

JACOB LIBERMAN, OD, PHD: CHANGE YOUR VISION, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Interview by Marc David and Suzanne Snyder • Photography by Greg Hoxsie

Jacob Liberman, OD, PhD, received a doctorate of optometry in 1973 from Southern College of Optometry, Memphis, Tennessee; a PhD in Vision Science in 1986 from The College of Syntonic Optometry, Leadville, Colorado; and an honorary doctorate of science in 1996 from The Open International University for Complementary Medicines. He is a fellow emeritus of The American Academy of Optometry, The College of Optometrists in Vision Development, The College of Syntonic Optometry, and The International Academy of Color Sciences. He is also the recipient of the H.R. Spittler Award for his pioneering contributions to the field of phototherapy.

For the past 35 years, Dr Liberman has worked with thousands of individuals, ranging from children with learning difficulties to Olympic and professional athletes. He has been interviewed on hundreds of radio and television shows, addressing audiences worldwide. Luminaries in the fields of science, medicine, consciousness, and professional sports have endorsed his work.

Dr Liberman is founder of Exercise Your Eyes, Inc, and has authored 3 books: Light: Medicine of the Future (Rochester, Vermont: Bear & Company; 1990) Take Off Your Glasses and See (New York: Three Rivers Press; 1995), and Wisdom From an Empty Mind (Sedona, Arizona: Empty Mind Publications; 2001), all of which have received international acclaim and have been published in multiple languages.

Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine (ATHM): How did you become interested in natural and holistic approaches to vision?

Jacob Liberman, OD, PhD: I was born in Havana, Cuba, and when I came to the United States in 1955, I didn't speak any English. In fact, English was my third language. It was difficult coming to Miami, Florida, in 1955 and having no one other than my family that I could speak to.

I found myself having difficulties in school, initially because of the language and then I realized I also had some difficulties

Opposite: *Dr Liberman, photographed near his home in upcountry Maui, says that the epidemic of deteriorating eyesight is caused primarily by the stress created by visual confinement—the cultural demand to sit and look at a book or a computer all day.*

focusing my attention on reading and schoolwork. I had great difficulties in going through school. Because of that, I always had the feeling something was wrong with me.

I was very tuned in. I could read people very well, but to concentrate on a 2-dimensional task like looking at a book all day was hard for me. I would start reading, and I'd feel very distracted or I would fall asleep. However, I had excellent eyesight. Whenever my parents took me to the eye doctor, the doctor would say, "His eyes are perfect." No one ever put it together that the difficulties that I was having in the classroom were in any way related to my vision because vision was defined as eyesight, and I had 20/20.

When I got out of high school and I entered college, about 10 days into the first semester the teacher gave us a pop quiz. I was sitting in the back of the class because my eyesight had always been excellent. In the middle of the test, I looked up at the blackboard, and the blackboard all of a sudden was fuzzy. And it stayed fuzzy. I got very frightened; I didn't know what was wrong. I finished the test and then went to the eye doctor at the infirmary.

The doctor examined me and said, "Oh, you're just near-sighted." He didn't tell me that my near-sightedness was just a minute amount, and he never mentioned that I had had a spasm in my accommodative or focusing system from doing so much close work, which is, of course, what happens when you're in college. He gave me glasses. I was just grateful I didn't have some pathology. So I started wearing glasses, and I could see the blackboard, but I still couldn't read for longer than I'd been able to before. In fact, reading became ever more uncomfortable.

Every 6 months or so, I would notice that I couldn't see the blackboard anymore, so I had to keep getting stronger and stronger glasses. But nothing was changing in terms of my ability to read and learn with greater ease. When I got into optometry school, the reading demand increased significantly, and I was barely getting by between working to pay my way through school and having a full school load—optometry school is basically the same pre-med as you get in a medical school. It's very intense. The first 2 years, I was so close to not getting by that I actually thought they would not allow me to go into my third year. But they did.

When I entered my third year, which is when you start your clinical training, they sent me down to the clinic, and they asked one of the fourth-year doctors to examine me. They gave me a

vision exam, and the young man told me the same thing everyone before him had told me: "You need a stronger pair of glasses." But he also said, "You know you're having some problems using your eyes together and that could be in some way affecting your comfort during reading." He suggested that I do some vision exercises. He gave me a little device and I took it home, but I never used it. I just stuck it in the corner of my room.

One day I was doing an assignment and after a few minutes of reading, the same thing happened that always happened: I fell asleep. When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was the device at the other end of the room. I had a revelation. Something said, "Pick it up." I picked it up. I did 1 exercise on it for no more than 4 or 5 minutes and then I read for an hour, non-stop, with the most perfect attention and comprehension I had ever experienced in my life.

