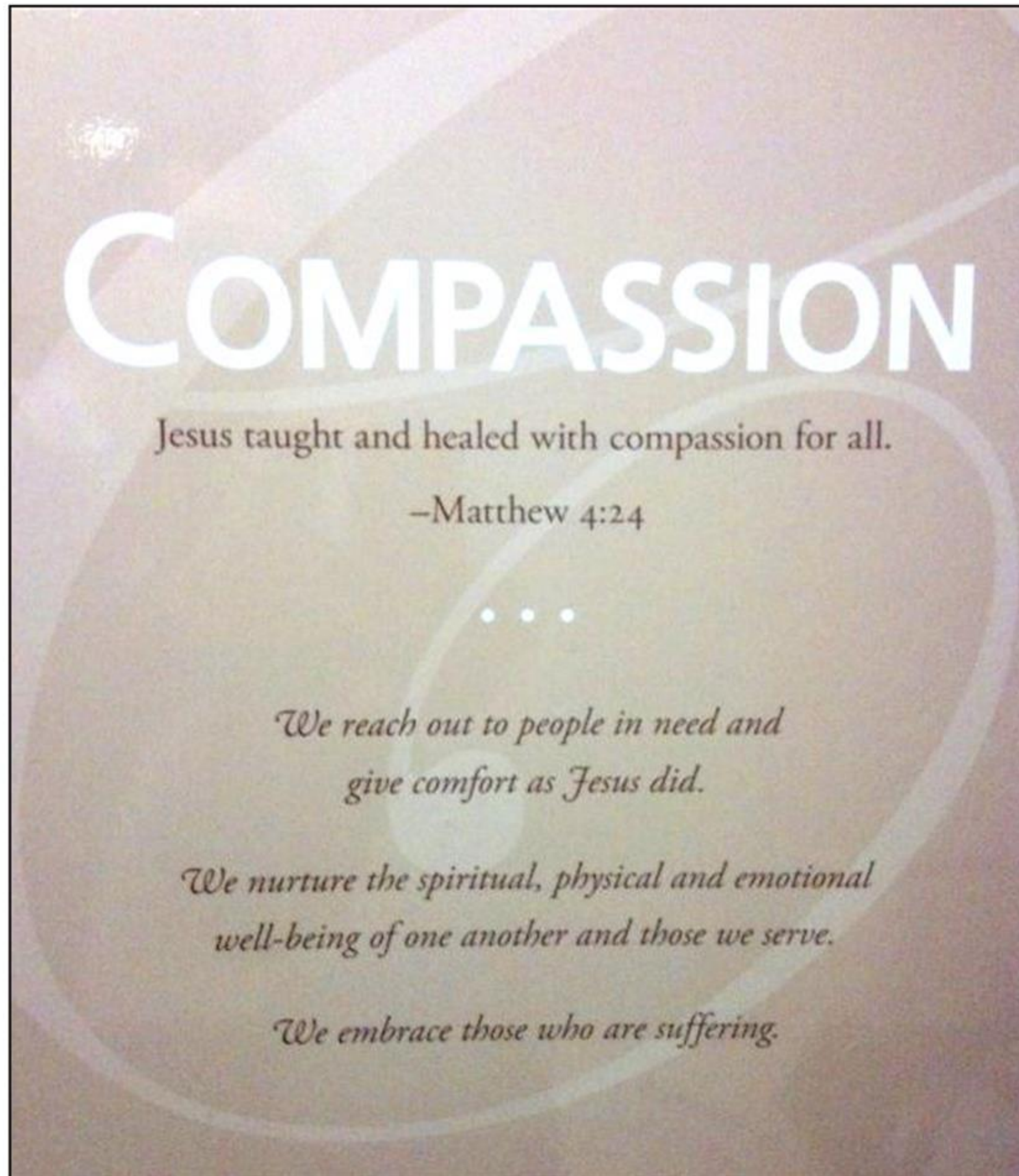
# Neuroscience of Compassion

- ‘Compassion training’ influences neural circuitry and emotional responses to suffering





# Compassion in Medicine



Providence Holy Cross Medical  
Center, Mission Hills, CA



# Compassion in Nursing

KEYWORDS COMPASSION | EMPATHY | HOLISTIC CARE

## Compassion in nursing 1: defining, identifying and measuring this essential quality

An outline of what compassion is, how it is an integral part of care and relates to dignity, and how it might be measured in both qualified and student nurses

Original article

### Compassion and professional care: exploring the domain

**Margreet van der Cingel** RN MsN PhD student

*Senior Lecturer, School of Healthcare, Windesheim University, Zwolle, the Netherlands*

#### Abstract

Compassion unites people during times of suffering and distress. Unfortunately, compassion cannot take away suffering. Why then, is compassion important for people who suffer? Nurses work in a domain where human suffering is evidently present. In order to give meaning to compassion in



# Compassion in Global Health





# What motivates and sustains us in global health?





# Compassion and Global Health

“Global health is rooted in the value of compassion. It is grounded in an awareness of our interconnectedness and a concern with the whole.”

