



Thank you to [Jeri Uhrich](#) for donating her photo.

WYOMING INTERFAITH NETWORK
Fear not. Be bold. Build bridges. Do justice.

Blessings to You, WIN Community:

In our daily lives, we tend to become so busy. The majority of us who are connected through WIN are busy aiming to help others. We are often so focused on helping others that we may become overwhelmed, isolated, or even experience a sense of despair. Whether it be helping individuals who are facing painful life experiences, helping people address challenges in their relationships, providing leadership in our faith communities and communities

at large, and now, perhaps more than ever before, doing our best to help those we don't even know -- vulnerable populations in our country and in our world -- those facing intersections of extreme poverty, racism, oppression, violence, hunger, homelessness, unsafe spaces in which to try to live and raise their children and families -- those seeking asylum and a better life, only to find their safety continually challenged -- we may face burnout.

We become so engrossed in our work, and in our inner determination to help, that we may move along a continuum from being stressed to becoming fatigued, then exhausted, then burned out. For some of us, our daily work of helping others who are traumatized, or viewing a constant barrage of online and electronic news about people who are traumatized, can lead to vicarious trauma.

Trauma affects the neurobiology of our brains, causing us to get stuck in a fight or flight response that God gave us in order to survive. When in a dangerous situation, our bodies get us ready to either run to safety or stay and fight. Either way, the complex physiology of this fight or flight survival mode is meant for rare emergencies, not for our daily lives. When we get stuck here, we tend to be filled with the anxiety needed to move quickly -- to either run away or fight. In daily life, if we are in this state, we tend to become aggressive -- ready to fight; or isolated -- having run away.

This week, I witnessed several examples of this. I saw two men get out of their cars to yell at one another in an incident that looked like road rage. I was involved in a complex situation at work in which a colleague began yelling at fellow colleagues. I saw literally hundreds of news stories throughout the week about human suffering and human acts of hatred and violence.

However, scientific studies on brains -- neuroscience -- is advancing at a wonderful and hopeful pace. The most important and interesting emergent theme that continues to result from these complex scientific studies is that our stressed-out, burned-out brains and bodies can heal. This is called neuroplasticity -- meaning that our brains are malleable -- they can change.

And the greatest, most hopeful findings of all are that the changes in one person's neurobiology is contagious. We can heal hatred, we can heal isolation, we can heal aggression, by doing three simple things that we all know how to do:

1. **Breathe.** Simply focusing on breathing for at least 90 seconds is the fastest way to become calm and mindful. The 4-4-6-2 breath is healing for our brain chemistry. Stop in the midst of a stressful moment or in preparing for the day or an interaction, and just breathe mindfully. We can also help those with whom we interact to offer them this simple gift of serenity: **Breathe in through your nose counting to 4; hold that**

breath gently for 4; blow out through your mouth for 6; and rest for 2. Repeat. It is important to know that for the first two to three rounds of inhaling and exhaling, more anxiety may creep in as our bodies are telling us mere breathing will not help when we need to either run or flee. But continuing through this moment and breathing through for at least 90 seconds is enough time to reset the brain and our body chemistry.

2. Practice Mindful Intent -- Pray. Taking a moment to decide for ourselves to quietly meditate on what we wish to accomplish in the day and *how* we aim to accomplish it, based on our own values, is very effective. A moment of mindful prayer to connect with our own God, to guide us through our days and our meetings and our tasks to help others is vital to help us stay connected to our daily mission, and to **respond** mindfully throughout our interactions, rather than being **reactive**.

3. Having Meaningful Interactions with Others. One of the most beautiful and hopeful neuroscience discoveries is that compassion can heal traumatized brains that are aggressive and isolated -- brains that have become so dysregulated by trauma that they are capable of committing violent acts that create ripples of more trauma, in a contagious manner. Compassionate, peaceful, loving connection can heal hatred. This helps to remind us that we can not only connect to help others, but that compassionate connection is also healing for us, and then it grows, as we model our kindness and our brains and bodies heal together.

I included a picture in this week's message of Mohamed Salhi, a WIN Board member, and my mom, Jan Hammer. These two humans are role models for mindfulness, peace, and the simplicity of how a calm, centered, human relationship can be healing and contagious. In this picture, they were hugging after Mohamed's presentation on Understanding the Muslim Faith at last year's WIN Annual Conference. They have been the best of friends since they worked together at Laramie County Community College. They would sit together and compassionately converse about life, family, and the complexities of oppression, racism, and hate, each having experienced their own versions of atrocious acts of hatred. But they focused on compassion, humor, love, and simply connecting and enjoying their friendship. This is contagious as you look at their photo. See the joy and love in the photo. It is contagious.

You in WIN have always known this. You are filled with love, and blessed with the knowledge of the peace that comes from prayer with the God in your life, to be the change we wish to see in the world. Sometimes, we just need a little reminder and the permission to slow down. Now, the importance of this is proven by medical research.

This week, my wish for you is breathing, prayer, mindfulness, and the experience of slowing down to enjoy true connection and simple, compassionate conversations with those in your lives, or even with strangers. My hope is that you will be re-energized by these simple acts of breathing, prayer, and connecting, and that you will rejoice in noticing that these simple components already present in you and in your daily life bring you peace and create ripples of hope and compassion.

With Gratitude and Peace ... and Resolve to Make a Difference,

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