
*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

In Deepest Gratitude

Spirit Rock Meditation Center

October 10, 2010

Rick Hanson

www.WiseBrain.org

There are these five gifts of a superior person. What five?

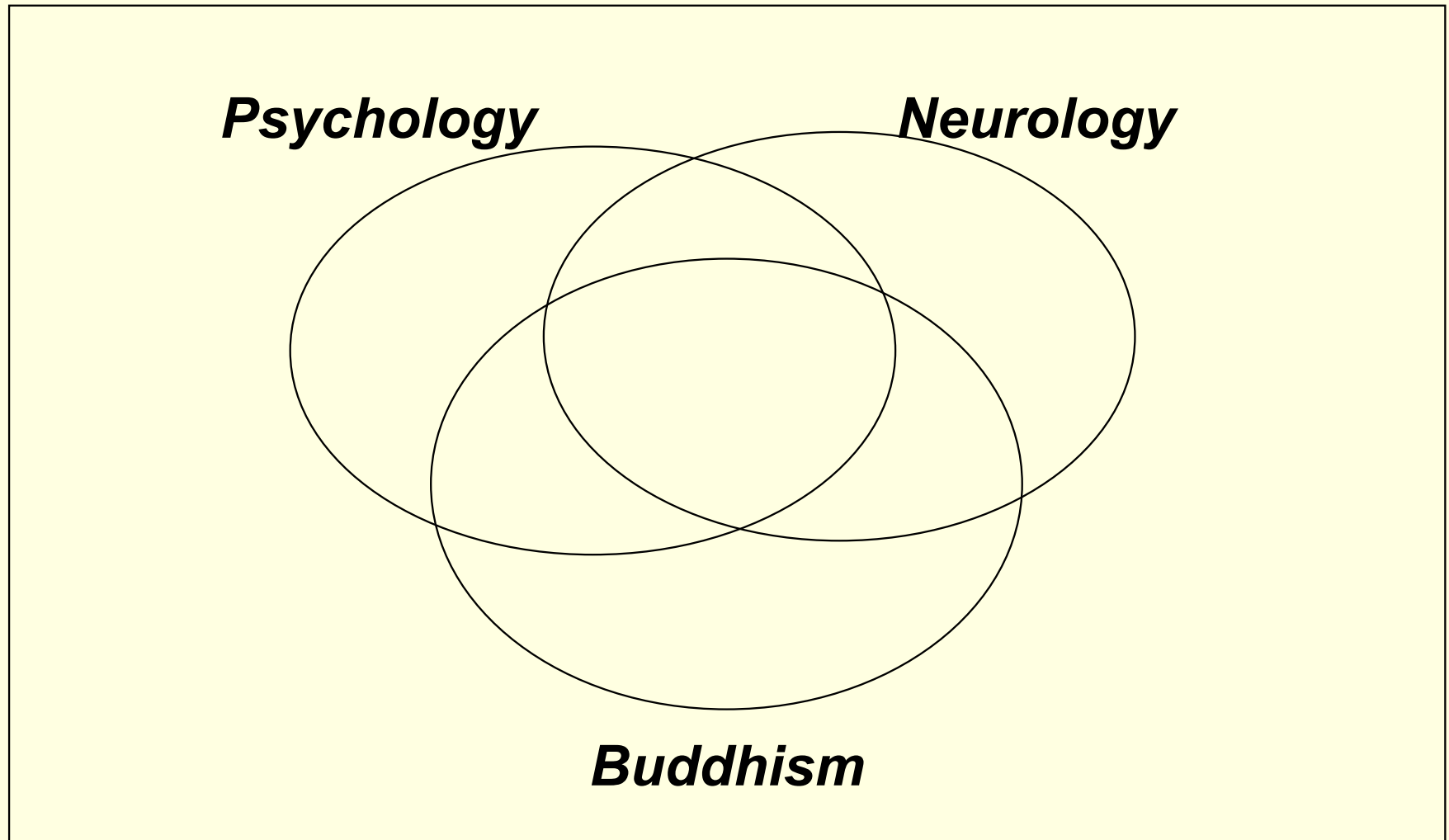
*He or she gives a gift out of faith;
gives a gift respectfully;
gives a gift at the right time;
gives a gift with a generous heart;
and gives a gift without denigration.*

