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# ***How to Build A Benevolent Brain***

**The Chi Center**

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[WiseBrain.org](http://WiseBrain.org) [RickHanson.net](http://RickHanson.net)

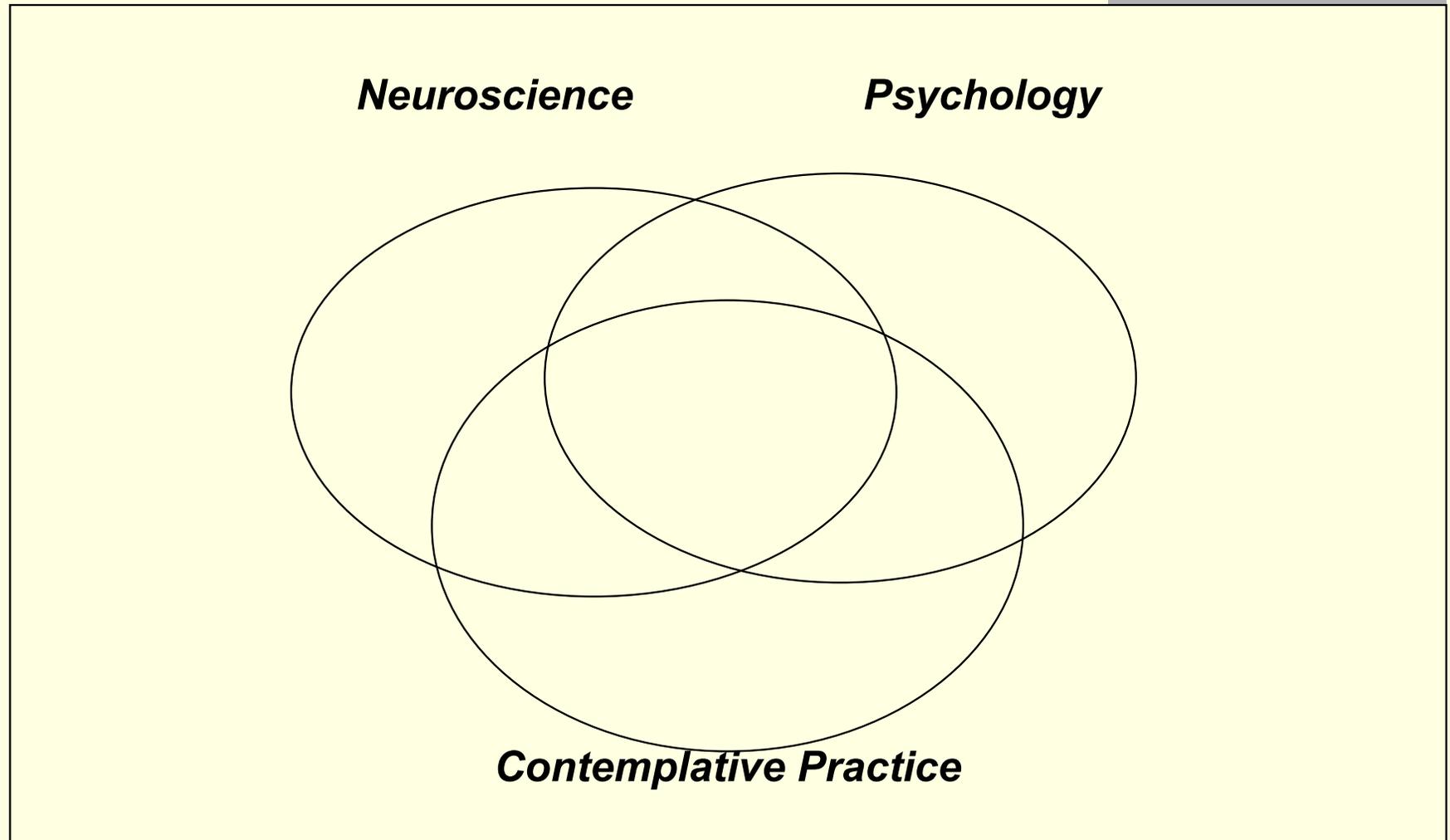
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# Topics

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- **Using your mind to change your brain**
- **Loving nature**
- **Benevolence**
- **Self-compassion**
- **Lovingkindness**

