

Taking in the Good

***For Lasting Peace,
Contentment, and Love***

Wake Up Festival

August, 2014

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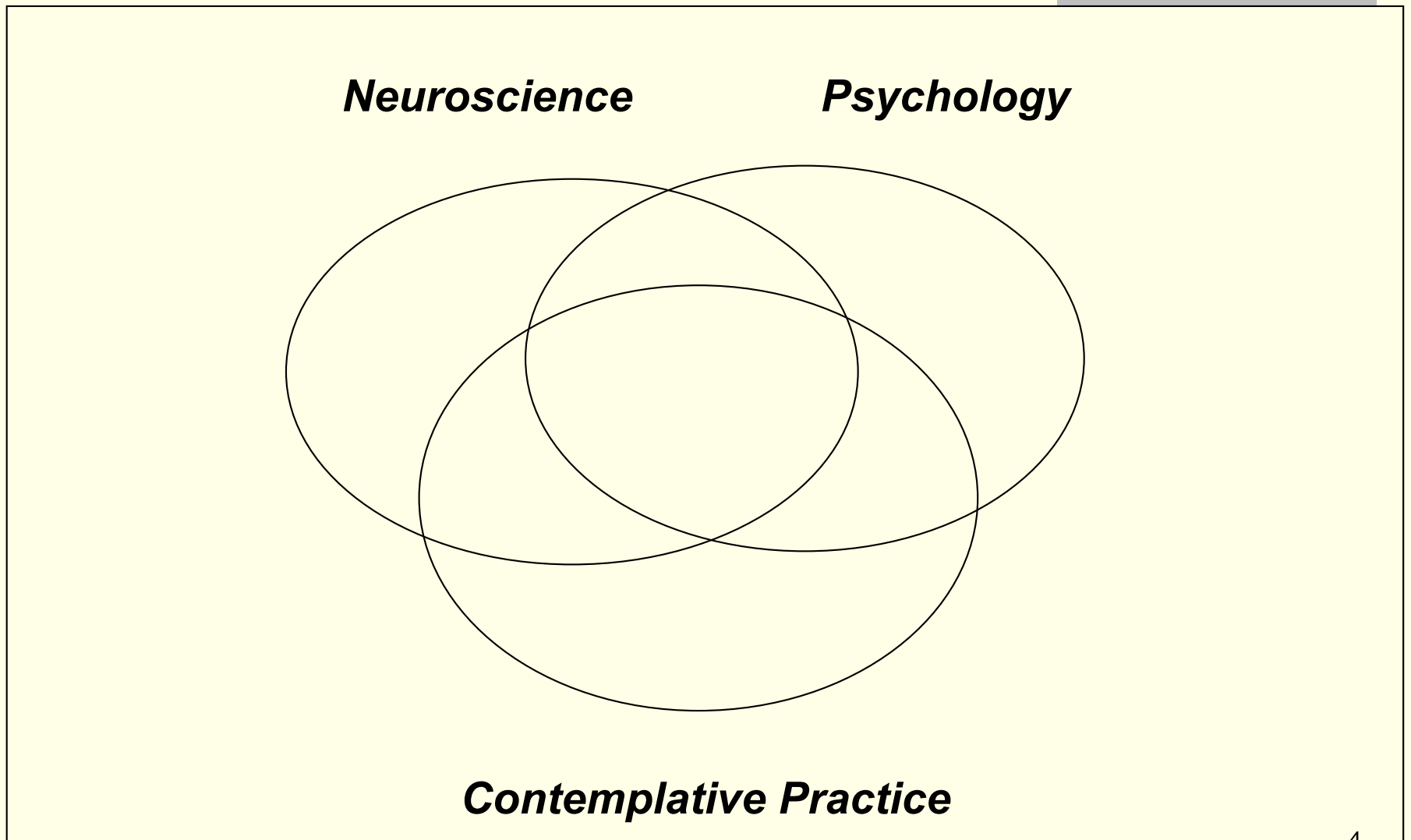
Topics

- **Grounding the mind in life**
- **Being on your own side**
- **Growing inner strengths**
- **The negativity bias**
- **Taking in the good**
- **The 2nd and 3rd Noble Truths**
- **The fruit as the path**