The Buddha

Topics

- **Generosity and Buddhism**
- **Your benevolent nature**
- **The circle of love**
- **Taking in the good of your giving**

Common - and Fertile - Ground



*The history of science is rich in the example
of the fruitfulness of bringing
two sets of techniques, two sets of ideas,
developed in separate contexts
for the pursuit of new truth,
into touch with one another.*

J. Robert Oppenheimer

Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of texts, by logic, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cognition, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, “this . . . is our teacher.”

*But when you know for yourselves, “these things are wholesome, these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, if undertaken and practiced, lead to welfare and happiness,”
then you should engage in them.*

The Buddha

*Great questioning, great enlightenment;
little questioning, little enlightenment;
no questioning, no enlightenment.*

Dogen



Generosity and Buddhism

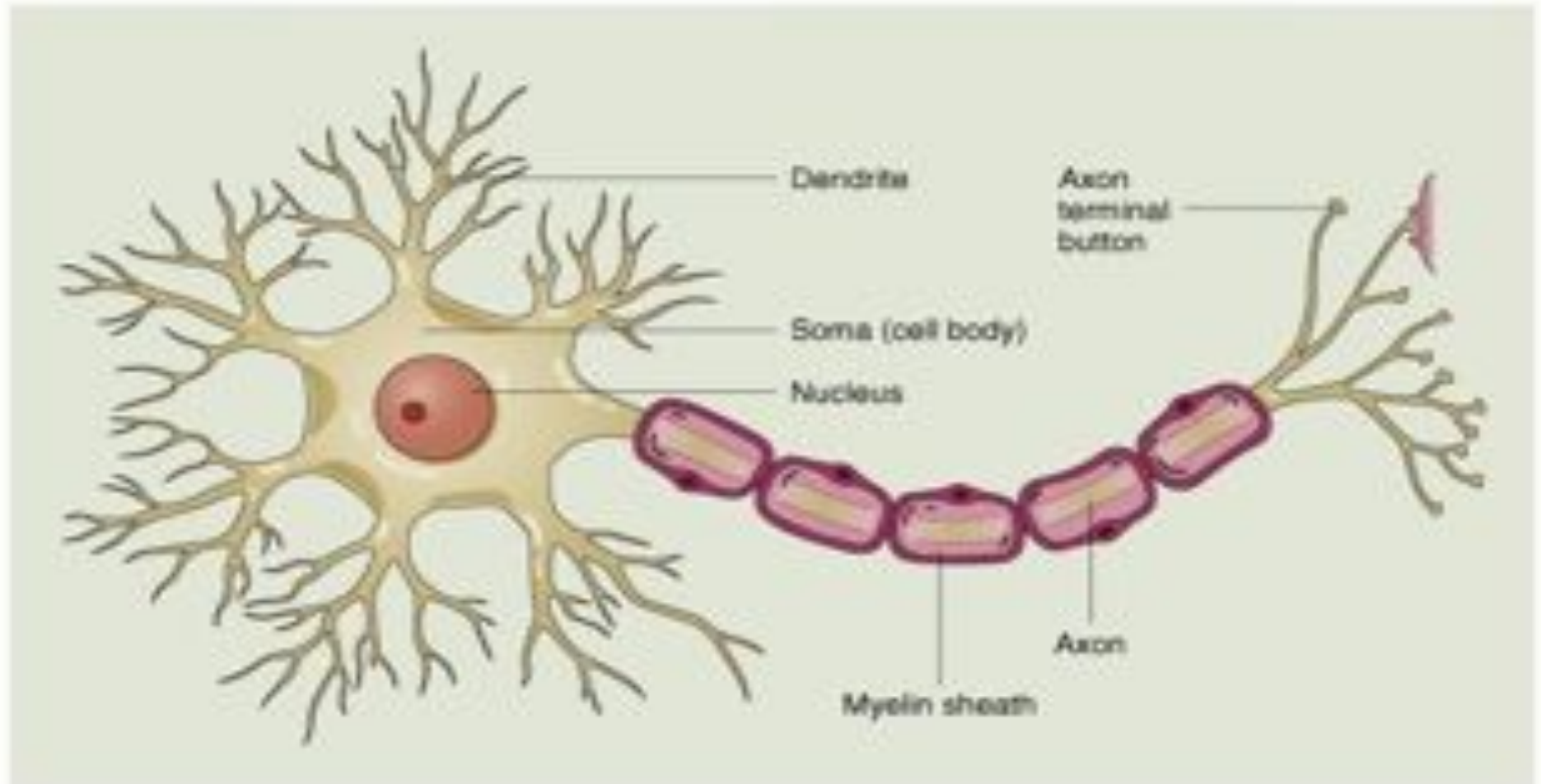
A human being is a part of a whole, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness.