# Common - and Fertile - Ground



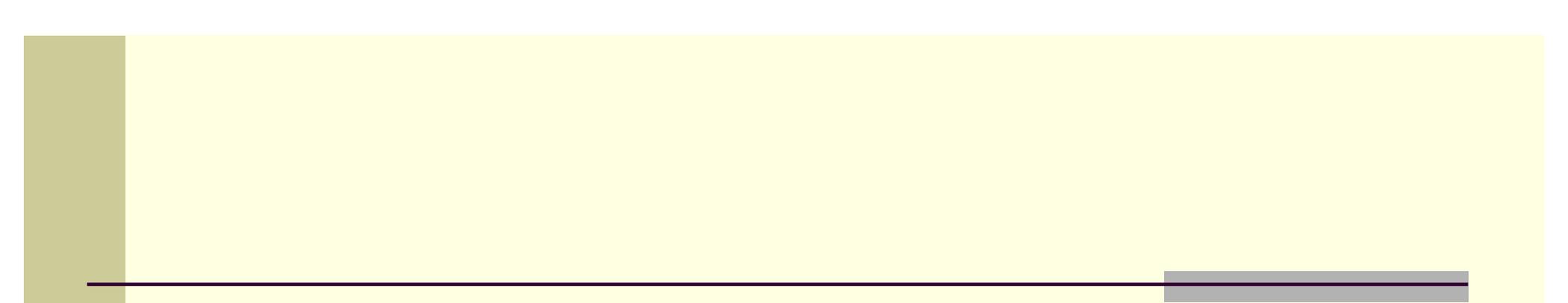
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*We ask, "What is a thought?"*