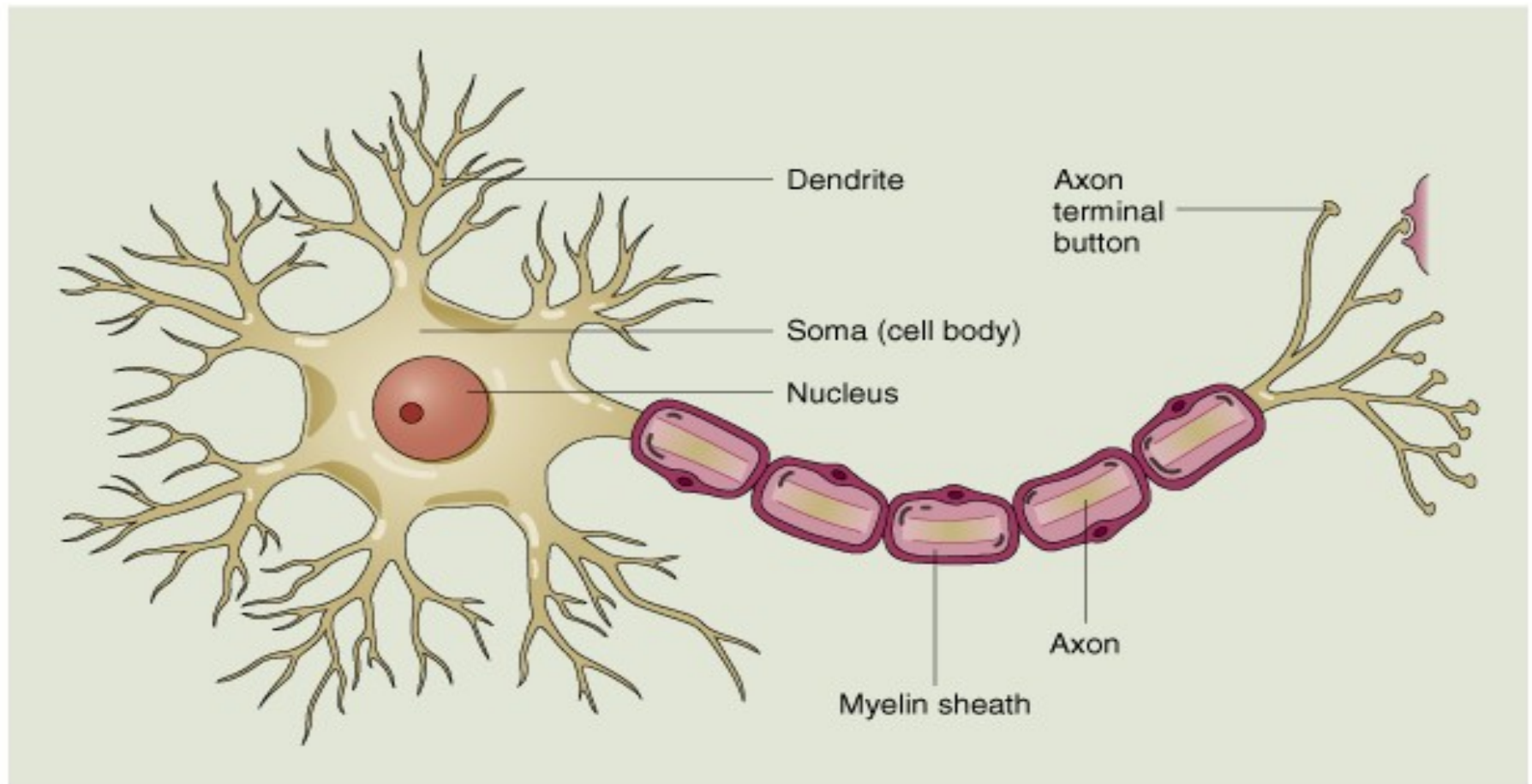
Grounding the Mind in Life

Common - and Fertile - Ground






A Neuron

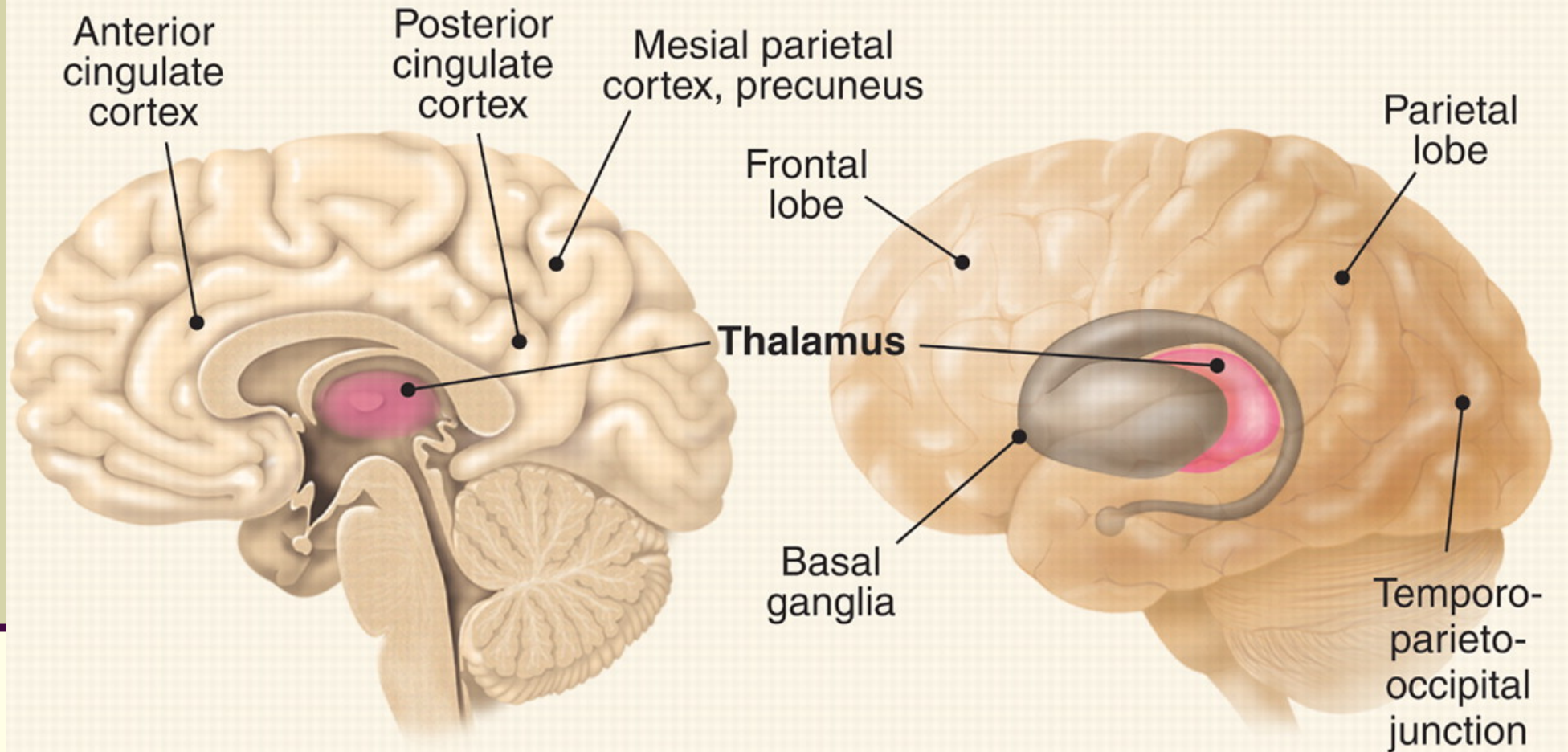


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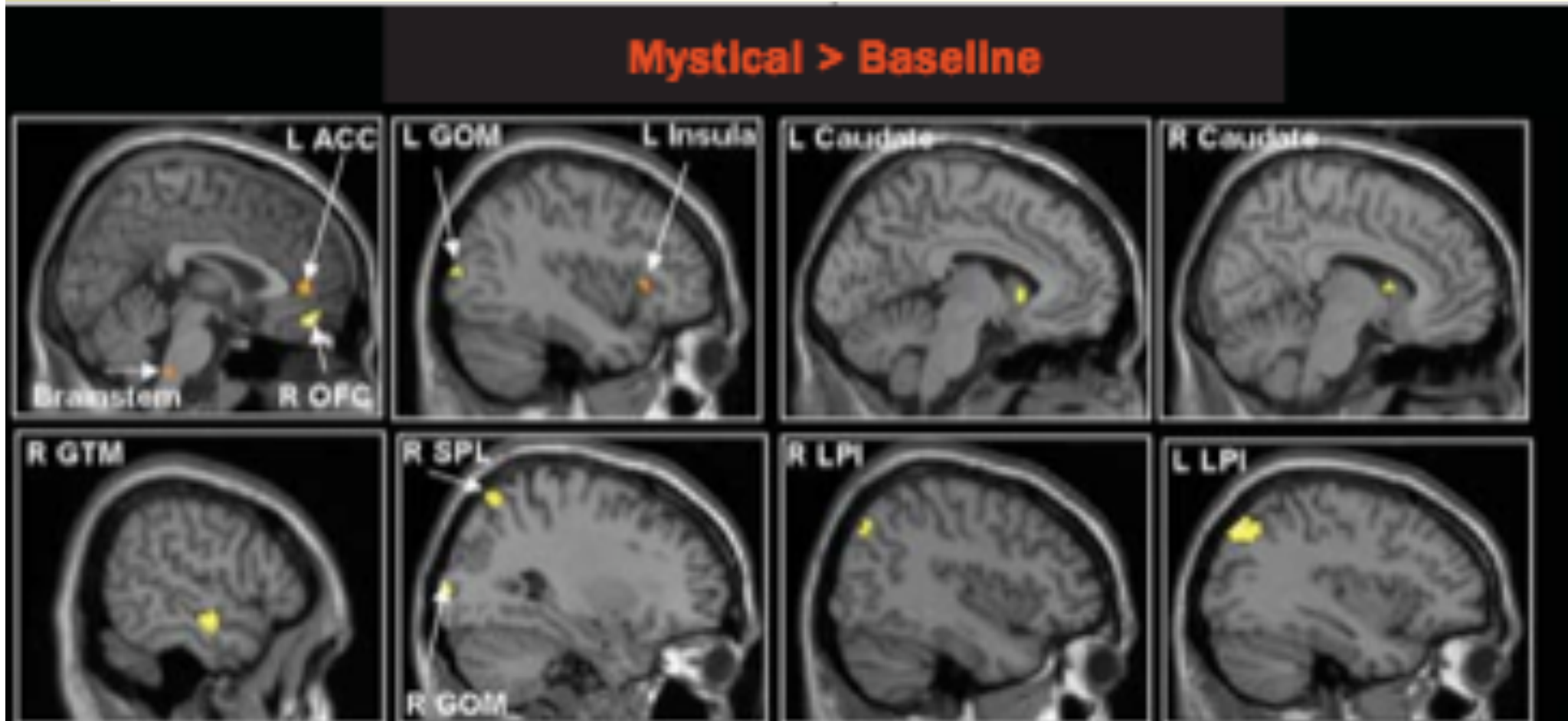
**Mental activity entails
underlying neural activity.**


