

**The Science of Rama:
Analysis of the Enlightenment Cycle**

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Introduction

How does current scientific evidence support or challenge the effectiveness and claims of Dr. Frederick P. Lenz's Enlightenment Cycle? As a collection of his profound teachings, the Enlightenment Cycle is a process to "overcome all limitations, all sorrow, all pain, [and learn to not be] bound by desire, and eventually [to] transcend death itself."¹ It is a lifestyle where the central practice is meditation, wherein we refine and clear our minds. This requires stillness, letting go of ego, and reaching clearer, higher states of *dharmakaya* (i.e., suchness). This process makes our happiness more resilient and puts an end to the "dependency for happiness on physical things, on people."² Throughout this cycle, meditation helps us unite our consciousness with "eternity, of being eternal, eternally aware, and at the same time being poised, graceful, balanced, and having a most excellent sense of humor."³ This cycle helps us live "a very grounded, happy, fun life, being energized and being good at everything you do, and getting better constantly."⁴ This paper compares current scientific evidence concerning the key elements of the Enlightenment Cycle. It first introduces Dr. Lenz's definition of these elements, followed by scientific analysis of his claims therein.

Biography

Dr. Frederick Phillip Lenz III, also called Rama, was born on February 9, 1950 in San Diego, California. His first encounter with Buddhism was when he was seven years old in Connecticut living with his father, stepmother, and stepbrothers after his mother and father divorced. He found a set of eight books on Buddhism in his father's library, which he avidly read. During his

¹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 21.

² Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 28.

³ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 21.

⁴ Ibid.

childhood and as a young adult, Rama took an interest in spirituality, Tae Kwon Do, meditation, traveling, and surfing.

He attended the University of Connecticut at Storrs in 1970. Reflecting on his time there, Rama stated, “When you study at a university with a great professor ... observe them and not simply what they say, but what they are”⁵ In 1972, Rama entered the spiritual community by becoming a student of Sri Chinmoy, a Hindu/Vedanta teacher, “who gave him the spiritual name of Atmananda, which means ‘bliss of the soul.’”⁶ Concurrently in his time with Chinmoy, he finished his undergraduate degree in English, Master of Arts via the State of New York Graduate Council Fellowship, and doctorate in English Literature from the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

At 29, Rama’s teaching career had already included lectures on meditation around the world, to include “State University of New York, Long Island University, Harvard, U.C.L.A., Stanford, Heidelberg, and the University of Zurich.”⁷ In the 1980’s, he formed his own school for American Buddhism and was then known as “Rama.” The school’s focus was on meditation, mindfulness, enlightenment, and happiness.

He went on to write many popular books and produced a number of enlightened musical albums to enhance meditation sessions. He was also a software designer, entrepreneur, scuba diver, snowboarder, martial artist, and a major contributor to numerous causes.

Rama passed away in 1998 and willed his estate for the Frederick P. Lenz Foundation for American Buddhism, which provides “general-assistance and restricted grants, program-

⁵ Lewison, *American Buddhist Rebel*, 27.

⁶ The Frederick P. Lenz Foundation, *Dr. Frederick P. Lenz*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

related investments, education and training, and other programs designed to grow and strengthen the emerging community of American Buddhist institutions.”⁸

Happiness

Rama’s Definition

Rama claimed that happiness can “free us from all limitation, from all sorrows, from all ignorance.”⁹ He stated that happiness is the correct view, through which we can discern what is and what is not. It is elusive, experienced by only a few, and comes from a “clear mind and unobstructed view where we can find peace within ourselves.”¹⁰ Alternatively, unhappiness is the incorrect view: it causes us to see life through a “condition of veiled light, of shadows.”¹¹

Happiness is powered by “light,” which Rama defined as the invulnerability of spiritual and physical happiness to the circumstances of physical life, such as having career success or failure, being in prison, dying, or being born. This form of resilient happiness depends on our inner light, which can also be called the light of self-discovery, or the light that does not give way. The deeper we are immersed in light, the happier we will be. This experience of light is unquantifiable, endless, without beginning, without an ultimate experience, and therefore has “no ultimate level of happiness.”¹² Light can be experienced during meditation once the mind is still, thoughts have stopped, and we go “beyond the senses [and ego].”¹³ Once light is being experienced, there is nothing else to do and subsequent experiences deepens the immersion of light, which further increases happiness. This is the pathway of *becoming* happiness, not just simply *being* happy.

⁸ The Frederick P. Lenz Foundation, *Dr. Frederick P. Lenz*.

⁹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 117.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 132.