*We don't know,*

*yet we are thinking continually.*

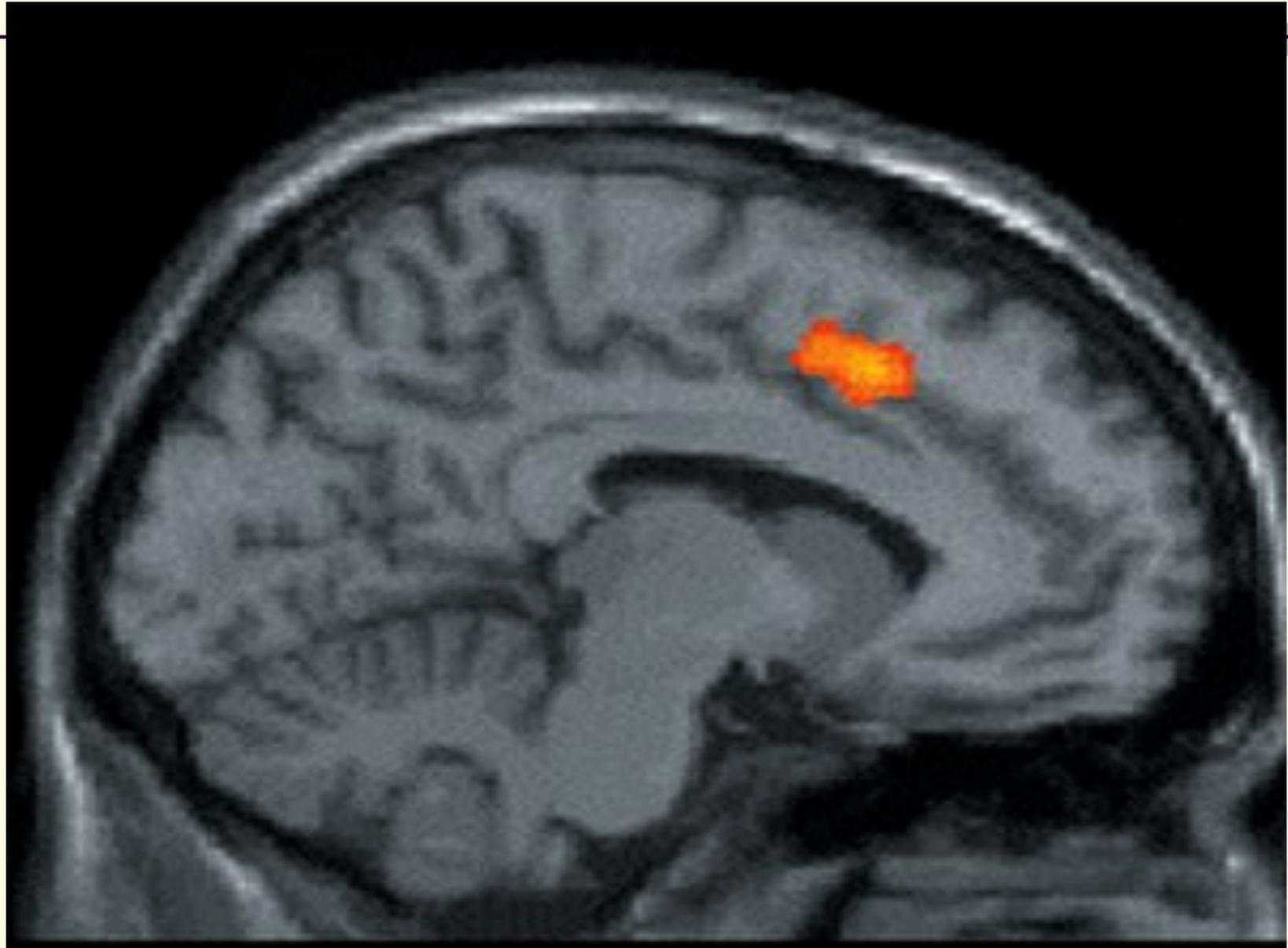
Venerable Tenzin Palmo



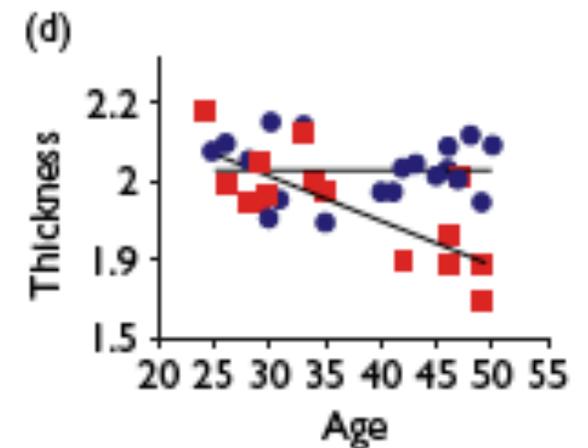
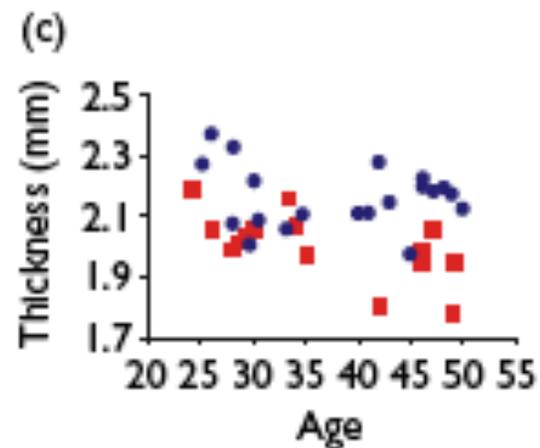
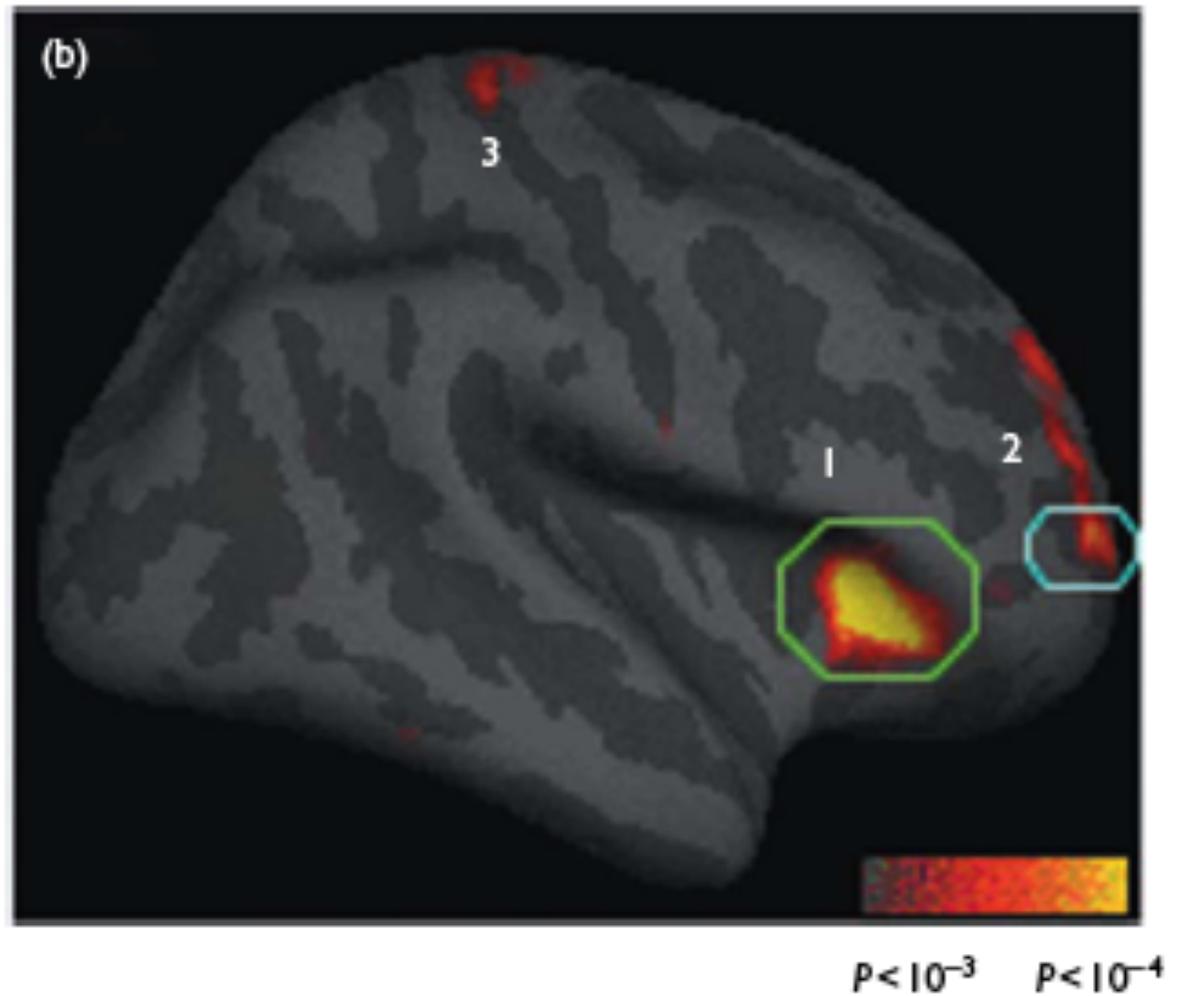
# **Using Your Mind to Change Your Brain**