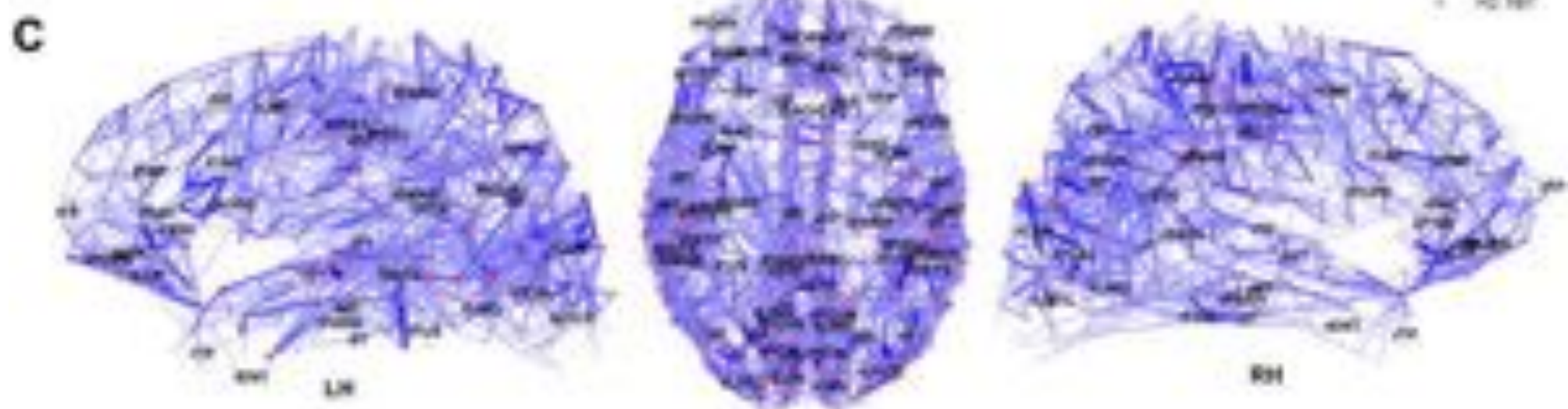
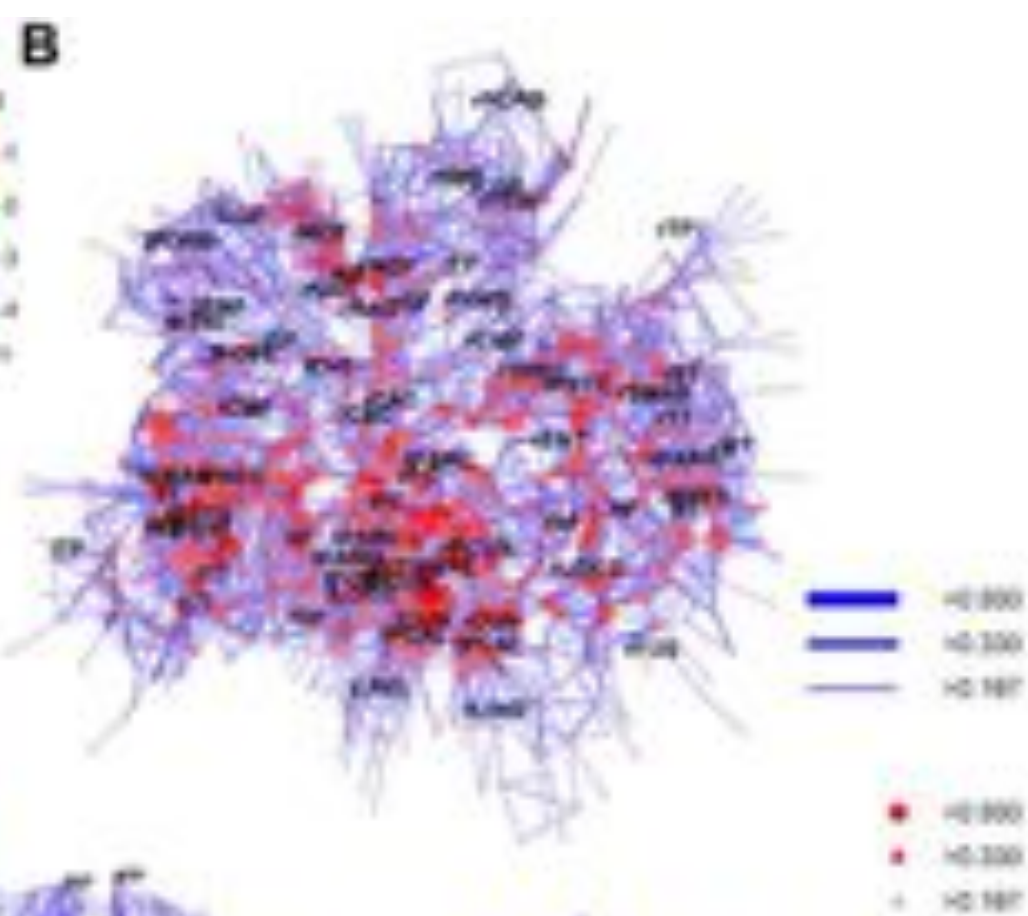