– Conclusion of a Meeting on Compassion in Global Health, The Carter Center, Atlanta, September 2010





# Global Health

- Notion
  - Health is global – we are all interconnected
  - Requires global cooperation
- Objective
  - Health of *all* people
  - Health equity
- Discipline
  - Academic and practice
  - Preventive and clinical care
  - Populations and individuals



Source: Koplan et al, *Towards a common definition of global health*. Lancet 2009; 373:1993-1995.



# Compassion and Global Health

## Steve Ben Israel, 74, a Living Theater Performance Artist

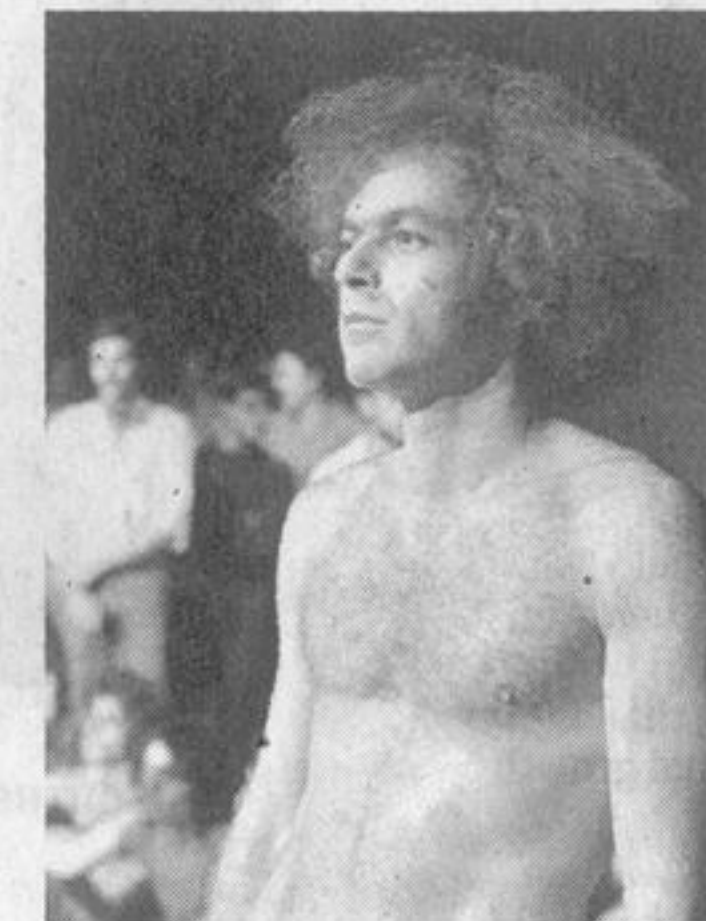
By PAUL VITELLO

The young Steve Ben Israel was a longhaired, card-carrying pacifist, anarchist, comedian and performance artist who toured during the 1960s and '70s with the Living Theater, an avant-garde repertory group. He had leading roles in many of the company's cheerfully seditious productions, including "Paradise Now," in which the cast, naked, exhorted audience members to seize the theater, form anarchist cells and overthrow the government.

Making anarchist performance art was a hard way to earn a living even back then, when millions of young Americans were dabbling in revolutionary ideas. But Mr. Israel, who died of lung cancer on June 4 in Manhattan at 74, kept at it for the rest of his life, friends said — a one-man revolutionary cell delivering jokes, stories and poems aimed at undermining capitalist society. He did not advocate overthrowing the government much anymore. He was trying, he told people, to

Bob Fass, a WBAI radio host and friend, attributed Mr. Israel's staying power to optimism. Ideology and politics mattered to Mr. Israel, he said. Eye contact mattered more. "He liked people," Mr. Fass said. "He never gave up on people. He was relentless in that way." Mr. Israel became a mainstay of the Living Theater during its New York heyday, when its productions pushed the limits of emerging Off Broadway and Off Off Broadway theater with works by playwrights like Jean Cocteau and Gertrude Stein and homegrown improvisations like "Paradise Now," its most successful show. Its cast members performed not only nude but also, in many cases, by their own later accounts, high on LSD.

Mr. Israel was an integral part of two productions that received Obie Awards: he portrayed the monster in "Frankenstein" in 1968 and was guest co-director of the 2007 revival of "The Brig," originally staged in 1963, about a Marine Corps prison.



Steve Ben Israel in "Paradise Now" in 1968.

*Trying to undermine capitalist society with comedy.*

He was trying, he told people, to foment a mass uprising of compassion.

handed out the money, he gave his slightly disoriented audience its marching orders: "Next time an artist, or a homeless person, gets on the train, you dig in your pocket and you give them a quarter. And remember: You're 75 cents ahead!"

earth streak, he was the organizer who frequently handled negotiations when the shows caused problems with the local authorities (a common occurrence). When diplomacy failed and the troupe needed to get out of town fast, Mr. Israel usually

drove the bus.

In 1977, he and his wife, Pamela Mayo Israel, a fellow performer, left the company, which is still operating. His wife and son, Baba, who announced his death, survive him, along with a granddaughter.