It hit me so hard that I started crying because my whole life, I thought I was stupid. I did the recommended protocol for about 2 months and then made the dean's list every quarter until I graduated. I went from a 2.0 average to ending up in the top 10% of my class.

That was my first profound experience with the fact that vision is much more than eyesight, and that just because we have 2 eyes open doesn't mean that they're both being used. You have 2 legs, but if you had use of only 1 of them, it would create a huge imbalance in your life. The same is true with your vision. If both eyes are not working together efficiently, it will affect your comfort and performance in a very significant way.

Additionally, if one's vision is functioning excellently, his response to life will be perfectly timed, so if he's playing baseball, the bat will be swung at the right moment, will hit the ball on the sweet spot and even if he doesn't hit the ball hard, it'll go a great distance. That's great vision. So vision is not so much what you see, it's what you do with what you see. It's your response to life. That first experience, which happened in 1971, changed my life.

ATHM: What was your next step in getting to where you are today?

Dr Liberman: In my first several years of practicing optometry, I was very involved in working with young children and teenagers who had difficulties with learning because that was something that I knew by heart—that was my own story. I worked with thousands of kids. And in late 1975, the thought came to me: "I

wonder if there's anything that I can do that could in some way improve my eyesight." Because when I went to school, I wasn't taught that vision could affect everything; it was just an optical system, a camera inside the head. We were taught that eyes got worse because they were too long or too short or oddly shaped.

The idea that vision could be improved was never discussed. One of the first things that is taught in medical school is that the body is always seeking homeostasis, always seeking balance.

We know health means balance. You could say that the heartbeat of life, of the universe, of the human body is a continual movement toward equilibrium. I call it homeodynamics. It's not really homeostasis; it's just a continual movement, a search for balance.

This is probably why in science we say, "The only constant is change." That change is the continual adjustment of the inside of the body to the environment. We know the body has the ability to self-heal, but for some reason or other, this is an unknown concept in the area of vision. Vision specialists know that very few people enter this world needing glasses or seeing poorly—probably less than 1%. Yet by the end of fifth grade, more than 80% of kids have measurable vision difficulties.

In many places where education is stressed, like Israel, Asia, and the United States, by the time kids are 16 or 17, well over 80% are near-sighted. The biggest health epidemic in the world right now is deteriorating eyesight, and yet all we do is give glasses or contacts. If you look at the records of any vision specialist in the world, you'll

notice that the moment a patient begins to wear glasses, his eyes continue to deteriorate. What I've always said is, if the problem gets worse, the solution can't possibly be the solution.

And yet we're not looking for the causative factor. We're looking at using glasses or contacts or doing surgical intervention like LASIK as a way of neutralizing the problem, but we're still not looking for the cause, and we're still not broadening our idea of what vision is beyond the concept of eyesight. So in 1976, I started doing vision training on myself a few minutes a day and rather than continually increasing the prescription of my glasses, which is what my history for 10 years had been, I began reducing my prescription very subtly every 6 to 8 weeks, gradually allowing myself to adjust to a weaker prescription as my vision skills improved.

I also spent time without my glasses on, just to notice how it felt internally when I wasn't wearing them. I wasn't primarily concerned with whether I could see or couldn't see, but rather how I felt emotionally. I noticed that I started feeling out of control and edgy without my glasses on and noticed that wearing the

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glasses masked a lot of these symptoms. After a while I noticed that when I was able to take the glasses off for longer and longer periods of time, I got more and more comfortable with a lot of these feelings and as my comfort increased, my eyesight started to change.

Within 8 or 9 months of doing this, my eyesight improved about 200% to 300%. I also had a revelation during a meditative experience that led me to recognize that vision was something way beyond eyesight. The combination of those experiences allowed me to see clearly without my glasses on. That happened in 1976 when I was 29. I just turned 60 in November and have never worn a pair of glasses for any purpose since that day. I don't wear glasses for distance or for reading and personally don't find a need for sunglasses.

I uncovered something through my own personal process that has allowed me to see vision in a whole new way and to recognize that if you can optimize your vision, it can have life-transforming effects. Vision accounts for about 90% of the information human beings take in during their lifetime. Vision is not so much what we see, it's what we do with what we see; it's the body's navigational system. So when we optimize vision, we're not talking about optimizing eyesight only, we're talking about optimizing the ability of the eyes to aim, focus, track, and work together as a team.

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ATHM: Can you explain those functions in detail?