Key Brain Areas for Consciousness



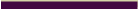
(adapted from) M. T. Alkire et al., *Science* 322, 876-880 (2008)

Christian Nuns, Recalling a Profound Spiritual Experience





**Repeated mental activity entails
repeated neural activity.**



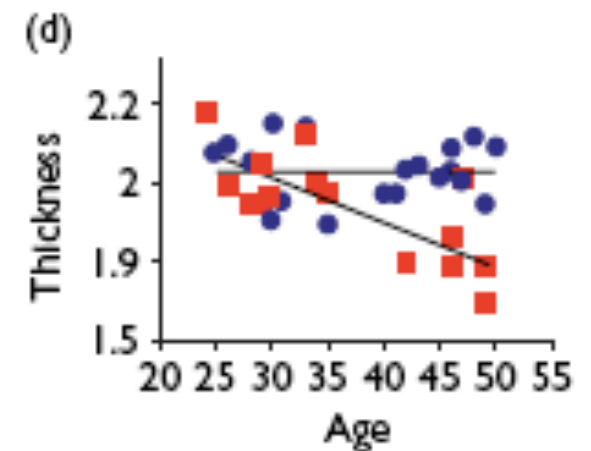
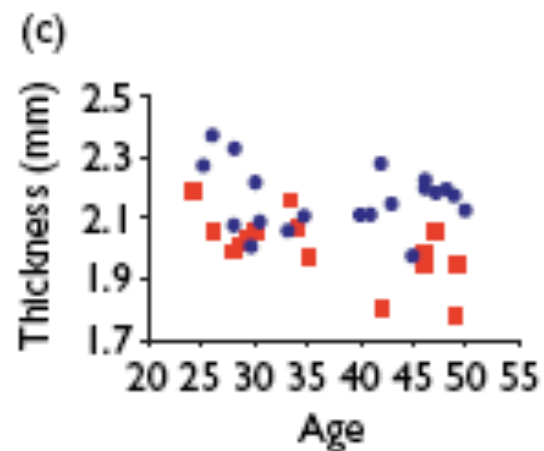
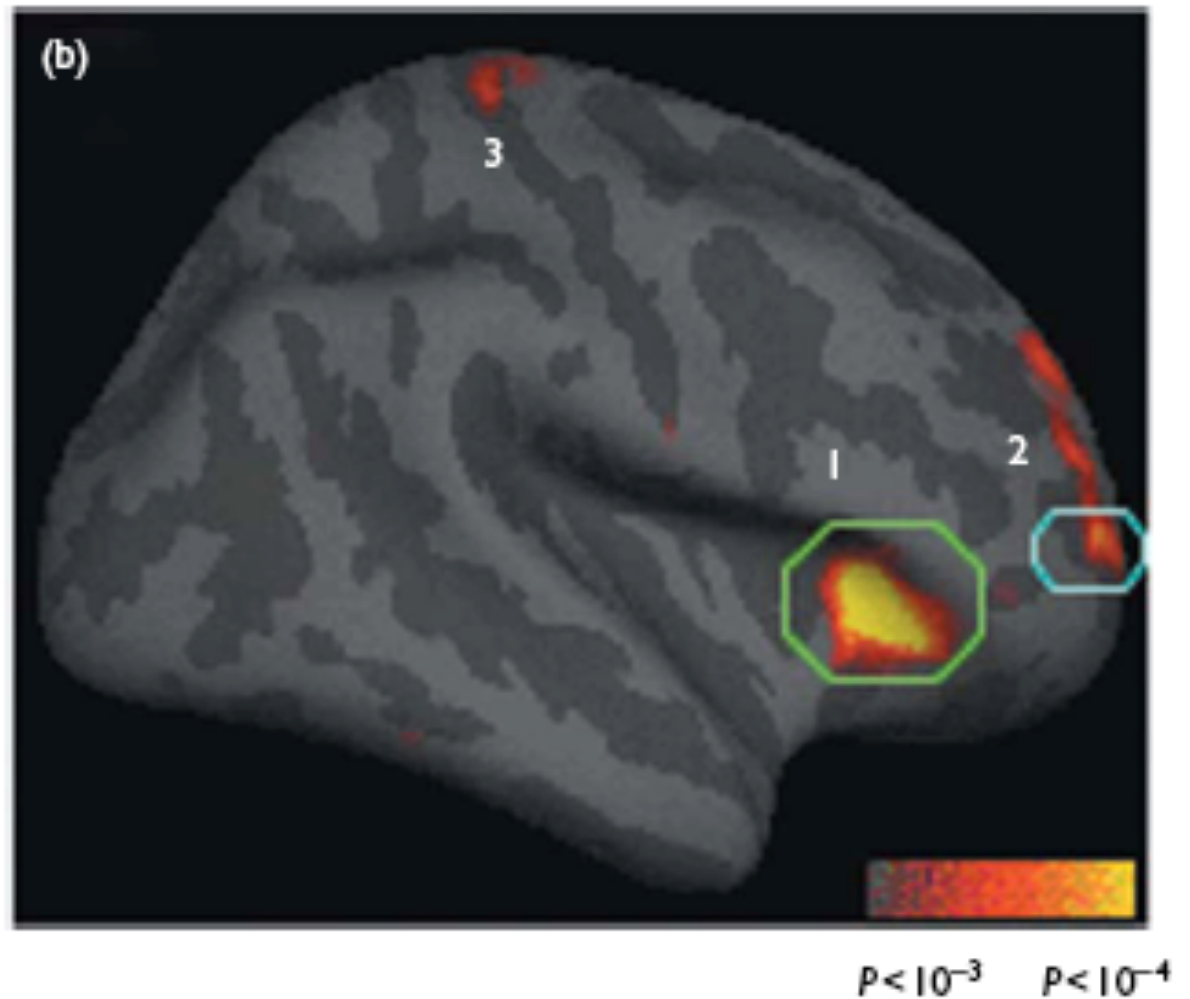
**Repeated neural activity
builds neural structure.**

A microscopic image of neurons, showing a central neuron with a glowing green nucleus and a yellow cell body, surrounded by a dense network of yellow axons and dendrites. The background is dark, making the glowing structures stand out.

Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

Lazar, et al. 2005.
Meditation
experience is
associated
with increased
cortical thickness.
Neuroreport, 16,
1893-1897.



The Natural Mind

Apart from the hypothetical influence of a transcendental X factor . . .

Awareness and unconsciousness, mindfulness and delusion, and happiness and suffering must be natural processes.


Mind is grounded in life.




We ask, “What is a thought?”

*We don’t know,
yet we are thinking continually.*

Venerable Tenzin Palmo




Being on Your Own Side



*If one going down into a river,
swollen and swiftly flowing,
is carried away by the current --
how can one help others across?*

The Buddha



*The root of Buddhism is compassion,
and the root of compassion is compassion for oneself.*

Pema Chodren

Self-Compassion

- Compassion is the wish that a being not suffer, combined with sympathetic concern. Self-compassion simply applies that to oneself. It is not self-pity, complaining, or wallowing in pain.
- Studies show that self-compassion buffers stress and increases resilience and self-worth.
- But self-compassion is hard for many people, due to feelings of unworthiness, self-criticism, or “internalized oppression.” To encourage the neural substrates of self-compassion:
 - Get the sense of being cared about by someone else.
 - Bring to mind someone you naturally feel compassion for
 - Sink into the experience of compassion in your body
 - Then shift the compassion to yourself, perhaps with phrases like: “May I not suffer. May the pain of this moment pass.”

“Anthem”

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in
That's how the light gets in*

Leonard Cohen



Growing Inner Strengths

Two wolves in the heart

Example: Major Buddhist Inner Strengths

Mindfulness

Investigation

Energy

Bliss

Tranquility

Concentration

Equanimity

Compassion

Kindness

Altruistic joy

Virtue

Wisdom

View

Intention

Effort

Conviction

Generosity

Patience

Let's Try It

- **Notice** the experience already present in awareness that you are alright right now
 - Have the experience – aware of breathing ongoing, the heart beating, your body's aliveness.
 - Enrich it.
 - Absorb it.

- **Create** the experience of gratitude
 - Have the experience - bring to mind one or more things you feel grateful for or glad about.
 - Enrich it.
 - Absorb it.

The Neuropsychology of Learning

Learning – changing neural structure and function – proceeds in two stages:

From short-term memory buffers to long-term storage

From state to trait

From activation to installation

Growing Inner Strengths


Inner strengths are grown from experiences of them or related factors – activated states – that are installed as traits.




**You become more compassionate
by repeatedly installing experiences of compassion.**

**You become more grateful
by repeatedly installing experiences of gratitude.**

**You become more mindful
by repeatedly installing experiences of mindfulness.**



**Without this installation,
there is no learning,
no change in the brain.**



**Meanwhile your painful,
harmful experiences
are being rapidly converted
into neural structure.**



The Negativity Bias

Unpleasant Experiences In Context

- Life contains unavoidable unpleasant experiences. Resisting them just adds to the stress, upset, etc.
- Some inner strengths come only from unpleasant experiences, e.g., knowing you'll do the hard thing.
- But unpleasant experiences have inherent costs, in their discomfort and stress.
- Many inner strengths could have been developed without the costs of unpleasant experiences.
- Most unpleasant experiences are pain with no gain.

The Brain's Negativity Bias

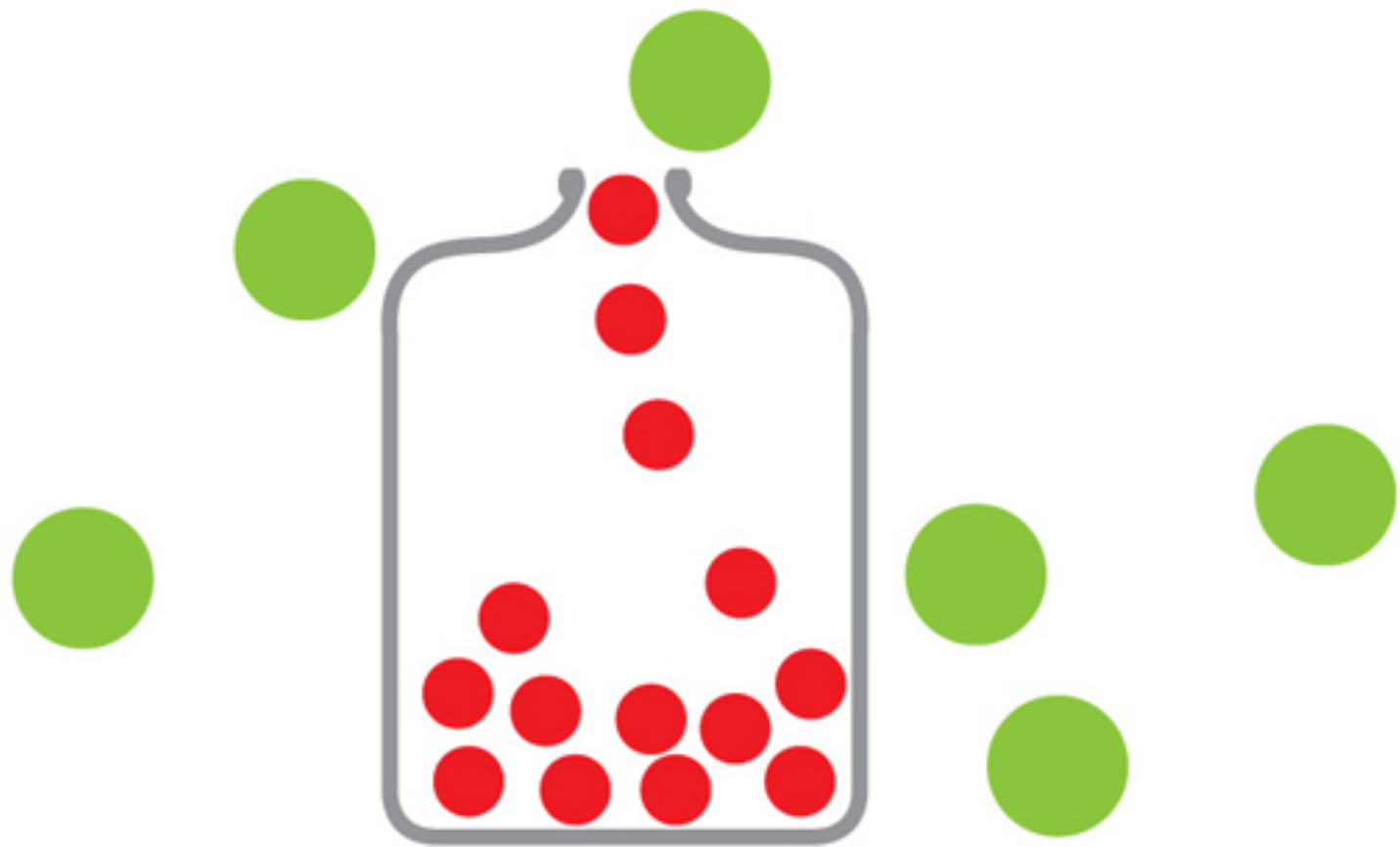
- As our ancestors evolved, avoiding “sticks” was more important for survival than getting “carrots.”
- Negative stimuli:
 - More attention and processing
 - Greater motivational focus: loss aversion
- Preferential encoding in implicit memory:
 - We learn faster from pain than pleasure.
 - Negative interactions: more impactful than positive
 - Easy to create learned helplessness, hard to undo
 - Rapid sensitization to negative through cortisol

Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias

bad experiences


good experiences



The Negativity Bias

Stone age brains in the 21st century

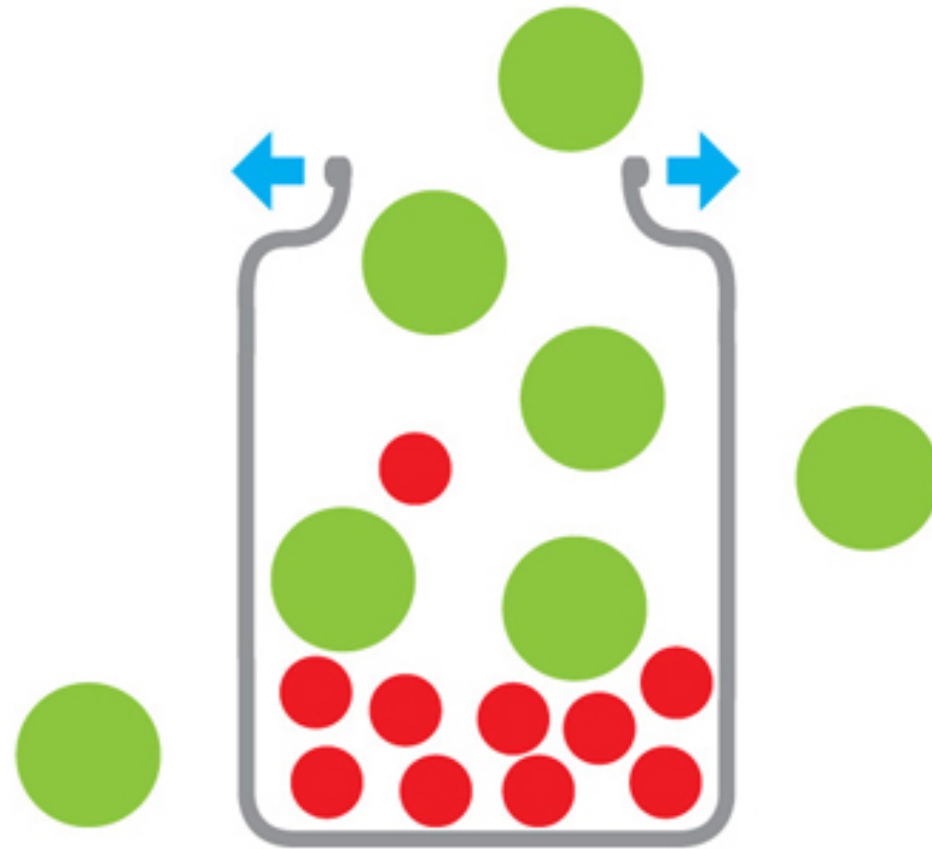




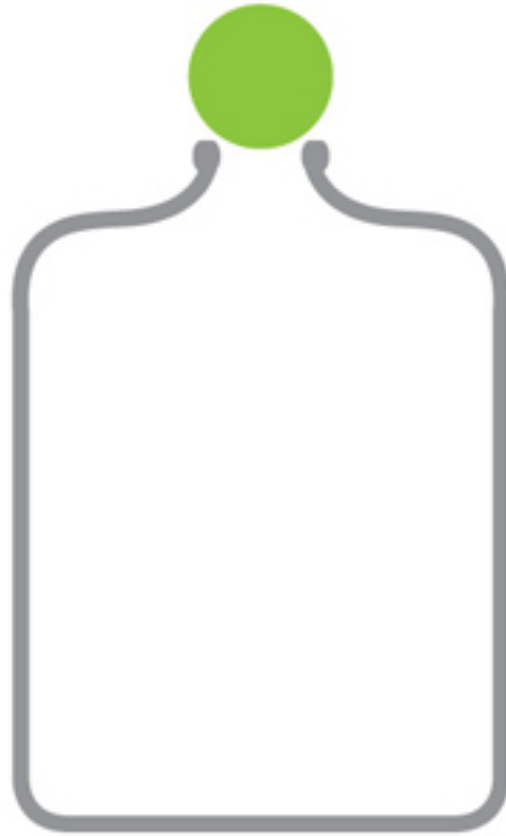
*We can deliberately use the mind
to change the brain for the better.*