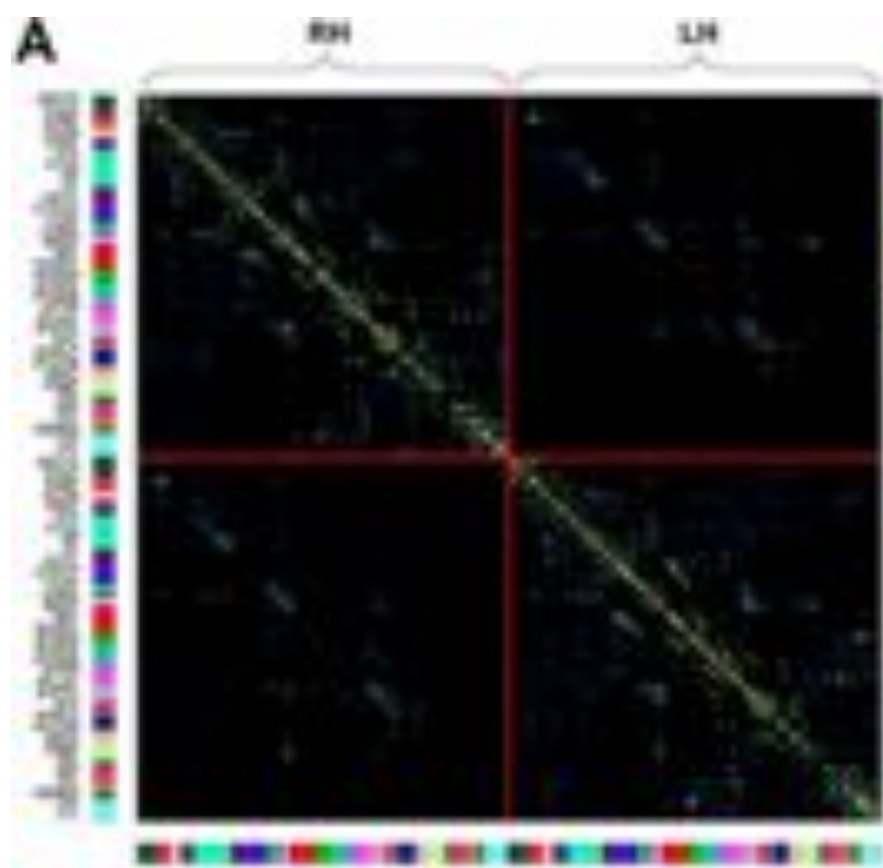
This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us.