Dr Liberman: These 4 functions—aiming, focusing, tracking, and teaming—occur simultaneously and are inseparably connected to one's consciousness. To give you an example, when you are speaking with someone and they're paying attention to you, how do you know they're paying attention to you? You know because they're looking at you. In order to attend, to be present, the eyes must converge upon that which is of interest.

When the eyes aim or converge, they simultaneously focus. This process is inseparably connected with our ability to selectively attend and be present. In other words, aiming and focusing the eyes is required for us to both suppress external noise and quiet the mind. This is extremely important because being present and attentive is the most fundamental function involved in learning. This is also why most meditative practices have you focus on something. Even though the eyes are closed, they say, "Focus on a mantra. Focus on the third eye. Focus on something."

When we think of the word *focus*, we think of an optical system. But to say something is in focus is to say it is clear. That's why people say "I see" to indicate that they understand some-

thing. Seeing is inseparably connected with understanding. Aiming lays the foundation for presence and effortless attention, while focusing provides a sense of clarity and knowing.

Next comes tracking, which occurs at the same time as aiming and focusing. We say the only constant is change. So as things in the environment enter our field of awareness, the eyes are automatically moved toward them. It's an effortless process because light and the eye are married. When light strikes the eye, the eye automatically moves toward it in the same way as a flower turns its face toward the sun. Tracking is the process of continually moving the eyes from one moment to the next as things in the environment call our attention.

So the eyes simultaneously aim, focus, track, and work together as a team. The teaming aspect of vision is very important because having 2 eyes gives us the ability to have stereoscopic or 3-dimensional vision. Dr Arnold Gesell, who at one time was the leading child-development expert in the world and who founded the Gesell Institute of Child Development at Yale, said that stereoscopic vision was the crown jewel of organic evolution. He said it was the most highly developed aspect of our neurological system.

Having 2 eyes not only gives us the ability to see depth, it also allows us to determine what's foreground and what's background, what's most important

and what's less important at that moment. It lets us know where we are in space in relation to other things. Good eyesight is the ability, for instance, of a baseball player to see the pitcher clearly. Good vision is the ability of that player to track the baseball at 95 or 100 miles per hour from the pitcher's hand to the plate and be so integrated that his arms and body move at the exact moment necessary for the bat to hit the ball.

In the classroom, that level of vision provides a child the ability to effortlessly attend, allows the eyes to move smoothly across a line of print, so that reading and comprehension and attention become something that's fun and easy. If a child is having any difficulty with these functions, learning becomes very difficult.

ATHM: Given your explanation of how big the definition of vision can be, what is creating this epidemic of young people not being able to see clearly?

Dr Liberman: I'll tell you exactly what it is. You live in Boulder, Colorado, a place where there's a lot of expanse, a lot of space. When people step outside, most will breathe a sigh of relief because their eyes can escape all the way out to infinity. You know

how sometimes it's a little more difficult to breathe deeply when you enter a small space such as an elevator? Well, we have 2 eyes in order to be able to see all the way out to infinity. However, if your visual space is confined, your body begins to show signs of stress. If you, for instance, put an animal in a visually confining environment, so that its eyes can look only as far away as 18 or 20 inches, that animal will become myopic. A high percentage of sailors that are in a submarine for a month or 6 weeks are near-sighted when they come out. Their near-sightedness may reverse, but visual confinement creates a constriction in vision.

Most of the epidemic of near-sightedness that we have today is because the demand on the eyes is for reading and learning. Most people spend a good part of their day either looking at a book 16 to 20 inches away or, even more commonly today, looking at a computer monitor. Many school children sit in windowless classrooms. Many people work in cubicles or in offices without windows.

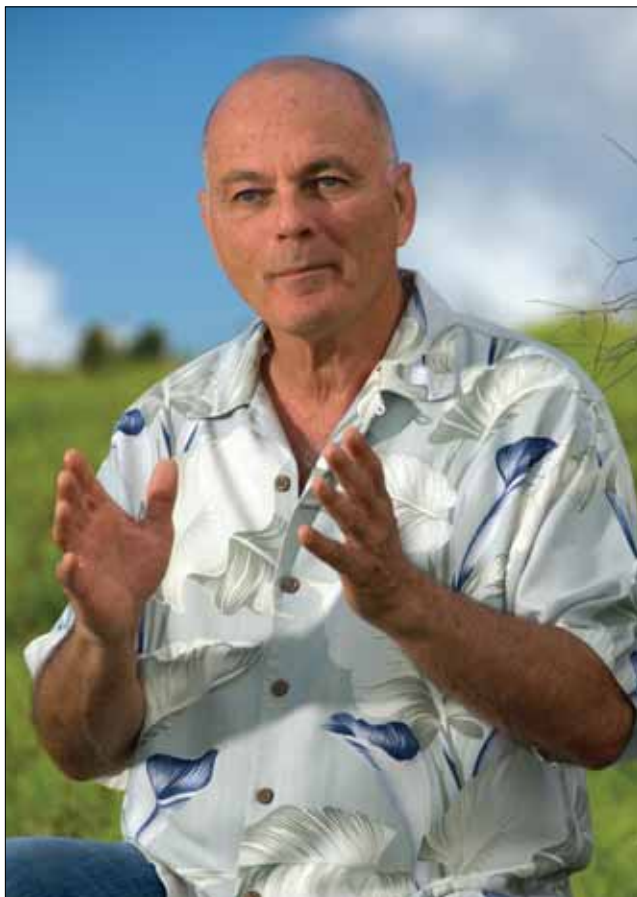
The major problem is that our eyes are very often confined to a close distance, so they adjust to that distance because that is what society says is important for us to succeed. If our neurological system were designed for a 2-dimensional world, we would