# Tibetan Monk, Boundless Compassion



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

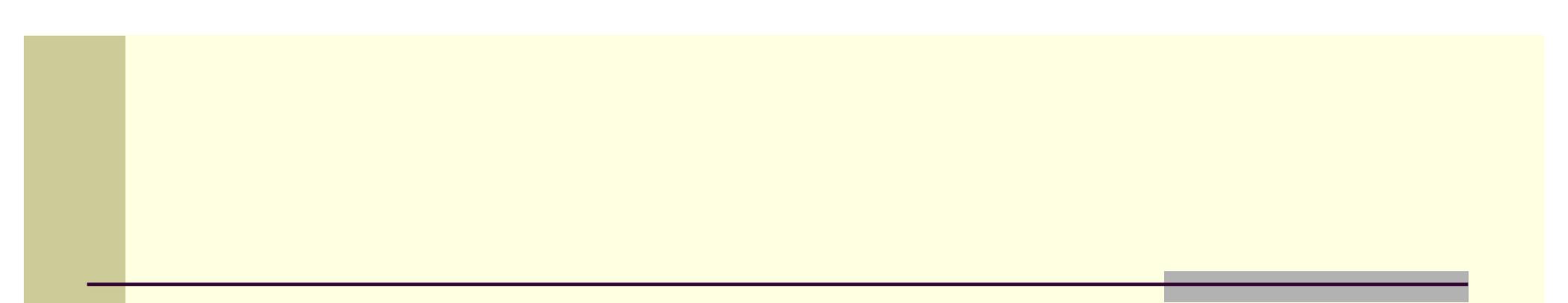


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***You can use your mind  
to change your brain  
to change your mind for the better.***