¹² Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 120.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Rama stated that happiness should never be dependent on the physical world and that humans have a “desire-aversion operating system” that clouds our judgement.¹⁴ This operating system fools us by making us want something (e.g., food, sex, achievement) and not want something else (e.g., being uncomfortable, poor self-esteem). This is dangerous because our happiness is thus dependent on external physical things and we can become the victim of our own fortune or misfortune. Additionally, there is a limit of happiness in getting the object of our desire. Humorously, Rama stated that if eating apple pie makes you happy, the mindset may be to eat as many pies as you can, believing that if one pie is good, ten must be better. However, the happiness from eating many pies may not provide the same happiness as eating just one.

In order to short-circuit this operating system, it is required to have experience contacting the aforementioned “inner light” through meditation. This shows how faulty this operating system truly is, that it actually births unhappiness, and that “meditation is the [true] journey to happiness.”¹⁵ Meditation helps us access “planes of light,” to learn to like life itself, and to cause us to bring back more light each time.¹⁶

Further, Rama stated that happiness is in danger if it is gained through an occurrence or achievement, as it produces a fear of loss, making us slaves or junkies to the thing that makes us happy. Rama taught that, when we have negative thoughts, feel depressed, or frustrated by not having the object of our dependent happiness, we should meditate as a way to become more positive, see things correctly, and see “life in its perfection.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 118.

¹⁵ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 119-125.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 131-132.

Scientific Evidence

Happiness is defined in the utilitarian tradition as “the degree to which individuals judge the overall quality of their life as a whole favorably.”¹⁸ This definition, which is far from being comprehensive, has been used to define and measure happiness by its empirical features in the form of “self-reports of subjective wellbeing, in identifying its distribution across people in the real world, and in identifying how wellbeing is influenced by various life factors that range from income to other people.”¹⁹ Although happiness is wildly subjective and difficult to define and study, investigations of “the brain states associated with happiness components” has been a new focus of neuroscientists and psychologists, which can help to both “understand happiness and alleviate the suffering.”²⁰

Substantial progress has occurred in mapping its empirical features, and neuroscientists have made comparable progress in investigating the functional neuroanatomy of pleasure, which contributes to “happiness and our sense of wellbeing.”²¹ This ongoing research could prove the effectiveness of happiness in alleviating sorrow, as Rama claimed; however, while these self-reports provide “interesting indicators of mental wellbeing, they offer little evidence of the underlying neurobiology of happiness” or “how positive and negative affect are balanced in the brain.”²²

¹⁸ Bergsma, Buijt, and Veenhoven, *Will Happiness-Trainings Make Us Happier?*

¹⁹ Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, *Well-Being*, 3–25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Kringelbach and Berridge, *The Neuroscience of Happiness and Pleasure*, 659–678.

²² *Ibid.*

Meditation

Rama's Definition

Rama claimed that meditation can foster career success, help achieve better grades, and increase happiness, focus, concentration, the ability to relate to people, humor, and overall wellbeing. Additionally, Rama claimed that meditation is important in “overcoming self-destructive tendencies, overcoming depression, anxiety, nervousness, fear of all types of descriptions.”²³ Rama defines meditation as a process in which we stop or silence our thoughts, in order to “transcend dimensionality and merge with a perfect light... [where it transforms us to] become ‘illuminated.’”²⁴ This process is concerned with not-doing, being still, centered, clear, happy, in touch with the light, and developing. It expands our awareness, touching the deepest part of self.

Meditation is crucial to the Enlightenment Cycle, as it makes us mentally tough, strong, conscious, and grounded in the knowledge of who we are. This can allow us to “always be positive,” and to “ignore those who aren’t because they’re obviously confused and out of touch with light.”²⁵ Meditation can help us identify the energy around us and how it can influence us, requiring meditation to cleanse the psychic influence of daily life. This influence can be very easy to identify: if we are in a room of negative people, we can be brought down, whereas a room of positive people can lift us up. Meditation helps us become resilient and invulnerable to these fluctuations and helps shape the ambient energy to a more positive one.

Music can be a great tool for meditation. Enlightened music, such as Dr. Lenz’s *Enlightenment*, *Canyons of Light*, and *Samadhi*, can enable deeper meditation and access to high

²³ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 2.

²⁴ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 21.

²⁵ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 18.

planes of consciousness or light. Specifically, his music focuses on meditation on the chakras, which can energize and cleanse the body, release energies, and gain mental clarity, power, sharpness, and control. This can result in a powerful “auric immune system” that enhances resistance to negative thoughts while increasing creativity, balance, happiness, and humor.²⁶

Rama described the process of meditation as “traveling” or a “journey,” which enables us to see that the mind is infinite and not relegated to the physical brain, thoughts, or emotions, but rather “an endless series of reality that stretches on into infinity.”²⁷ Meditation is the process of gaining “self-knowledge, or the awareness of life or its many awarenesses.”²⁸