only require 1 eye in the center of our head. The reason we have 2 eyes is to give us 3-dimensionality. In other words, our entire neurophysiology is designed for a 3-dimensional world. When you read or work on a computer, you are restricted to 2 dimensions.

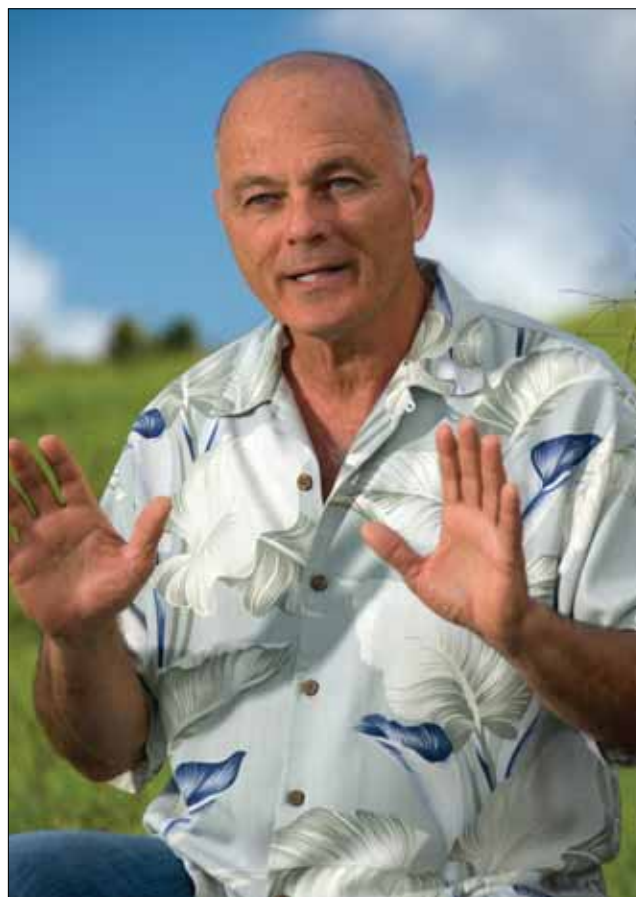
If you take a system that is designed for 3-dimensionality and primarily use it for 2-dimensional tasks, it creates stress. Studies that were done many years ago found that when children read a book, their pulse rate, respiration rate, etc—all the markers of stress—significantly increase. If you go into cultures around the world where people don't go to school and don't do a lot of reading, you see that near-sightedness is unheard of. Look at Eskimos, for instance; before Alaska institutionalized education, myopia was unheard of. However, as soon as Eskimos were required to go to school and read, there was a significant onset of myopia.

So the epidemic of deteriorating eyesight is caused primarily by the stress created by visual confinement. And the major source of visual confinement responsible for that stress is the cultural demand to sit and look at a book or a computer all day.

ATHM: What do you see as the remedy?