"I live a few blocks away from here in SoHo," Mr. Israel told the audience at a comedy club in Greenwich Village years later. "SoHo: where you can buy a painting of a regular pizza for \$12,000. But a painting of a Sicilian will cost you \$18,500."

He worked for the next three decades as a "live artist" (his homey term for performance artist), sometimes on street corners and subway cars, but mainly in

clubs and small theaters in New York and Los Angeles. Mixing poetry and political satire, he produced two one-man shows, "Non-Violent Executions" and "Nostalgia for the Future."

Steven Ben Israel was born in Brooklyn on May 25, 1938, the son of Jack and Rose Israel. His father was a truck driver. After high school, Mr. Israel spent a semester at the University of Kansas. His only achievement there, he said, was playing a round of pool with a basketball-playing upperclassman, Wilt Chamberlain.

He began his career as a stand-up comedian and jazz drummer. Lenny Bruce, whom he met in the Village in the late 1950s, deeply influenced his worldview, he said.

Before joining the Living Theater, he played roles in an Off Broadway production of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's "Threepenny Opera."

In recent years Mr. Israel was known for what he called impromptu interventions: one-man street-theater improvisations, some of them witnessed by friends and some recounted in his club act. Many were about money, which he called civilization's most coercive and violent force. In one, he became a superherolike "Money Fairy," breaking up an actual fight over the correct change between a hot-dog vendor and his customer by giving each the sum of money in dispute.

In his last performances, Mr. Israel presented what he called the world's first "seven-second play."

"To be," he intoned with authority Hamlet never mustered.

"A mensch!"

"That is the answer."



# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

## *Consensus Definition of Spirituality*

“**Spirituality** is that aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals ***seek and express meaning and purpose*** and ***experience their connectedness*** to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred.”

2009 National Consensus Conference, *Improving Quality Spiritual Care as a Domain of Palliative Care* (Puchalski et al., J Palliat Med 2009;12:885–904)



# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

- Sense of calling or vocation  
*...“seek and express meaning and purpose and experience their connectedness...”*



# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

- Sense of calling or vocation  
*...“seek and express meaning and purpose and experience their connectedness...”*
- Shared values and virtues
  - Compassion



# Compassion

*Karen Armstrong*

“The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures...”

<http://charterforcompassion.org/>





# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

- Shared values and virtues
  - Compassion
  - Human dignity
  - Equity and social justice
  - Generosity of spirit
  - Fearlessness
  - Humility
  - Gratitude
  - Connectedness
  - Wonder and awe



# Spiritual Themes and Challenges in Global Health

- Method
  - Informal conversations and interviews ‘in the corners’ of global health meetings
- Spiritual themes and challenges
  - “Compassion at a distance”
  - Dichotomous thinking
  - “Conspiracy of silence”
  - Compulsion to “save the world”