Rama further discussed how to make the most out of meditation. He prescribed meditation as nearly the first thing in the morning and then again in the evening. He places emphasis on meditating and exercise as a daily habit for a better life. This process can help us achieve *samadhi*, which is freedom and liberation through meditative awareness, resulting in the oneness of mind, body, and soul with the divine. This kind of meditation changes, remakes, reforms, shifts, and merges us into becoming God, nirvana, enlightenment, and “the ecstasy of the clear light of reality” with “limitless awareness.”²⁹ This can shift us away from “the world of pain and discouragement and frustration,” “where we watch [our] bodies age and [our] hopes fade, and the things [we] believe and love are destroyed. [Instead, with this new] awareness [we] return to the world brighter, different, less solidified.”³⁰ This helps us realize that happiness is the purpose of life: “It doesn’t come from places. It doesn’t come from things. It’s inside your own mind .. and meditation is about experiencing the happiness that’s inside your mind.”³¹

²⁶ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 12.

²⁷ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 186.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 187.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 191.

Scientific Evidence

There is no singular scientific definition of meditation: it is an umbrella term for many “different groups of techniques that might exert diverse effects,” such as “focused attention” or “open-monitoring” practices.³² Therefore, it is more appropriate to define how meditation occurs in the brain and what the effects are therein.

In the process of meditation, there are three relevant brain structures at use: the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the amygdala and hippocampus, and the insula. First, the PFC is “the conductor of the brain” and “orchestrates thoughts and actions according to internal goals.”³³ Meditation increases PFC activity and helps us to better deal with “distracting events and emotions.”³⁴ Second, the amygdala and the hippocampus, which are both part of the limbic system, are safeguards for the brain by processing emotions, survival responses, and secretes the hormones needed to deal with potential danger. Third, the insula is the brain’s “coach,” which improves “core brain and body skills,” such as “interception, movement, self-regulation, vocalizing sounds and music, emotional awareness, and perception of time.”³⁵ Meditation can thicken the insula, leading to better proprioception, ability to deal with negative experiences, and an increase in attention span.

Without meditation, the harmful “amyloid protein” can buildup in the brain as a response to stress, anxiety, stressful thinking, or a stressful event.³⁶ In this anxious state, cortisol builds up and “eventually forms this protein,” causing a range of illnesses, such as “heart attacks and

³² Matko and Sedlmeier, *What Is Meditation?*

³³ Rodski, *The Neuroscience of Mindfulness*, 46.

³⁴ Rodski, *The Neuroscience of Mindfulness*, 47.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rodski, *The Neuroscience of Mindfulness*, 131.

aneurisms.”³⁷ This research supports Rama’s claims about meditation’s effects on overall wellbeing.

Power

Rama’s Definition

Rama claimed that power can engender the ability to change perspective and actively use energy to modify and deepen awareness. Although “there is no singular word that can encompass all the different aspects of power,” he discussed three main elements: perception, *kundalini*, and Buddhism.³⁸

First, perception shows us that we are “what we perceive,” “the being that perceives,” and that “we become what we focus on.”³⁹ Perception defines everything, varies from person to person, and is internal. It gives us the power to “become conscious of self and that which is other than self, and other than self is normally what we perceive.”⁴⁰

Perception is also very much like a radio with many different stations. Rama called these stations “bands of perception.”⁴¹ These bands are held in place by power and are what we perceive things on. All life vibrates at certain frequencies, whether we are aware of them or not. There are bands for humans, mammals, plants, invertebrates, everything, all at the same time. Rama describes the lowest bands as unpleasant and the higher bands as pleasant. Placement on these bands is dictated by karma, which is the universal reality and the natural law of cause and effect, much like an interrelated or interdependent web. Past life knowledge can also help us determine from which band of perception we currently operate.

³⁷ Rodski, *The Neuroscience of Mindfulness*, 131.

³⁸ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 37.

³⁹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 38-71.

⁴⁰ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 38.

⁴¹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 39.

Second, generally, power is defined as *kundalini* (i.e., “energy of life that creates life,” root chakra, *shakti*).⁴² It is power “that opens up the bands of perception” and is the “primary energy that’s active in all the energy of awareness....”⁴³ It also is the personal power that “changes or shapes consciousness.”⁴⁴ It has “a latent energy field, an invisible energy that is present in all life, everywhere, in this dimension and in other dimensions.”⁴⁵ Rama claimed that kundalini also has a “weird power,” which he describes as “the ability to create effect thousands of miles away from where your body is located” in order to heal a person who “has a disease without having to resort to antibiotics or surgery or what might be necessary.”⁴⁶ In this way, he further claimed that we could literally get inside someone’s “cell structures and create a change.”⁴⁷

Third, Buddhism is the “study of power” and is concerned with moving our “awareness field” (i.e., karma) from the lowest bands (e.g., “unhappiness, depression, alienation”) to highest bands (e.g., “happiness, contentment, peace of mind, a feeling of balance and overall wealth of spirit and ecstasy”)⁴⁸ Buddhism focuses on meditation, through which we can “get power, store power, utilize it intelligently, so that it creates benefit to oneself and to others.”⁴⁹

Scientific Evidence

Rama’s claims concerning power’s ability to change perspective can be tentatively supported by expert meditators and activation likelihood estimation (ALE) analysis. In Structural Magnetic Resonance Imaging (sMRI) studies, expert meditators showed “increased grey matter

⁴² Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 37.