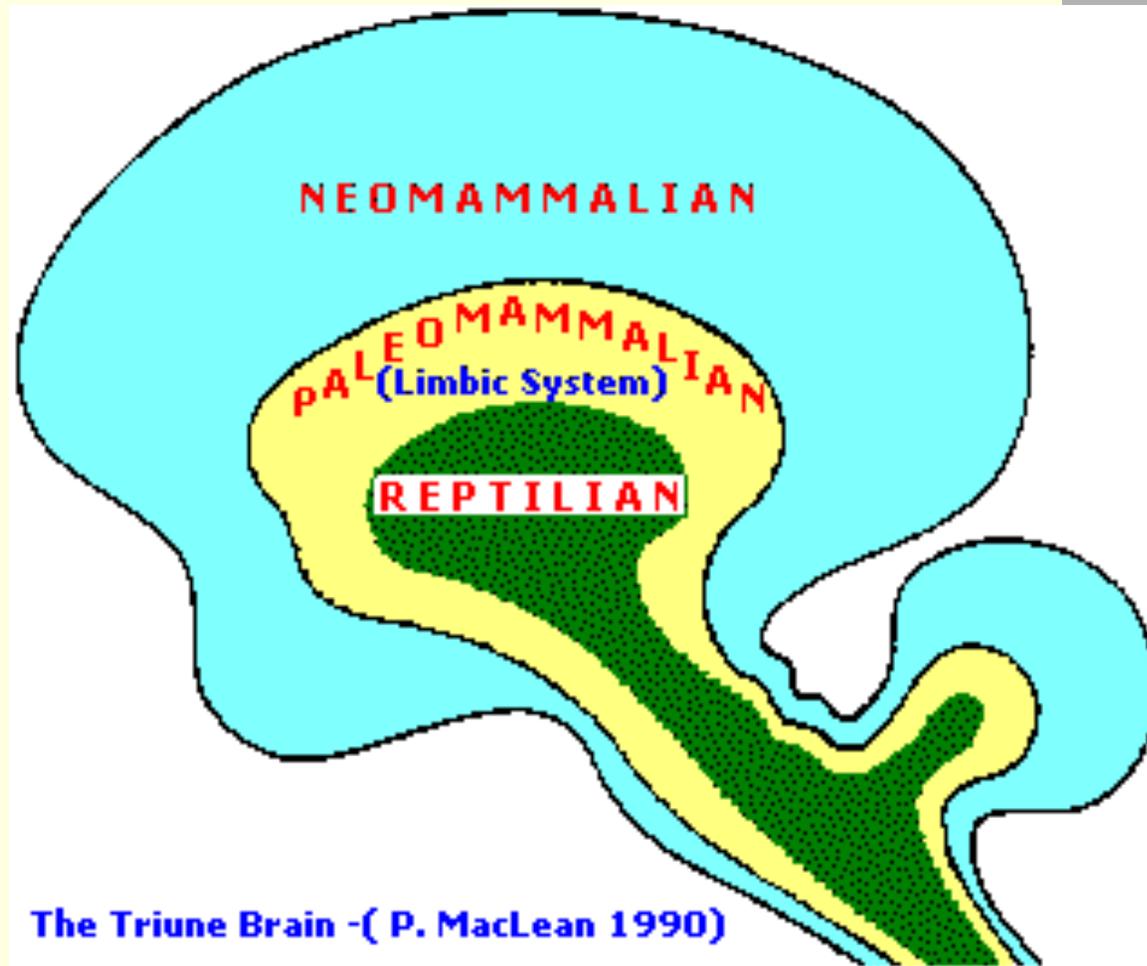
**This is self-directed neuroplasticity.**

***How to do this, in skillful ways?***



# Loving Nature

# Evolutionary History



## The Triune Brain

# Three Stages of Brain Evolution

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## ■ Reptilian:

- Brainstem, cerebellum, hypothalamus
- Reactive and reflexive
- **Avoid** hazards

## ■ Mammalian:

- Limbic system, cingulate, early cortex
- Memory, emotion, social behavior
- **Approach** rewards

## ■ Human:

- Massive cerebral cortex
- Abstract thought, language, cooperative planning, empathy
- **Attach** to “us”