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.

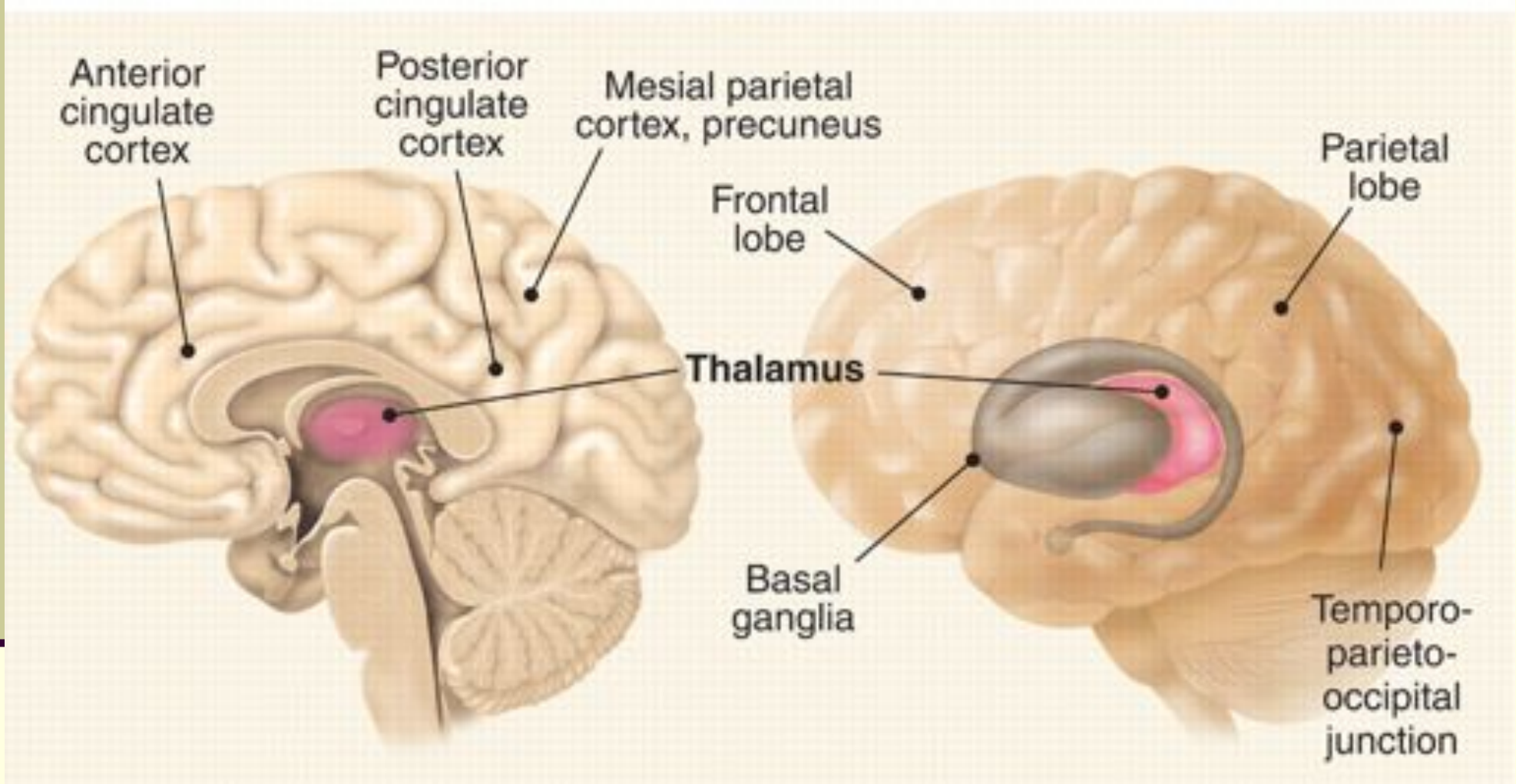
Albert Einstein

One Simple Neuron . . .