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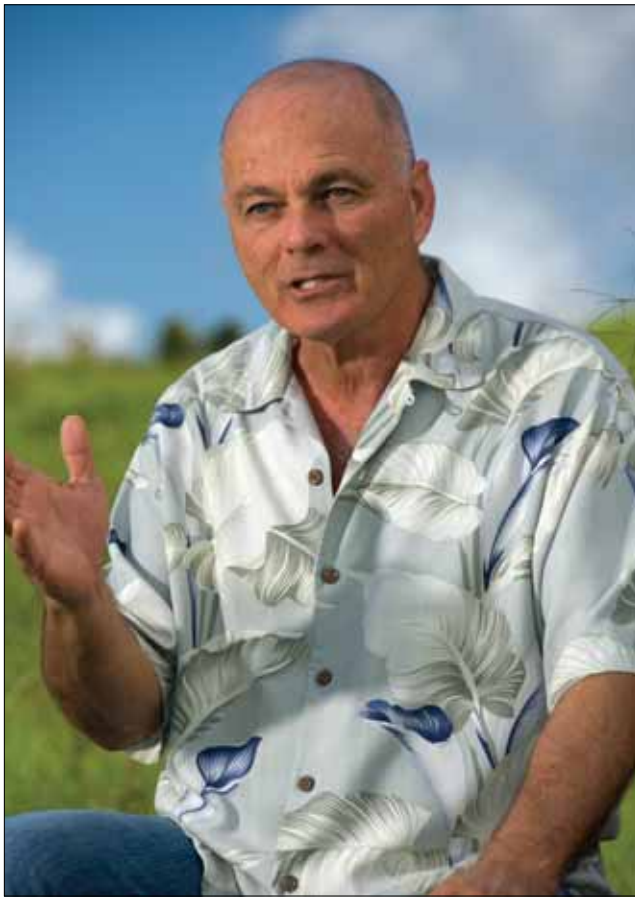


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Dr Liberman: There are 3 remedies that I immediately see. First we need to redefine what it means to see. People need to become aware that vision is much more than just eyesight.

Next, I see 2 very practical remedies. In 1928, a group of visionary optometrists developed the science of functional optometry and vision training. They realized that vision is seamlessly connected with behavior and performance. And since vision affects every human function, they developed a behavioral science called behavioral optometry.

Today there are thousands of doctors who practice this type of care, and one of the major things they do, aside from vision training, is to prescribe stress-reducing glasses for kids to use in school for learning. These are not glasses that are prescribed because of poor eyesight. These are glasses that magnify very slightly and have a measurable stress-reducing effect. They function like a wedge. Let's say you're cutting a tree down and want the tree to move in a certain direction. Strategically placing a wedge of wood on one side helps the tree to fall in the desired direction. When we want the vision system to begin to normalize or move in a direction opposite of the way it's moving, we frequently use what we call a wedge prescription. It's a very small-



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powered magnifying lens that reduces visual stress and is used primarily for classroom work and reading. That by itself is a wonderful preventive tool. It's a practical application that very often prevents the onset of myopia.

The most important recommendation is vision training. Consider the value of doing something like yoga, Pilates, or gyrotomics, some sort of exercise that maintains the body's flexibility. If we began doing yoga as children, a little bit each day, not as an exercise but as just a part of our life, as we got older a lot of that flexibility would be maintained. The difference between youth and older age often is a loss of flexibility. If flexibility can be maintained in the body, then I think that it has a direct effect on not only our physical comfort but on our longevity and our well-being. The same is true with vision.

Another very effective tool is a little bookmark that I developed in 1976. It has a stop sign on top and says, "Stop. Look up. Look away. Breathe. Put me 2 pages ahead." So that every time you get to that bookmark, you take a little break, just enough time to look up, look away, let the eyes escape, and relax the focusing system. If we merely gave each child in school one of these bookmarks, that in itself would make a very significant change in terms of the onset and progression of myopia.

If we just did a few simple vision-training exercises each day, along with using stress-reducing glasses for close work, I believe we would probably prevent most myopia. Beyond the prevention of vision deterioration, this approach would also optimize and expand our ability to see and learn.

We would attend better with less effort. We could read longer and more comfortably. Learning would be easier, sports performance would soar, and working at the computer would be more comfortable.

ATHM: How do you envision making these vision-training practices more widespread?

Dr Liberman: For years my dream has been to bring this awareness to the public. If I share these suggestions and skills with athletes, for instance, it significantly improves their game. Whether it's baseball, golf, or tennis, athletes know that the key to peak performance, aside from physical conditioning, is their vision. And the same is true in the classroom. Our eyes guide everything we do.

We are now introducing this work to school systems, sports teams, computer users, pilots, and police recruit training programs. It's a whole new paradigm, and the timing couldn't be any better. It's not only because we're losing our eyesight as a species, but also one of the biggest epidemics today is attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Millions of children and adults are being medicated because they have great difficulty attending comfortably. I cannot tell you the huge difference someone can experience in their ability to attend, read, and learn by doing some very simple vision exercises.

To make that available to people, I developed a clinically proven device that can significantly improve those skills. And it's

backed up by peer-reviewed published research. What's really interesting is that someone can spend less than 10 minutes a day doing these exercises and experience very broad effects—everything from improving visual attention and reading efficiency and comprehension to how comfortably they work at the computer and play their favorite sport.