# Home Base of the Human Brain

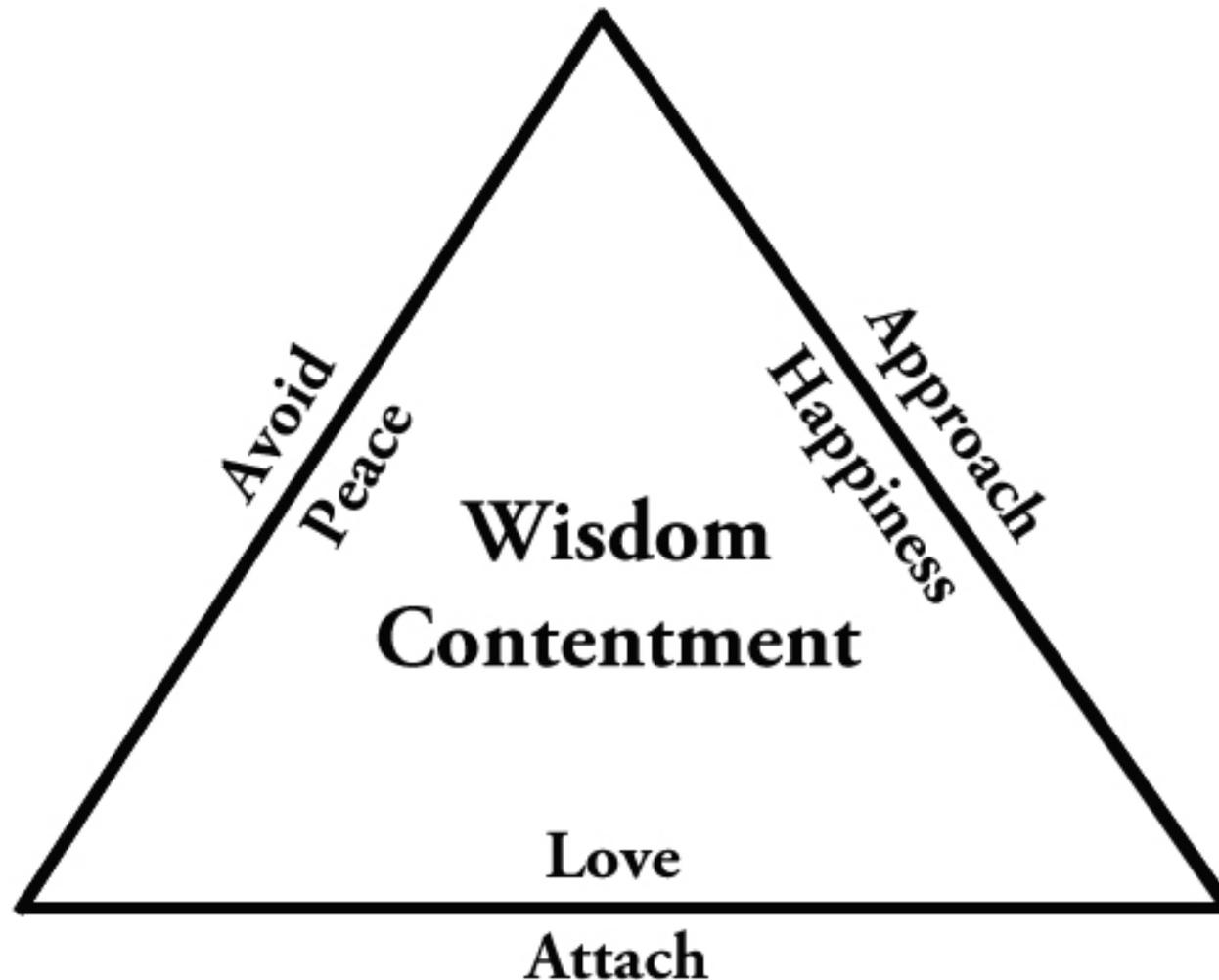
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*When not threatened, ill, in pain, hungry, upset, or chemically disturbed, most people settle into being:*

- **Peaceful** (the Avoid system)
- **Happy** (the Approach system)
- **Loving** (the Attach system)

This is the brain in its natural, ***Responsive*** mode.

# The Responsive Mode



# The Social Brain

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- Social capabilities have driven recent brain evolution.
- Reptiles and fish avoid and approach. Mammals and birds *attach* as well - especially primates and humans - and they have bigger brains than reptiles and fish.
- More social primate species have larger cortex.
- Since the first hominids began making tools 2.5 million years ago, the brain has tripled in size. Much of this new cortex is devoted to social functions (e.g., family attachments, empathy, language, cooperation, friendship, romance, love).