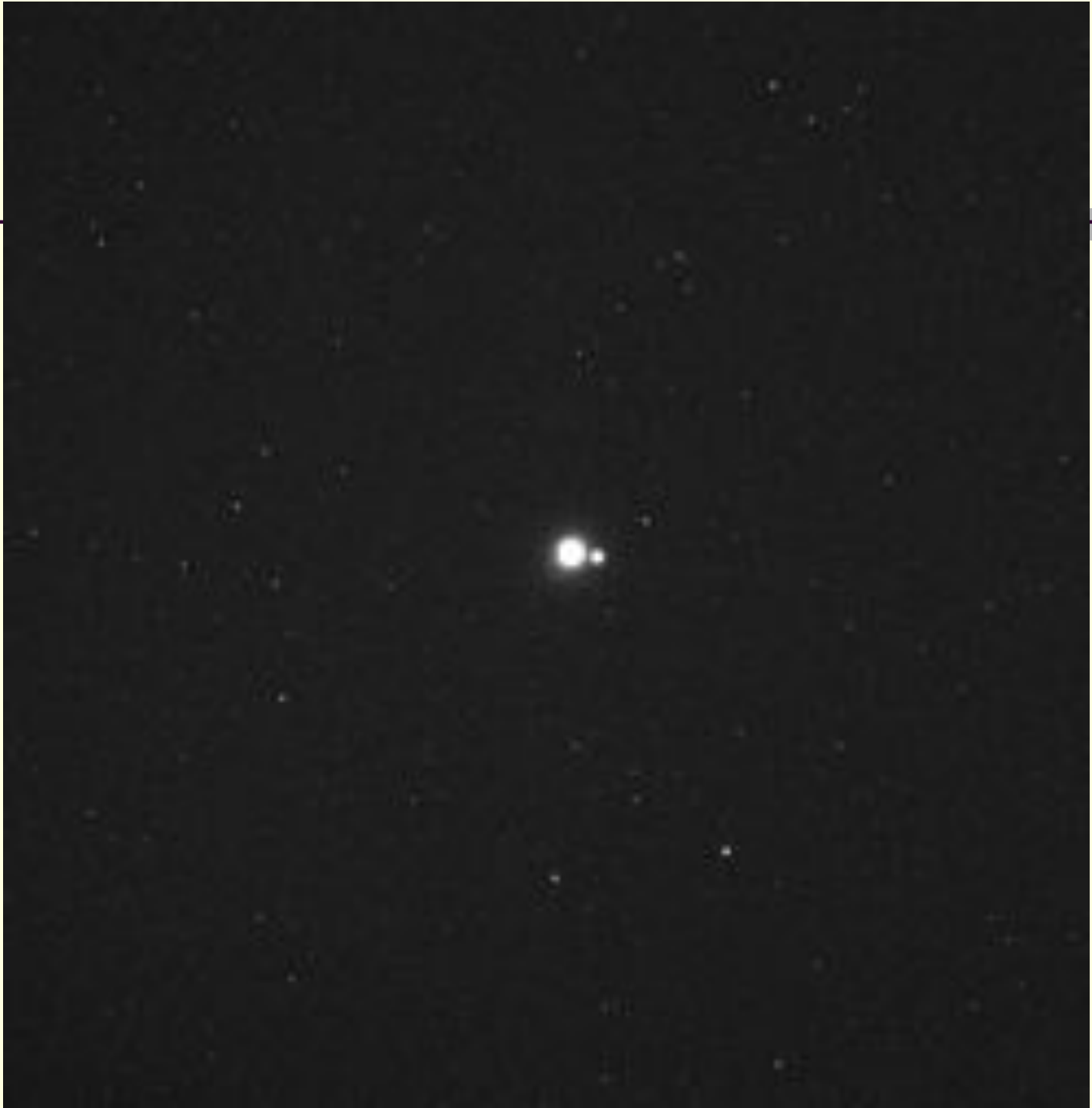
Key Brain Areas for Consciousness