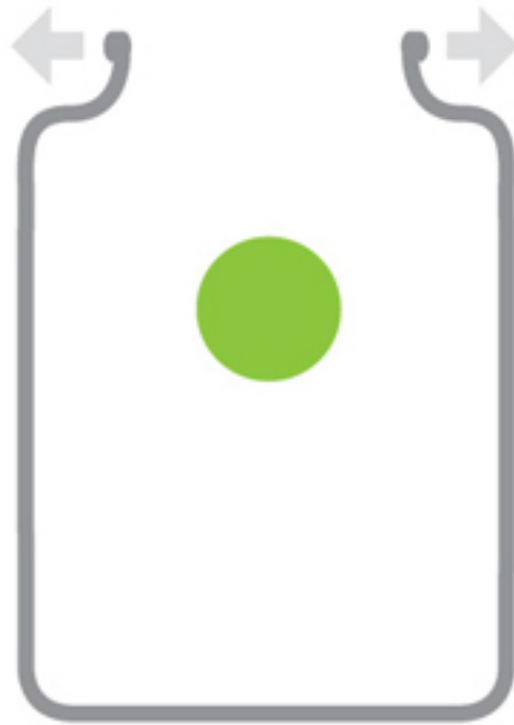
Taking in the Good



Learning to Take in the Good



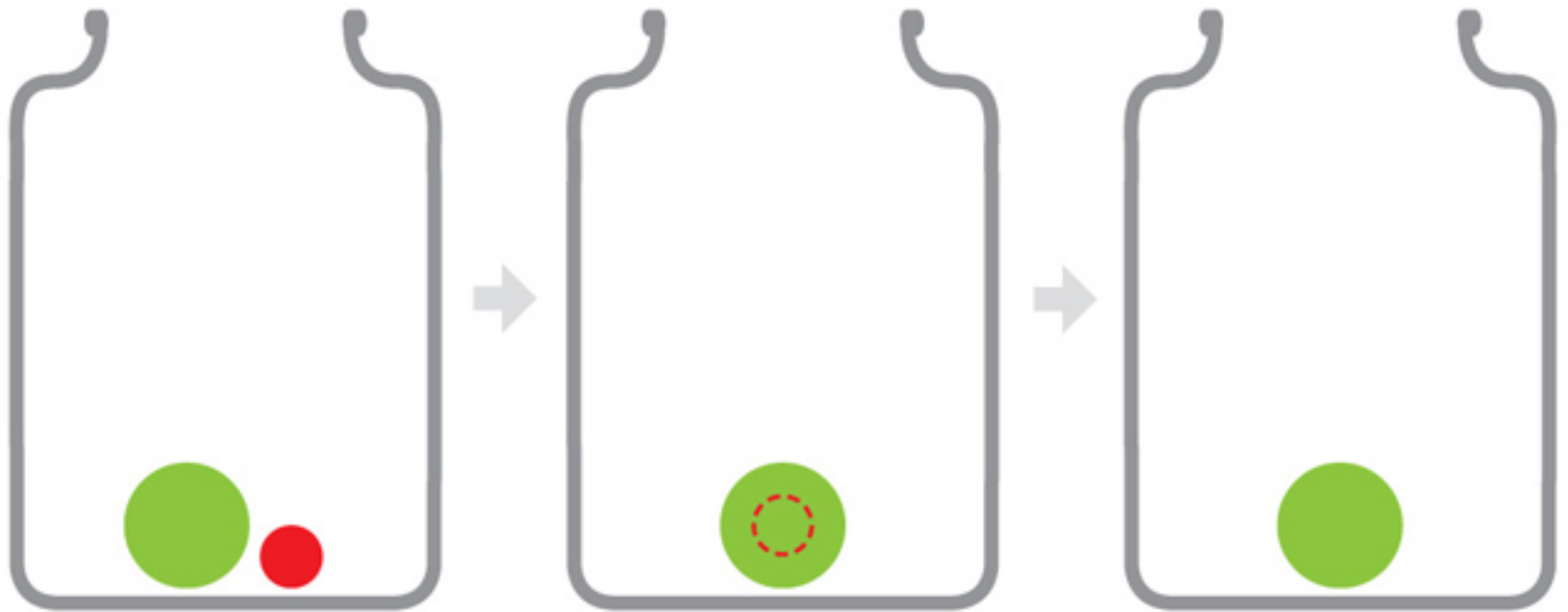
Have a Good Experience



Enrich It



Absorb It



Link Positive and Negative Material

HEAL by Taking in the Good

1. Have a positive experience. Notice it or create it.
2. Enrich the experience through duration, intensity, multimodality, novelty, personal relevance
3. Absorb the experience by intending and sensing that it is sinking into you as you sink into it.
4. Link positive and negative material. [optional]



Have It, Enjoy It


Let's Try It Again

- **Notice** the experience already present in awareness of some kind of strength . . . focus, determination, vitality, endurance
 - Have the experience
 - Enrich it
 - Absorb it

- **Create** the experience of goals attained
 - Have the experience - bring to mind a time you finished something large or small . . . Open to a sense of completion, accomplishment, relief, success . . .
 - Enrich it
 - Absorb it

It's Good to Take in the Good

- Development of specific inner strengths
 - General - resilience, positive mood, feeling loved
 - “Antidote experiences” - Healing old wounds, filling the hole in the heart
- Implicit benefits:
 - Shows that there is still good in the world
 - Being active rather than passive
 - Treating yourself kindly, like you matter
 - Rights an unfair imbalance, given the negativity bias
 - Training of attention and executive functions
- Sensitizes brain to positive: like Velcro for good



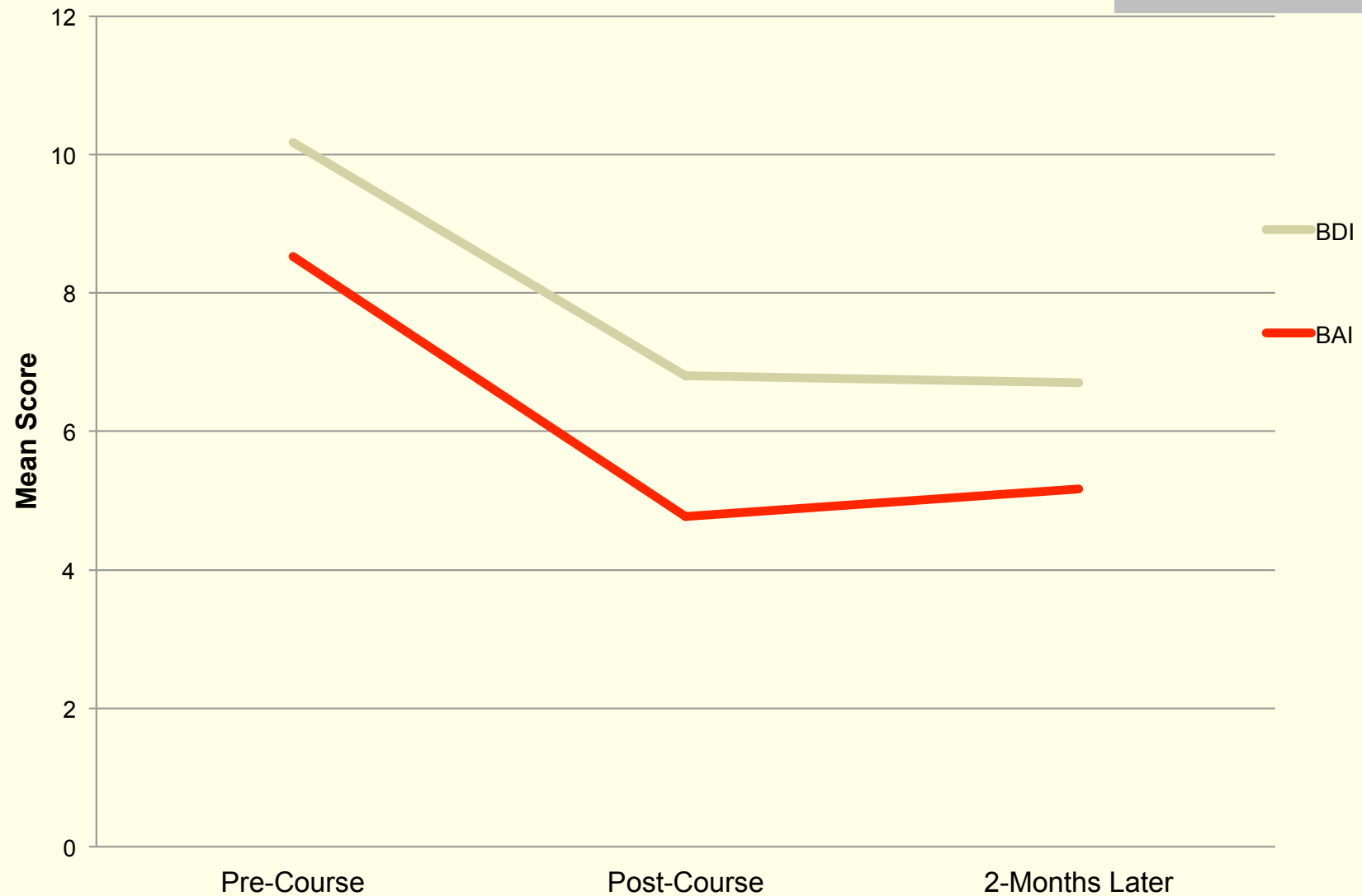
*Keep a green bough in your heart,
and a singing bird will come.*

Lao Tsu

Research on the HEAL Process

- With collaborators from the University of California, a 2013 study on the HEAL course, using a randomized waitlist control group design (46 subjects).
- Course participants, compared to the control group, reported more Contentment, Self-Esteem, Satisfaction with Life, Savoring, and Gratitude.
- After the course and at two month follow-up, pooled participants also reported more Love, Compassion, Self-Compassion, Mindfulness, Self-Control, Positive Rumination, Joy, Amusement, Awe, and Happiness, and less Anxiety and Depression.