Vision training has far-reaching effects, and very soon this information will permeate every area of life because as someone once said, "Next to life itself, God's most precious gift is sight." When we think about vision, what it means to see, it's not just an optical process. Our vision is deeply rooted in our humanity.

A large part of my last 35 years of work has dealt with the effect of light on the mind, body, and spirit. Now I'm focusing on light, vision, consciousness, and performance and how all these things are connected. What I've discovered is that they are inseparable. Changing one's vision can truly change one's life.

One of the most powerful movements today is a drive toward personal growth and development. We read self-help books in an attempt to see and understand our lives more clearly. We try to be more conscious about our diet, exercising regularly and taking supplements in hopes of fulfilling our vision of better health. We meditate as a way of finding inner peace and new vision. In our own way, we are all trying to improve the quality of our lives by seeing life more clearly. Yet very few of us have considered the role of vision training in expanding our ability to see. That's what my interest is, and I've developed a technology that I feel can really support people in that process.

ATHM: Where can readers go to learn more about resources in this area?

Dr Liberman: There is a lot of information available through the Optometric Extension Program Foundation, OEP.org, and the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, COVD.org. OEP is the organization that started the science of behavioral optometry and vision training in 1928. This is a science that's been incorporated into the optometric profession for more than 80 years. COVD is the certifying body for doctors of optometry who specialize in the art and science of vision training.

ATHM: Can you tell us more about the device you created and how it works?

Dr Liberman: The device is called the EYEPORTR Vision Training System, and people can find out about it at our website, www.exerciseyoureyes.com. The EYEPORTR has been cleared by the FDA and is the first clinically proven device available to the public that improves overall visual performance.

The EYEPORTR has a series of alternating red and blue LEDs that the user tracks horizontally, vertically, diagonally, and from far to near and back. Our patent deals with a very specific effect that occurs when the eye looks at red vs when it looks at blue. These colors have opposing effects on the autonomic nervous system as well as the aiming and focusing mechanism of the eyes.

Red causes the eyes to reflexively over-focus, while blue causes them to reflexively under-focus.

When you alternately look at red and blue lights, you create rocking action—a rhythmic expansion and contraction, simulating the body's natural state of flow. There's a reason we rock babies. It puts them into a state of ease. If you close your eyes and tune into your body, you will notice that the most fundamental rhythm is that the body continually expands and contracts—the breathing cycle.

If you go a little deeper into the body, you will notice that same continual expansion and contraction in the heart. That rhythm is then transmitted to the vascular system, the organs, the glands, and the cells. The whole body is continually expanding and contracting. We say the only constant is change—that's called *flow*. When that's going on, the body is in a state of physiological coherence.

Every time we think, try hard, or put effort into something, the breath is momentarily held and restricted. When that occurs, the muscles get tight, mind-body integration is broken, and one's visual field begins to collapse. We see less, experience less, and become less efficient because the flow is gone. What is the flow? The flow is what's described and defined by the statement, "The only constant is change." It's the homeodynamic heartbeat of the human energy system.

By viewing the alternating red and blue lights on the EYEPORTR, you create an involuntary expansion and contraction within the eye and the nervous system, reminding the body of its most primal rhythm and natural state of flow.

And while the system is expanding and contracting, the eyes are simultaneously aiming, focusing, tracking, and teaming, which means these skills are being trained and reinforced without effort. It's occurring within a state of flow. When this occurs for an athlete, they're "in the zone." And when they're in the zone, something special happens.

The most important aspect of our technology is that it encourages and allows the mind-body system to re-experience its natural state of flow, while visual function is enhanced. This is extremely important because when the mind/body is in a state of flow, it's at its maximum potential and re-experiences its ability to function and perform without effort.

ATHM: How successful has the system been?

Dr Liberman: So far, we have 3 published studies in peer-reviewed journals, all of which demonstrate that using the device for less than 10 minutes a day—five 90-second exercises—significantly improves visual attention; reading efficiency and comprehension; aiming, focusing, tracking, and teaming of the eyes; speed and span of perception; dynamic depth perception; marksmanship; and sports performance.

That's what the studies have demonstrated, whether the subjects are medical school students, Little League baseball players, or police recruits. We've also completed a pilot study at a university dealing with using the EYEPORTR on kids who have

been diagnosed with ADHD. Even though it was only a pilot study, we found statistically significant improvement in visual attention and focusing ability after using the device less than 10 minutes a day over 3 weeks—which means that these children used the EYEPORTR for less than 3 hours total.

