

## Scientists Bridging the spirituality gap

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The new [Center for Spirituality and the Mind](#) at the University of Pennsylvania is using brain imaging technology to examine such questions, and to investigate how spiritual and secular beliefs affect our health and behavior.

“Very few are looking at spirituality from a neurological side, from the brain-mind side,” said Dr. Andrew Newberg, director of the center.

A doctor of nuclear medicine and an assistant professor at Penn, Newberg also has co-written three books on the science-spirituality relationship. He's also played a role in "[What the Bleep Do We Know,](#)" a movie that blends quantum physics and new-age neuroscience.

Newberg's center is not a bricks-and-mortar structure but a multidisciplinary team of Penn researchers exploring the relationship between the brain and spirituality from biological, psychological, social and ideological viewpoints. Founded last April, it is bringing together some 20 experts from fields including medicine, pastoral care, religious studies, social work and bioethics.

“The brain is a believing machine because it has to be,” Newberg said. “Beliefs affect every part of our lives. They make us who we are. They are the essence of our being.”

Spirituality and belief don't have to equate to religious faith, Newberg said. The feelings of enlightenment and well-being some derive from religion can come to others through from artistic expression, nonreligious meditation, watching a beautiful sunset or listening to stirring music.