⁴³ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 43-44.

⁴⁴ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 46.

⁴⁵ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 47.

⁴⁶ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 43-44.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 41-46.

⁴⁹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 44.

volume ... compared to control groups.”⁵⁰ The study posits that this increase of grey matter volume in the anterior cingulate cortex can “account for the improvement of specific abilities,” such as “self-regulation, self-control, focused problem-solving, adaptive behavioral responses under changing conditions, and prosocial behavior;” however, it is not clear if these were effects of meditation or individual predispositions.⁵¹

Further, Rama’s esoteric claim of using kundalini to effect change far from our physical body alludes to recent research in “distance healing intention therapy (DHI),” such as distance Reiki practice.⁵² Current evidence, accrued through numerous studies via “distant mental interactions with living systems (DMILS),” show an enigmatic “existence of genuine interactions between distant people.”⁵³ Despite this, many researchers have significant resistance to this concept for two reasons: “it violates one or more physical or biological laws” and the current neuroscience-based assumption does not account for bands of perceptions and equates the mind to the brain, making any external interaction impossible. Nonetheless, this area of research is worthy of serious consideration.

Spiritual Balance and Wisdom

Rama’s Definition

Rama claimed that spiritual balance and wisdom is the ability to take care of your life properly in spite of internal and external opposition and being able to “let go and be resilient as children.”⁵⁴ Spiritual balance puts us at “the center of things;” wisdom is being “in the world and of it ... and, at the same time, to not be here at all, to be in realms of light, to be in the super-

⁵⁰ Magdalena, Piccardi, and Guariglia, *The Meditative Mind*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Radin, *Distant Healing Intention Therapies*, 67–71.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 69-85.

conscious state, to be in samadhi, beyond all this.⁵⁵ Spiritual balance helps us “climb up the mountain and be in a world of light,” able to “get above it all” in order to see the divine, happiness, brightness, and brilliance; wisdom shows us the “motions of eternity” therein.⁵⁶ Spiritual balance is “to choose happiness, to feel that the purpose of life is to love;” wisdom teaches us to love deeply “without the sense of that which you love being your personal possession.”⁵⁷ Spiritual balance tells us that we “can’t expect the world to settle down, everything to work out, in order for [us] to practice meditation and to be happy ... [We] have to *do* something [emphasis added];” wisdom “seeks itself,” meaning that as your wisdom increases, so does your curiosity of things.⁵⁸

Scientific Evidence

Rama’s claims concerning spiritual balance and wisdom goes beyond a definitive scientific definition or empirical qualification: they both appear different to each individual and at specific seasons of life. At best, the journey of spiritual balance and wisdom is an individual, lifelong experiment to learn how to properly take care of ourselves on the inside and outside, which requires firsthand experience, immersion, and searching for that which is beyond words and logic. Pragmatically, these claims do not need an ultimate echelon to summit: it is our individual, lived experience and the experience of our past lives. Rama implored us to find happiness in our pursuit of spiritual balance and wisdom, as it makes us “pretty tough to knock over.”⁵⁹ He urged us that spiritual balance and wisdom requires us to be lifelong learners, meditate, eat healthy, exercise, and never lose our sense of humor.

⁵⁵ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 69-85.

⁵⁶ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 70-86.

⁵⁷ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 71-87.

⁵⁸ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 73-86.

⁵⁹ Lenz, *The Enlightenment Cycle*, 74.

Conclusion

Many of the claims of Rama's Enlightenment Cycle have a basis in current scientific evidence, although some are not possible to quantify with current research. His claim that happiness is the freedom beyond limitations, sorrows, and ignorance corresponds to the science of happiness through its burgeoning empirical understanding. His claim that meditation can lead to overall wellbeing corresponds to current neuroscientific evidence. His claim that power is the ability to change perspectives, modify energy for DHI, and deepen awareness is tentatively supported by expert meditators via sMRI and certain esoteric practices. His claim that spiritual balance and wisdom are central to personal evolution matches the individual experimental, experiential, and pragmatic knowledge gained from firsthand experience through our journey. By following Rama's teachings, we can learn to be empowered by the light of invulnerability that will not give way to circumstances and helps us form a resilient state of humor and happiness.

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