Combined Sample: Depression (BDI) & Anxiety (BAI)



The Role of Cultivation

- Three fundamental ways to engage the mind:
 - Be with it. Decrease negative. Increase positive.
 - The garden: Observe. Pull weeds. Plant flowers.
 - Let be. Let go. Let in.
 - Mindfulness present in all three ways to engage mind
- While “being with” is profound, it can be isolated and over-valued in some therapies or spiritual practices.
- Skillful means for decreasing the negative and increasing the positive have developed over thousands of years. Why not use them?



SPIRIT ROCK MEDITATION CENTER



Join us for

**Cultivating Inner Strength - Monastic
Daylong [Dana - No Fee Day]**

with Ayya Anandabodhi
and Ayya Santacitta

on

Sunday, July 8

from 9:30 am - 5 pm.

(Photo by Ed Ritger)



The 2nd and 3rd Noble Truths

A Telling of the Four Noble Truths

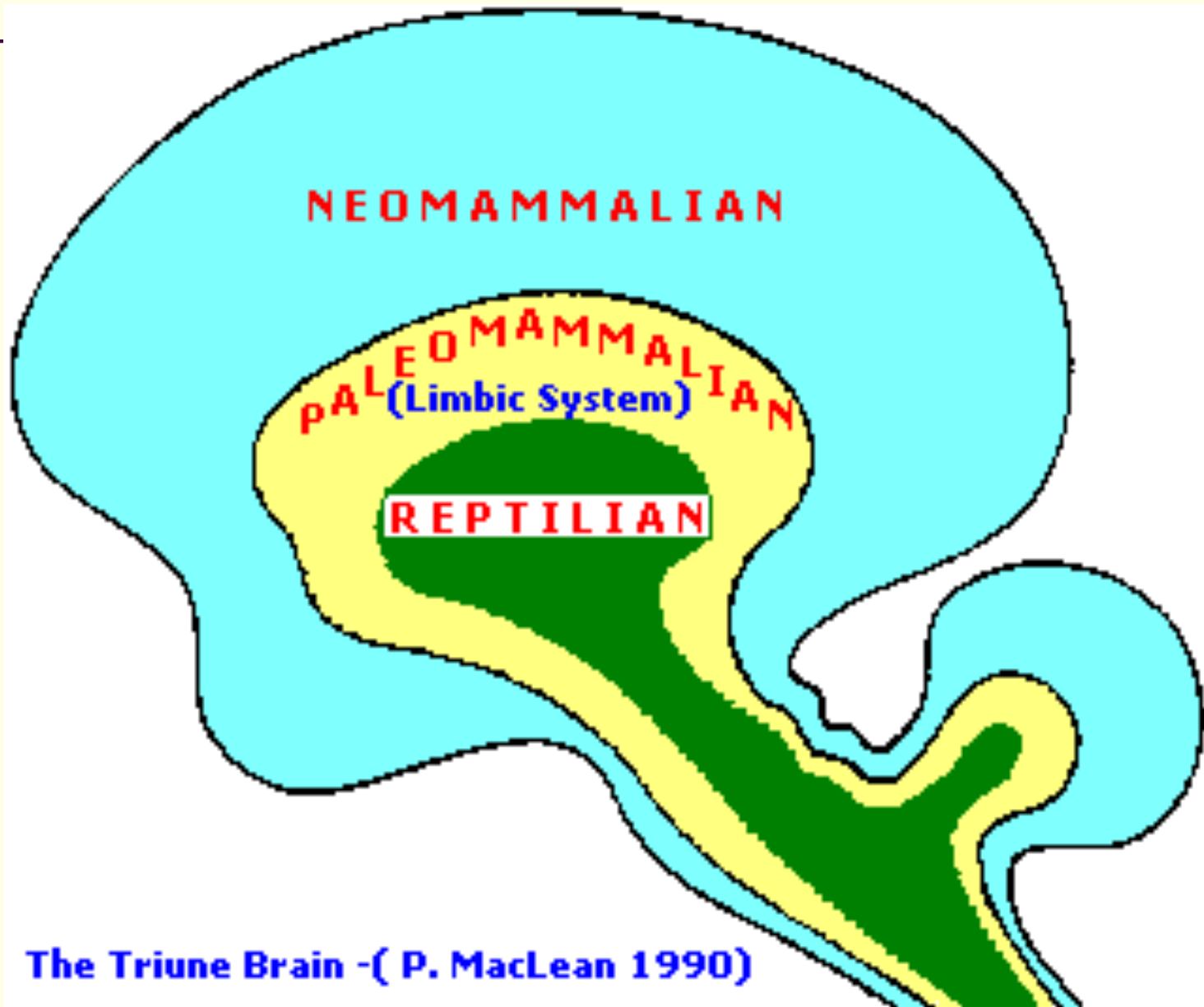
There is suffering.

When craving arises, so does suffering.

When craving passes away, so does suffering.

There is an eight-part path that both embodies and leads to the passing away of this craving.

Evolution of the Brain



Three Motivational and Self-Regulatory Systems

- **Avoid Harms:**

- Predators, natural hazards, aggression, pain
- Primary need, tends to trump all others

- **Approach Rewards:**

- Food, shelter, mating, pleasure
- Mammals: rich emotions and sustained pursuit

- **Attach to Others:**

- Bonding, language, empathy, cooperation, love
- Taps older Avoiding and Approaching networks

Each system can draw on the other two for its ends.⁵⁴

Craving Arising . . .

When invaded by threat, loss, or rejection [felt deficit or disturbance of safety, satisfaction, or connection]:

The body fires up into the stress response; outputs exceed inputs; long-term building is deferred.

The mind fires up into:

- **Fear** (the Avoiding system)
- **Frustration** (the Approaching system)
- **Heartache** (the Attaching system)

This is the brain in its allostatic, **Reactive**, *craving* mode.⁵⁵

Craving Passing Away . . .

When not invaded by threat, loss, or rejection [no felt deficit or disturbance of safety, satisfaction, and connection]

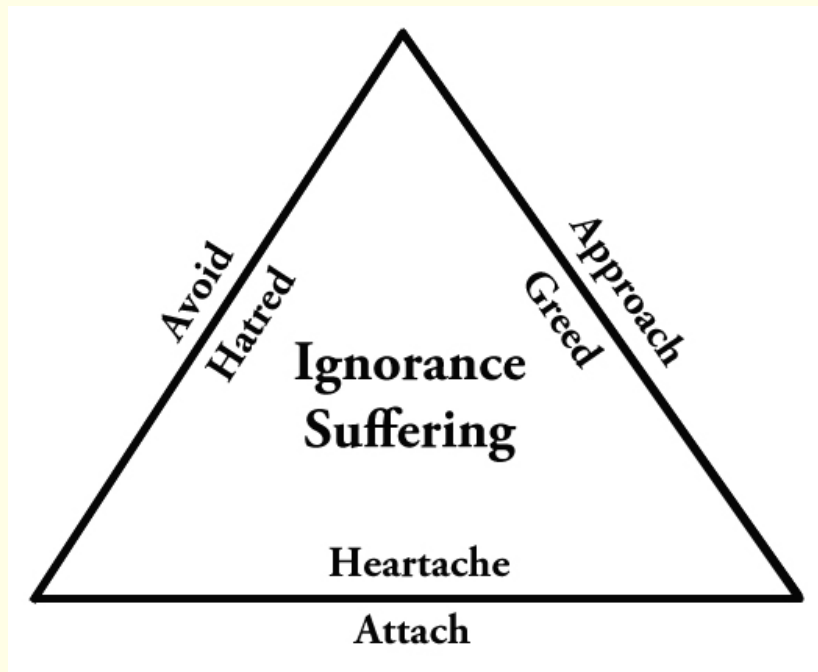
The body defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing, and pleasant abiding.