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*All sentient beings developed through natural selection in such a way that pleasant sensations serve as their guide, and especially the pleasure derived from sociability and from loving our families.*

Charles Darwin















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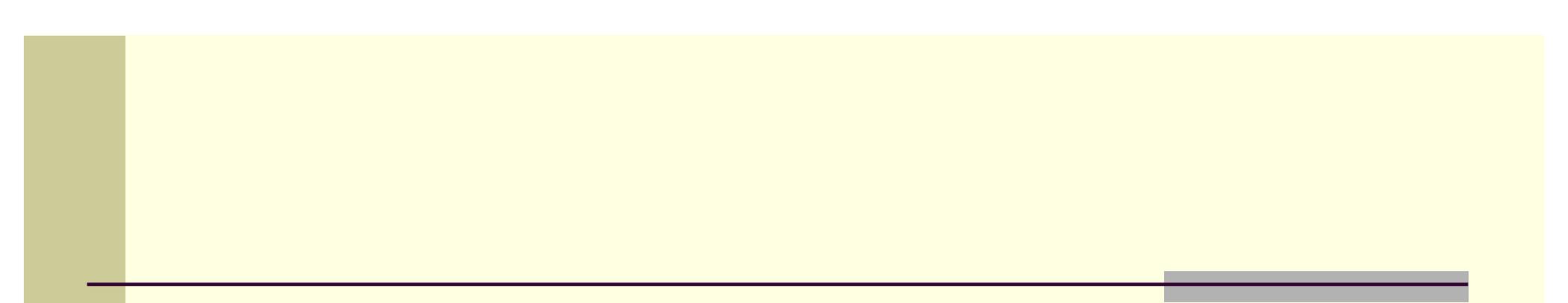












# **Benevolence**



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*If there is anything I have learned about [people], it is that there is a deeper spirit of altruism than is ever evident.*

*Just as the rivers we see are minor compared to the underground streams, so, too, the idealism that is visible is minor compared to what people carry in their hearts unreleased or scarcely released.*

*(Hu)mankind is waiting and longing for those who can accomplish the task of untying what is knotted, and bringing these underground waters to the surface.*

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*If people knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing,  
they would not eat without having given,  
nor would they allow the stain of niggardliness  
to obsess them and root in their minds.*

*Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful,  
they would not eat without having shared it,  
if there were someone to share it with.*

The Buddha

# Benevolence Takes Many Forms

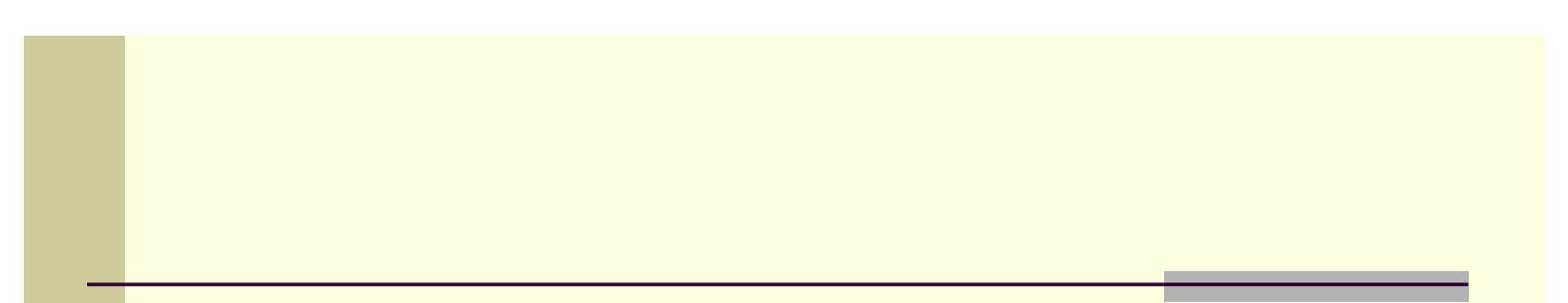
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- Attention
- Heart
- Practice
- Time
- Patience
- Service
- Food
- Money









# **Self-Compassion**

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*The root of compassion is  
compassion for oneself.*

Pema Chodron

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*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

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*The good life, as I conceive it, is a happy life.  
I do not mean that if you are good you will be happy;  
I mean that if you are happy you will be good.*

Bertrand Russell

# How to Take in the Good (TIG)

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1. Have a good experience.
  - You are already having one.
  - You deliberately recognize a good fact and let it become a good experience.
2. Extend the good experience in:
  - Time - for 10-20-30+ seconds
  - Space - in your body and feelings
  - Intensity - help it become stronger
3. Absorb the good experience by intending and sensing that is becoming a part of you, woven into the fabric of your brain and being.