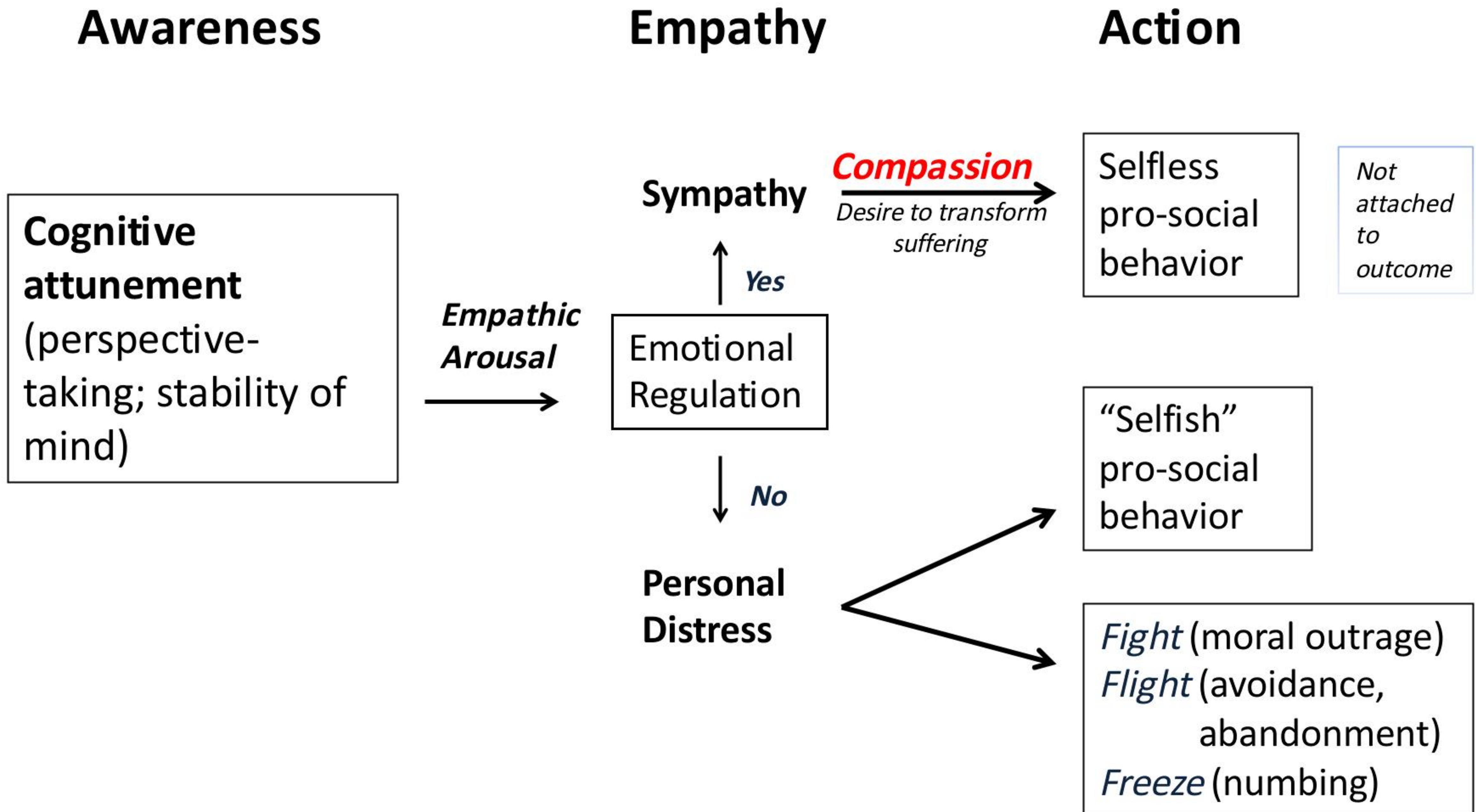


# Elements of Compassion

- Awareness of suffering (cognitive attunement)
- Empathy (emotional attunement)
- Action (to relieve and prevent suffering)



# A Social Psychology Model of Compassion



Adapted from Eisenberg, Batson, Halifax, and others



# Compassion and Global Health *Challenges*

- Populations, not individuals
  - Geographic, cultural, economic distance





# “Willing to see faces”

“If we are to maintain the reputation this institution now enjoys, it will be because in everything we do, behind everything we say, as the basis for every program decision we make—we will be willing to see faces.”

Bill Foege, *Smallpox, Gandhi, and CDC*  
– *Fifth Annual Joseph Mountin Lecture*,  
Atlanta, October 26, 1984





# Compassion and Global Health *Challenges*

- Populations, not individuals
- Complex bureaucracies and partnerships





# Compassion and Global Health *Challenges*

- Populations, not individuals
- Complex bureaucracies and partnerships
- **Competing values**
  - Economic, political, military interests





# Compassion and Global Health *Challenges*

“I hope that our understandable ***fear*** of the unfamiliar does not trump our ***compassion*** when ill Americans return to the US for care.”