The mind defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

- **Peace** (the Avoiding system)
- **Contentment** (the Approaching system)
- **Love** (the Attaching system)

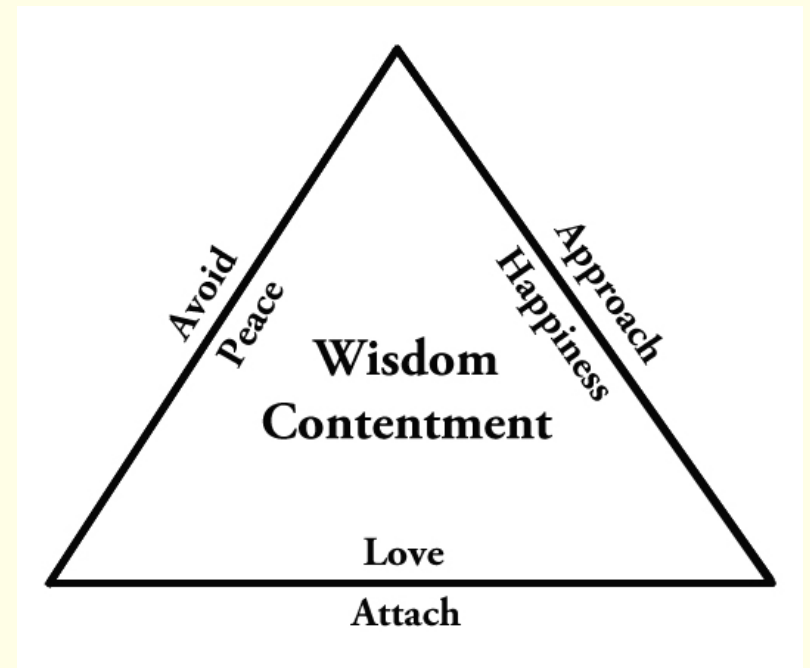
This is the brain in its homeostatic **Responsive**,
minimal craving mode.

Choices . . .



Reactive Mode

Or?



Responsive Mode

Coming Home, Staying Home

Positive experiences of core needs met - the felt sense of safety, satisfaction, and connection - activate Responsive mode.

Activated Responsive states can become installed Responsive traits. Responsive traits foster Responsive states.

Responsive states and traits enable us to stay Responsive with challenges.



The Fruit as the Path

Cultivation Undoes Craving

- Taking in the good is an openness to positive experience while letting go – allowing the experience in and through you.
- Much suffering and harm comes from “craving” – resisting the unpleasant, grasping after the pleasant, and clinging to the heartfelt – a drive state based on deficit or disturbance of core needs – safety, satisfaction, connection – being met.
- By repeatedly internalizing the felt sense of core needs being met, we gradually reduce the sense of deficit or disturbance, and rest increasingly in a peace, happiness, and love that is independent of external conditions.
- With time, even the practice of cultivation falls away - like a raft that is no longer needed once we reach the farther shore.

Coming Home

Peace

Contentment

Love

*Think not lightly of good, saying,
"It will not come to me."*

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

*Likewise, the wise one,
gathering it little by little,
fills oneself with good.*

Suggested Books

See www.RickHanson.net for other suggestions.

- Austin, J. 2009. *Selfless Insight*. MIT Press.
- Begley, S. 2007. *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*. Ballantine.
- Carter, C. 2010. *Raising Happiness*. Ballantine.
- Hanson, R. (with R. Mendius). 2009. *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*. New Harbinger.
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Key Papers - 1

See www.RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.

- Atmanspacher, H. & Graben, P. 2007. Contextual emergence of mental states from neurodynamics. *Chaos & Complexity Letters*, 2:151-168.
- Baumeister, R., Bratlavsky, E., Finkenauer, C. & Vohs, K. 2001. Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, 5:323-370.
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Key Papers - 2

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- Hanson, R. 2008. Seven facts about the brain that incline the mind to joy. In *Measuring the immeasurable: The scientific case for spirituality*. Sounds True.

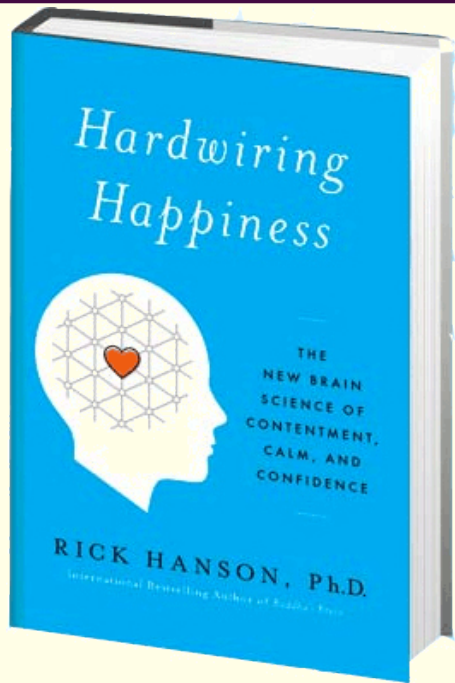
Key Papers - 3

- Lazar, S., Kerr, C., Wasserman, R., Gray, J., Greve, D., Treadway, M., McGarvey, M., Quinn, B., Dusek, J., Benson, H., Rauch, S., Moore, C., & Fischl, B. 2005. Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *Neuroreport*. 16:1893-1897.
- Lewis, M.D. & Todd, R.M. 2007. The self-regulating brain: Cortical-subcortical feedback and the development of intelligent action. *Cognitive Development*, 22:406-430.
- Lieberman, M.D. & Eisenberger, N.I. 2009. Pains and pleasures of social life. *Science*. 323:890-891.
- Lutz, A., Greischar, L., Rawlings, N., Ricard, M. and Davidson, R. 2004. Long-term meditators self-induce high-amplitude gamma synchrony during mental practice. *PNAS*. 101:16369-16373.
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Key Papers - 4

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- Walsh, R. & Shapiro, S. L. 2006. The meeting of meditative disciplines and Western psychology: A mutually enriching dialogue. *American Psychologist*, 61:227-239.

Where to Find Rick Hanson Online



Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence

www.rickhanson.net/hardwiringhappiness

Personal website: www.rickhanson.net

Wellspring Institute: www.wisebrain.org



youtube.com/drrhanson



facebook.com/rickhansonphd