The other thing that's really interesting is that most of the change remains even after you stop using the device. If you go to the gym and exercise your muscles, if you don't continue to exercise them, they become flaccid after awhile. In vision training, it is important to recognize that the eyes are direct frontal extensions of the brain. When you train the eyes, you're directly training the central nervous system. So you don't have to do this for the rest of your life. That's extremely important to me because if you have to do something for the rest of your life, there's a good chance you won't do it. You see, if it takes effort to create change, it will take effort to maintain it. And if it takes effort to maintain it, you can pretty much be assured it will not be maintained because the body, just like the universe, functions by the law of parsimony—it uses the least amount of energy to get the job done.

When the subjects who took part in our studies were reevaluated 3 weeks afterwards, the level of performance was frequently just as high as and, in some cases, higher than it had been immediately after the study. In other words, if the treatment is really working, one's vision and performance should continue to improve, not decline again. I don't want people to have to do something for the rest of their lives to get the benefit. I haven't done vision training in 31 years. I did it in 1976 and something changed about the way my vision worked and the way my brain was responding, and it has continued to improve. I do not see my vision getting worse; I actually see it getting better. That's interesting at 60. You don't expect that.

ATHM: How do you explain that?

Dr Liberman: When you create greater balance between the eyes, you create greater balance in the brain and in the person's ability to find balance in his or her life. Because you're training the brain, you're basically creating new, neuronal connections within the brain, and once people start using these skills the mere act of looking, reading, paying attention as they're driving, sitting in the classroom, or playing golf—whatever they're doing—continually reinforces the skills that they have learned.

The device comes with a 3-month protocol that gives you the exact exercises to do every day. However, all of our studies were based on using the product less than 10 minutes a day, 6 days a week for 3 weeks. Recently, we started a large-scale study with the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission where we are incorporating the EYEPORTR into police recruit training because we find that the recruits respond much faster, much more accurately, and much more appropriately. We're talking about enhancing performance in everyday life, but when someone is in a stressful situation, like police officers are, they can't afford to respond inappropriately. It could mean their lives or the life of someone else.

Eventually, we want to introduce this into the armed forces, so that people who are under high levels of stress can rely on their vision to respond quickly, accurately, and effortlessly, allowing them to respond more appropriately regardless of the situation they're in. We're trying to introduce not only this device but the concept of spending a couple minutes each day optimizing visual function so that your eyes can guide you in the best possible way. So much of our success in the world is related to how we see and respond to life. When we optimize vision, we optimize our ability to perform. And when we optimize our ability to perform

with minimal effort, we experience greater self-respect.

This is especially true with children. One of our published studies was with a group of 12-year-old boys on a Little League team that was in the lowest division in their group of baseball teams. These kids used the device exactly as I mentioned, less than 10 minutes a day for 3 weeks. They didn't practice individually, or as a group, and they had no games over this 3-week period.

At the end of the study, the average player had a 90% improvement in batting performance. Not only that, but the team went from the lowest division to winning the championship. Several of these children started doing better in school as well. Some people think, "A kid can hit the ball better. How big a deal could that be?" But when you don't experience success early in your life, as I didn't in my schoolwork, it can really damage your sense of self. In my personal experience, it wasn't until sometime in my 40s that I began to recognize that I was actually gifted in certain areas. I no longer have the reading problem that I had as a child, but at the time it really affected me.

Over the past 35 years of doing this work, I have had the pleasure of working with thousands of people. Many of them

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notice a change after a single session. They can literally feel their eyes working in a different way. One of the greatest values of vision training is that it allows you to discover that eyesight is only a small aspect of how we see. It also allows you to see that you're not always looking where you think you're looking.

For instance, let's say that you're playing golf, and you want to putt the ball into the hole. Most people assume that they're looking at the spot on the ball that they want to hit. However, most of the time, that's not the case.

I started doing research on this in 1976 and discovered that about 70% of the population is not looking where they think they're looking. Most people are actually looking a little closer to or further away from where the ball really is. And that's why most people don't sink the putt or hit the home run more often. The unfortunate thing is that none of us can see how we're seeing, so we have no idea why our performance is less than expected.

Another example of this same phenomenon is a group of people at an archery range. They all want to hit the bull's eye. They're sure that they are looking at the bull's eye, and they try hard to aim for its center. Yet very few of them actually hit the bull's eye. Isn't this the experience many of us have? We not only miss the bull's eye on the archery range, but often also in our lives.

One of the beauties of vision training is that it creates a high level of congruity and alignment, so that your physical eye and your mind's eye are both focusing at the same point at the same time. When this occurs you experience a greater sense of timing and accuracy in everything you do. You start hitting the ball on the sweet spot more consistently and experience greater success at whatever you're doing because there's greater focus and clarity in your life.