Tom Frieden, CDC Director  
August 3, 2013

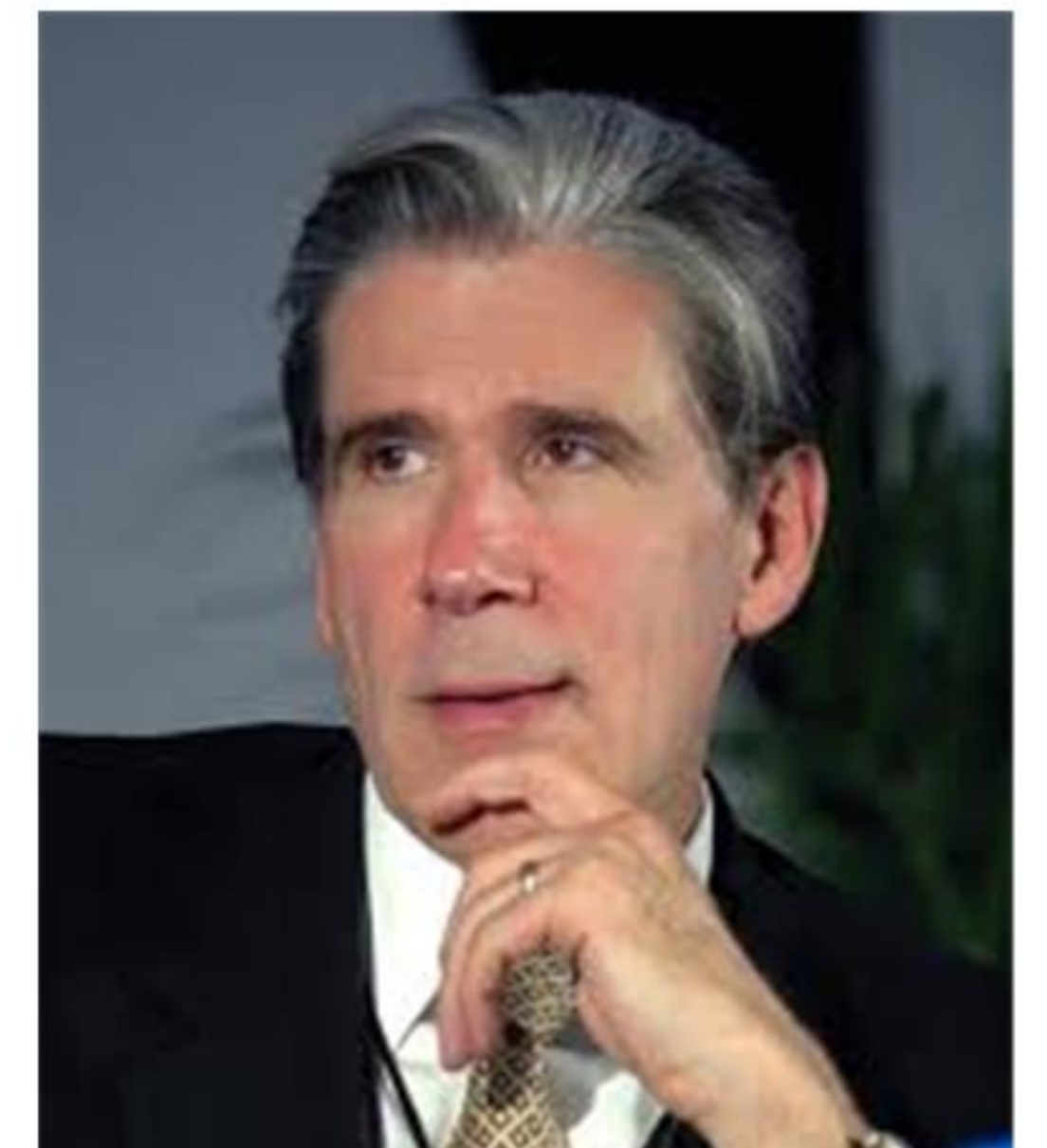




# Spiritual Challenges in Global Health

## *Dichotomous Thinking*

- “We do this so badly in global health... false dichotomies... prevention vs. cure”  
— Richard Horton, November 25, 2013
- “The greatest threat to global health is dichotomous thinking.” — Julio Frenk