# Self-Compassion

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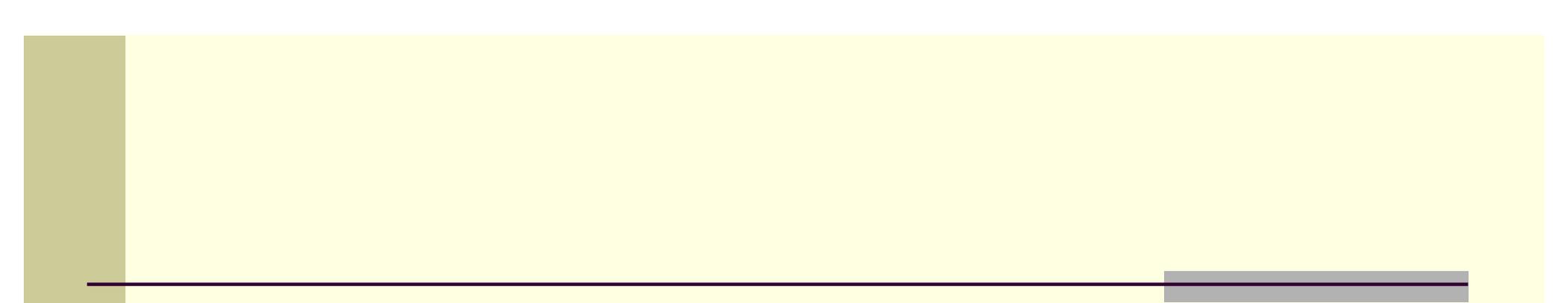
- Compassion is the wish that a being not suffer, combined with sympathetic concern. Self-compassion simply applies that to oneself. It is not self-pity, complaining, or wallowing in pain.
- Studies show that self-compassion buffers stress and increases resilience and self-worth.
- But self-compassion 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”

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*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



# Lovingkindness

# The Wisdom of Connection

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*A human being is a part of a whole, called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.*

*This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.*

*Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.*

Albert Einstein



# Lovingkindness Practice

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- Types of wishes

- Safety
- Health
- Happiness
- Ease

- Types of beings

- Self
- Benefactor
- Friend
- Neutral
- Difficult

- Continually “omitting none” in all directions

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*Outstanding behavior,  
blameless action,  
open hands to all,  
and selfless giving:*

*This is a blessing supreme.*

The Buddha

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

Lao Tsu

# Great Books

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See [www.RickHanson.net](http://www.RickHanson.net) for other great books.

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- Begley, S. 2007. *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*. Ballantine.
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- Thompson, E. 2007. *Mind in Life*. Belknap.

# Key Papers - 1

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See [www.RickHanson.net](http://www.RickHanson.net) for other scientific papers.

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- 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.
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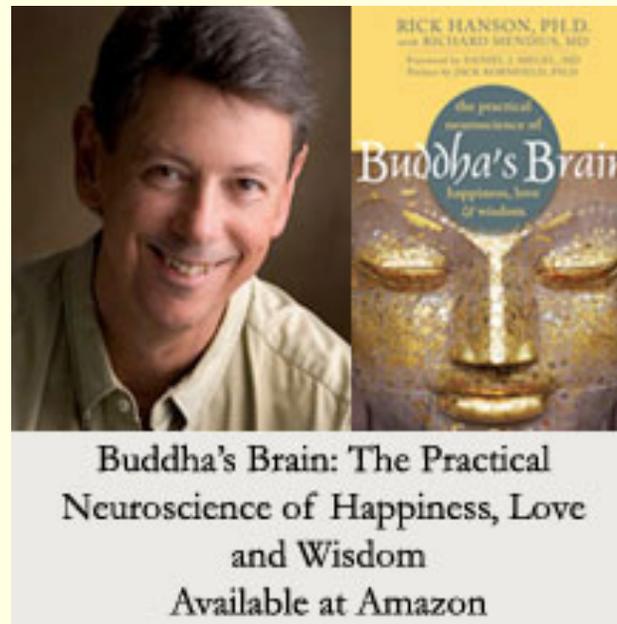
## *Where to Find Rick Hanson Online*

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<http://www.youtube.com/BuddhasBrain>

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