ATHM: You've elevated the whole conversation of vision from a visual organ system to a psycho-emotional experience and even to a spiritual organ.

Dr Liberman: There is no question about that. When we talk about enhanced awareness or expanding consciousness, what are we talking about? We're talking about seeing things more clearly. Now, for some reason or other, we do not recognize that that

level of seeing is inseparably connected with the seeing we're doing every day. But they are connected. They are absolutely connected because the thing that is seeing is not the eye; it's something much deeper. The eye is just one part of the process.

Vision and seeing are right at the heart of every spiritual tradition. Meditation is all about focusing on something. People do not connect that practice with the eyes, but whether the eyes are open or the eyes are closed, when you focus on something, your eyes also focus on the same thing. There's no way to separate these functions.

We must begin to look at vision in a broader way because our eyes guide every move we make. The way we see, where we perceive things to be, how accurately we judge distance and the speed at which things are moving—all of those factors are reflected in our moment-by-moment response to life. Real vision is the ability to respond automatically, without thought or effort.

When that happens, our potential is expanded in ways that I cannot even describe. Improving visual performance directly affects performance on every level, but if you can significantly improve attention, reading, learning, and comfort of everyday use of the eyes, all of that together has a far greater effect on how we feel about ourselves in the world. We can trust our vision to allow us to see situations in life more clearly. And when we see more clearly, we respond more accurately. We begin to trust our

vision and ourselves, and that makes huge changes in our lives. If we begin training our vision as children, the effects stay with us through adulthood and permeate our lives.

By doing a few simple vision exercises, you can begin to experience your potential in a whole new way. I know this not only from my own experience but because I've had the pleasure of working with thousands of adults and children over the past 35 years. And I'm not the only one. There are probably 6 thousand to 8 thousand behavioral optometrists around the country who also specialize in this work and have similar experiences.

We are beginning to recognize the importance of this work because there's such an epidemic of vision deterioration. Additionally, children are experiencing more visual problems in the classroom in terms of reading and learning, and almost 90% of

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computer users complain about their eyes. It's time to redefine what it means to see and to incorporate techniques into our everyday life that can preserve our vision and also expand its potential.

ATHM: You've taken us into a visionary journey that's both extremely practical and, I believe, powerfully sacred. Do you have other recommendations you would like to share?

Dr Liberman: It's very important, for instance, for children to have comprehensive vision examinations. I recommend they see a behavioral optometrist because a behavioral optometrist specializes in preventive vision care and looks at vision not in terms of eyesight but in terms of performance. It's also important to check the health of the eyes, and optometrists are licensed to do that. But pathology is not very common in children. What is important to a child's vision is that it's working properly, that it's developing properly, and that the child is able to use it effectively. It is imperative that we think preventatively because hardly anyone escapes this epidemic. In Asia approximately 87% of kids aged 16 years and older are near-sighted. That's huge. There isn't a disease process in the world that effects so many people.

Vision training and the preventive use of stress-reducing lenses must be used with all children, starting at an early age. It isn't a question anymore of, "If my child needs glasses, there's something wrong with his eyes." No. Children need special kinds of glasses because we don't want anything to go wrong with their eyes. We recommend nutritional supplements and good eating habits in order to prevent disease, not just remediate it once you have it. Vision training is used in the same way. However, since you are working with the body's navigational system, the effects can be profound.

ATHM: It sounds like there is a spiritual tie-in to all of this. Do you feel that is the case?

Dr Liberman: Yes. The thought that keeps coming through is that in our own way we are all trying to "see through the eyes of God." Whether we are religious or think of ourselves as spiritual seekers, we are trying to see things more clearly and be more in alignment with the source—whatever the source is for each of us.

ATHM: It seems as though you're pointing to the next paradigm of how we view the body. For a while we saw the body exclusively as a biologic machine. More recently, we've been looking through the mind-body lens. Now you're pointing to seeing the body as part of the sacred domain.

Dr Liberman: For many years scientists and clinicians working in the field of mind-body medicine have spoken about the effect of the mind on the body. It's the foundation of the field of psychoneuroimmunoendocrinology. I can understand how the mind can effect the body if you identify yourself as the thinker of the thoughts you are experiencing. However, what happens if you do not identify yourself as the thinker but merely the observer of

those thoughts as they enter your field of awareness? From my experience, the only reason we are aware that thinking is occurring is because we are observing that process. We are not the thinker; we are that which is aware of the thinking. The significance of this is the realization that our essence is a field of awareness. We are the seeing mechanism I have been discussing. When we discover this, we truly discover what it means to see.

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