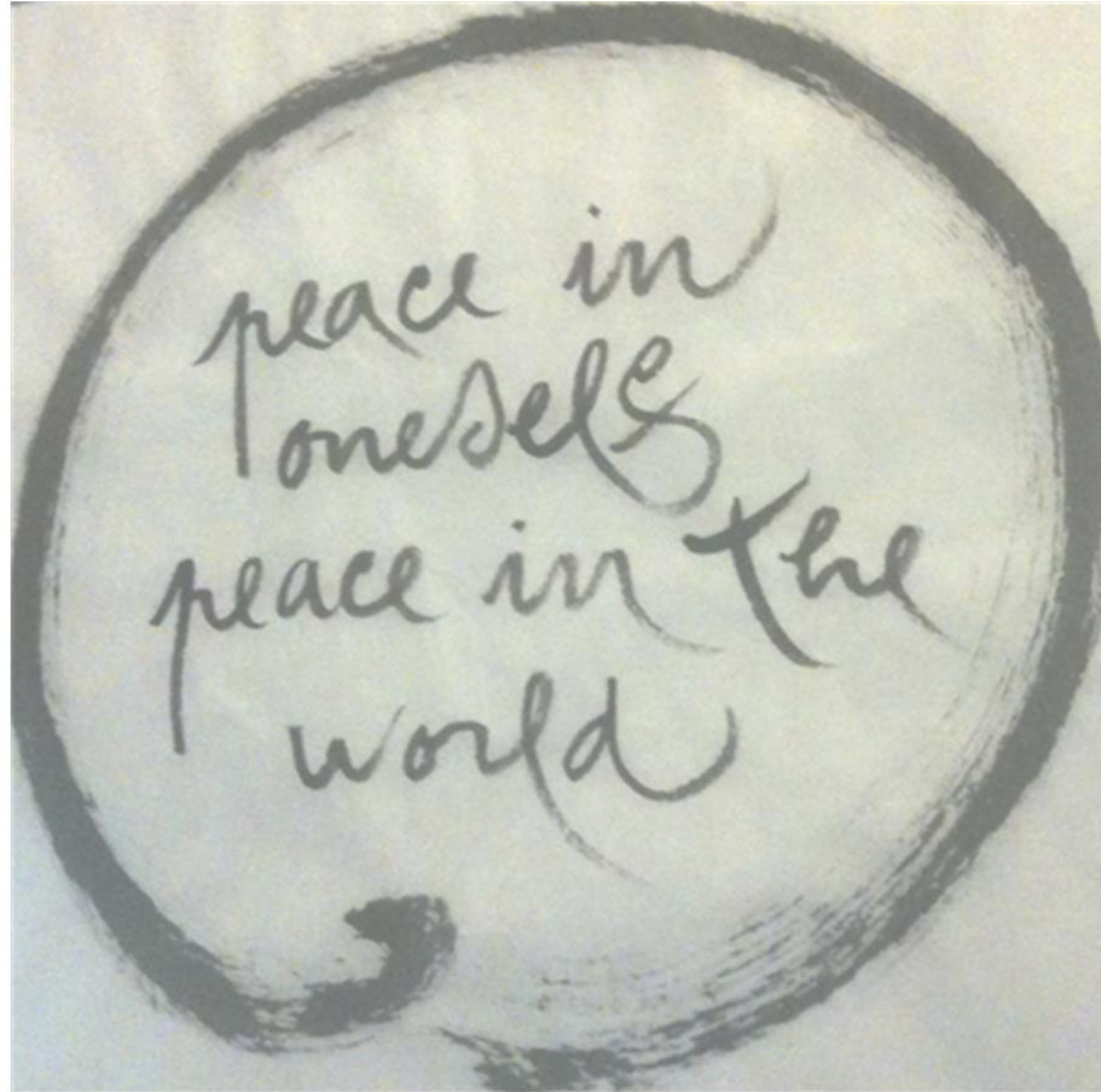


# Global Health is Non-Dual

- “Everything is local and everything is global. Global health is not ‘over there’ – it’s right here.” – Bill Foege, April 26, 2012
- “Successful public health leadership in the next millennium will require...*the ability to see the whole and its parts simultaneously*...to scan and to focus and to see relationships. And they need to do these all *at the same time*.”
  - Bill Foege and Mark Rosenberg, Public and Community Health. In: *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Health Care Leader* [italics added]



# Global Health is Non-Dual





# Spiritual Challenges in Global Health

## *“Conspiracy of Silence”*



Symposium on Compassion in Global Health and Tropical Medicine  
ASTMH, December 7, 2011



# Spiritual Challenges in Global Health

## *Compulsion to “Save the World”*

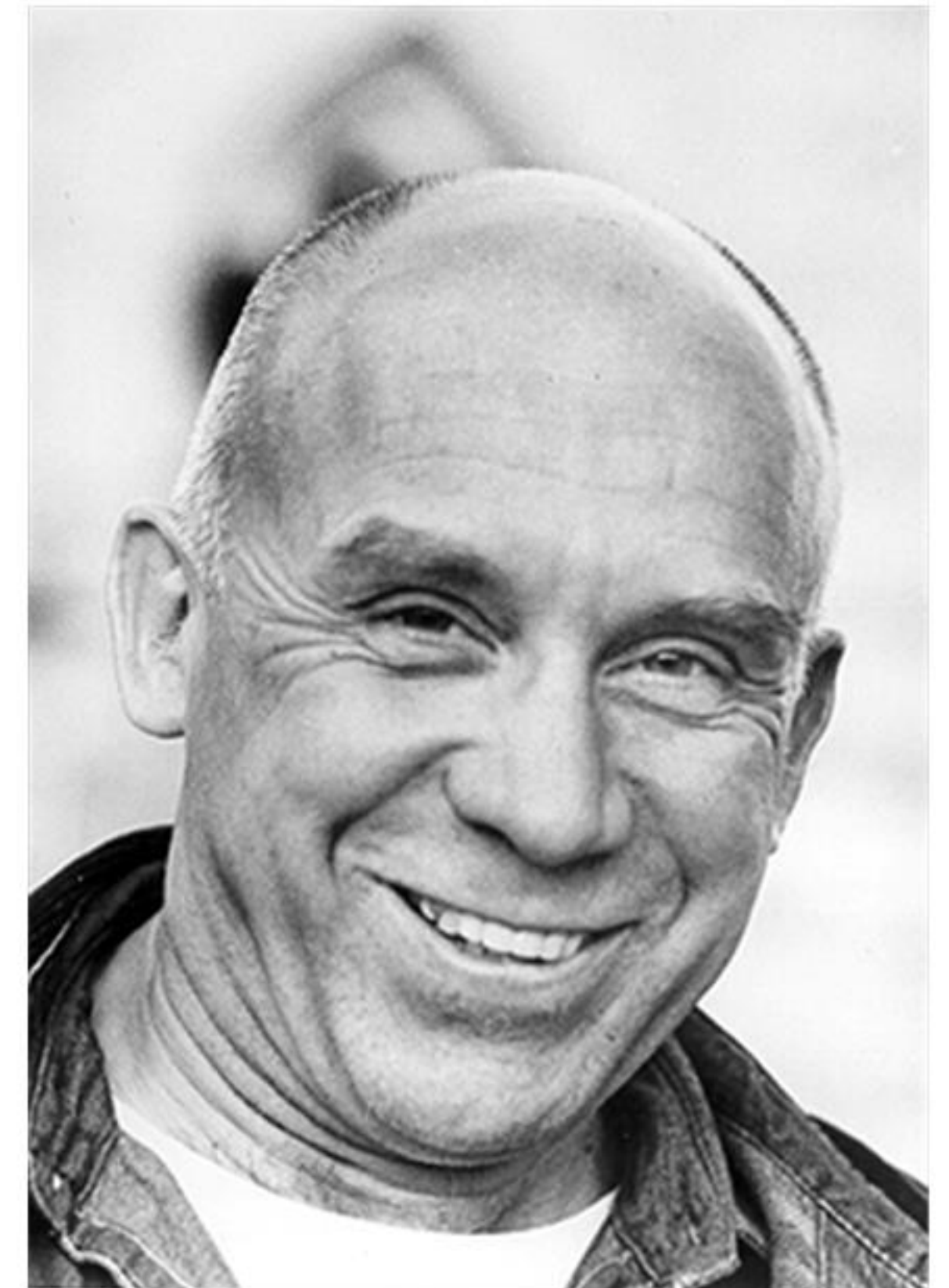
- “Shadow side” of wanting to make a difference
- Response to overwhelming need
  - Ego over-identifies with work and outcomes
  - Compulsive overwork
  - Burnout



# The cost of 'compulsion to save the world'

“To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is itself to succumb to the violence of our times.”

Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*





# HIV/AIDS Activist, Manhattan

“I don’t think I had verbalized to anyone before the disconnect I sometimes feel between the compassionate nature of my work, all with nonprofits doing extraordinary public health and social justice work, and my avoidance of dealing directly and compassionately with friends and family who are in psychological or physical distress...”



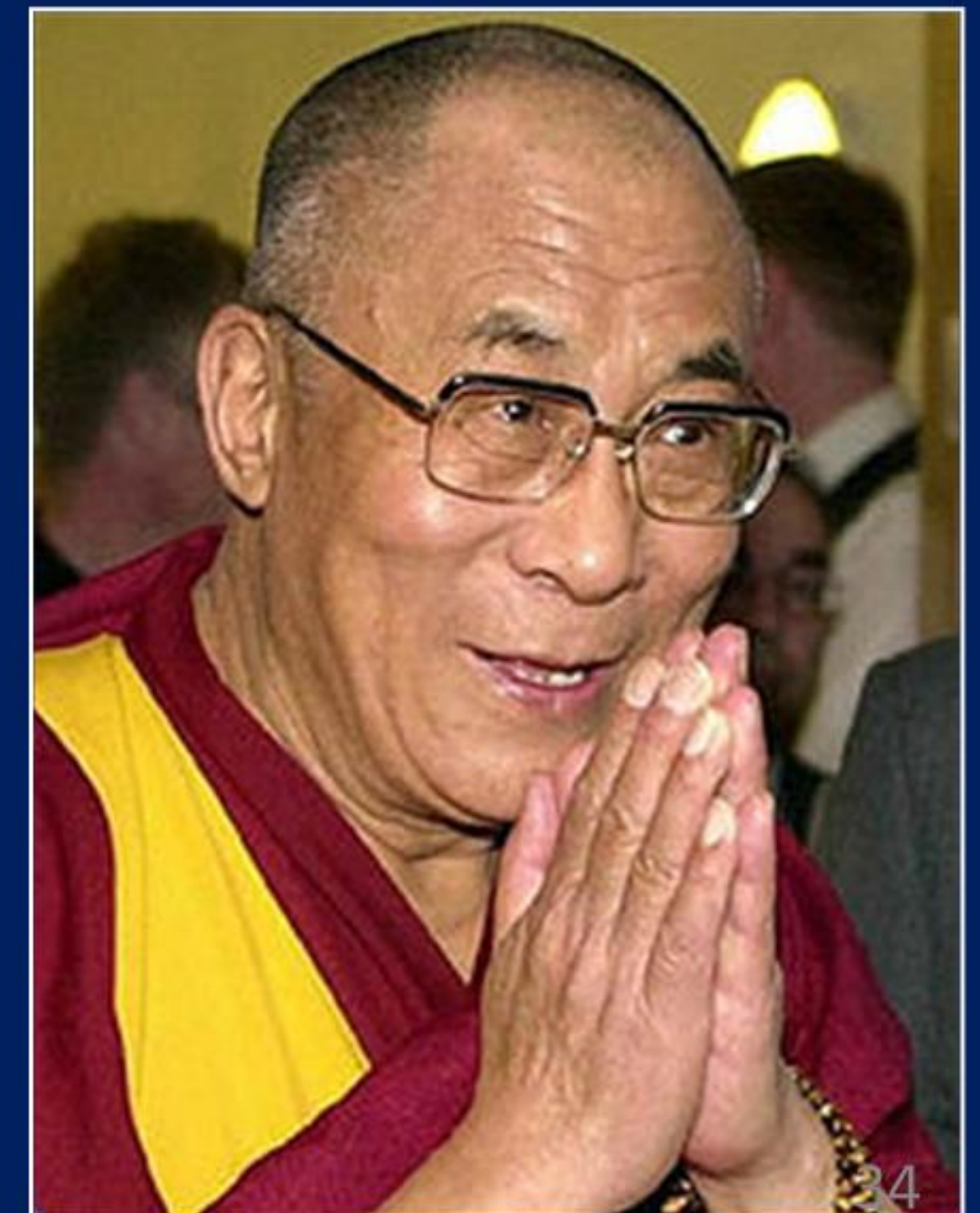
# Compassion and Action

“[Compassion] is not just a wish to see sentient beings free from suffering, but an *immediate need to intervene and actively engage*, to try to help...

A person who has attained stability in his or her compassion training ... should now be out, running around like a mad dog, actively engaged in acts of compassion.”

- The Dalai Lama

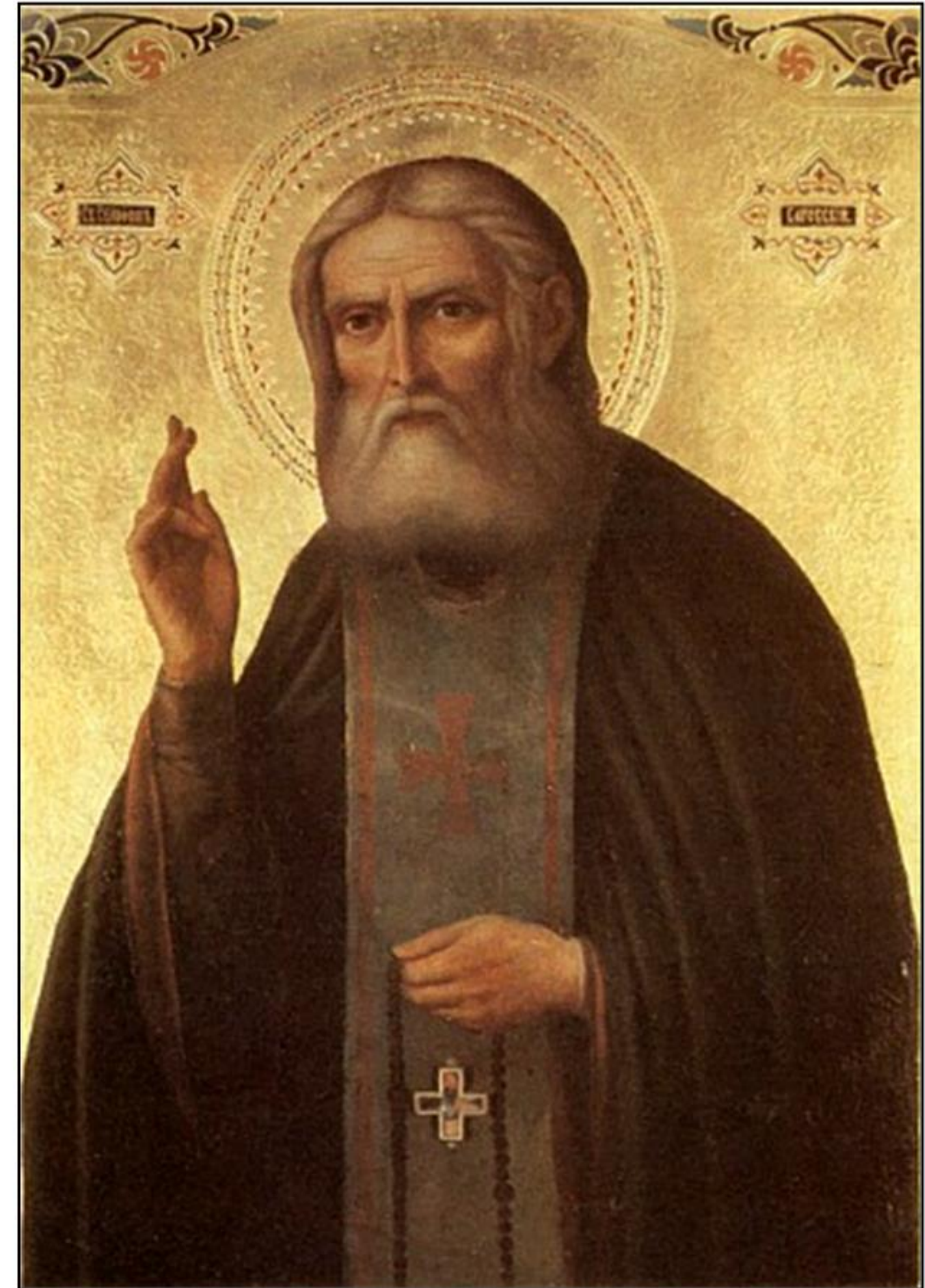
Source: Davidson RJ and Harrington A, eds. *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*. Oxford University Press, New York, 2002





# St. Seraphim of Sarov

"Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved."



b. 1754 - d. 1883



# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

## *Individual level*

- Travel to the field
- Photos
- Relationships
- Personal rituals
- Compassion training
- Religious practice
- Prayer





# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

## *Collective level*

- Sharing our stories
- Celebrating our joys and successes
- Collective expressions of sorrow and apology
- Religious fellowship
- Periodic retreats



# Global Health as Spiritual Practice

## *Organizational*

- Chaplains
- Deep dialogue
  - Global health, religious and spiritual leaders, theologians
  - Tübingen conferences were an essential precursor to the primary health care movement in the 1970s
- Organizational values and commitments



# The Good Samaritan



Vincent Van Gogh, 1890



# Thank you!

[www.ccagh.org](http://www.ccagh.org)

Center for Compassion & Global Health

David Addiss

[dgaddiss@gmail.com](mailto:dgaddiss@gmail.com)