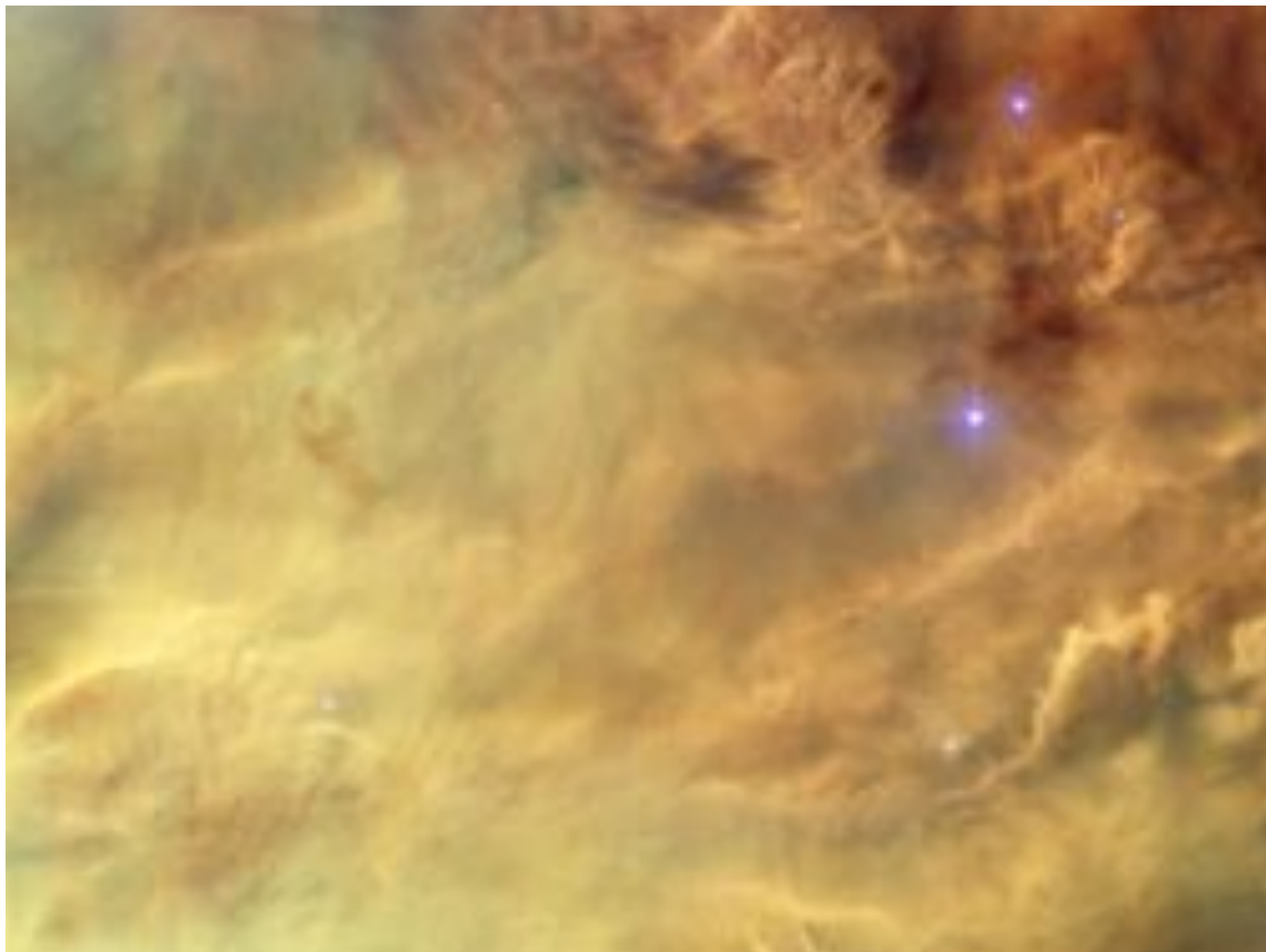
(adapted from) M. T. Alkire et al., *Science* 322, 876-880 (2008)









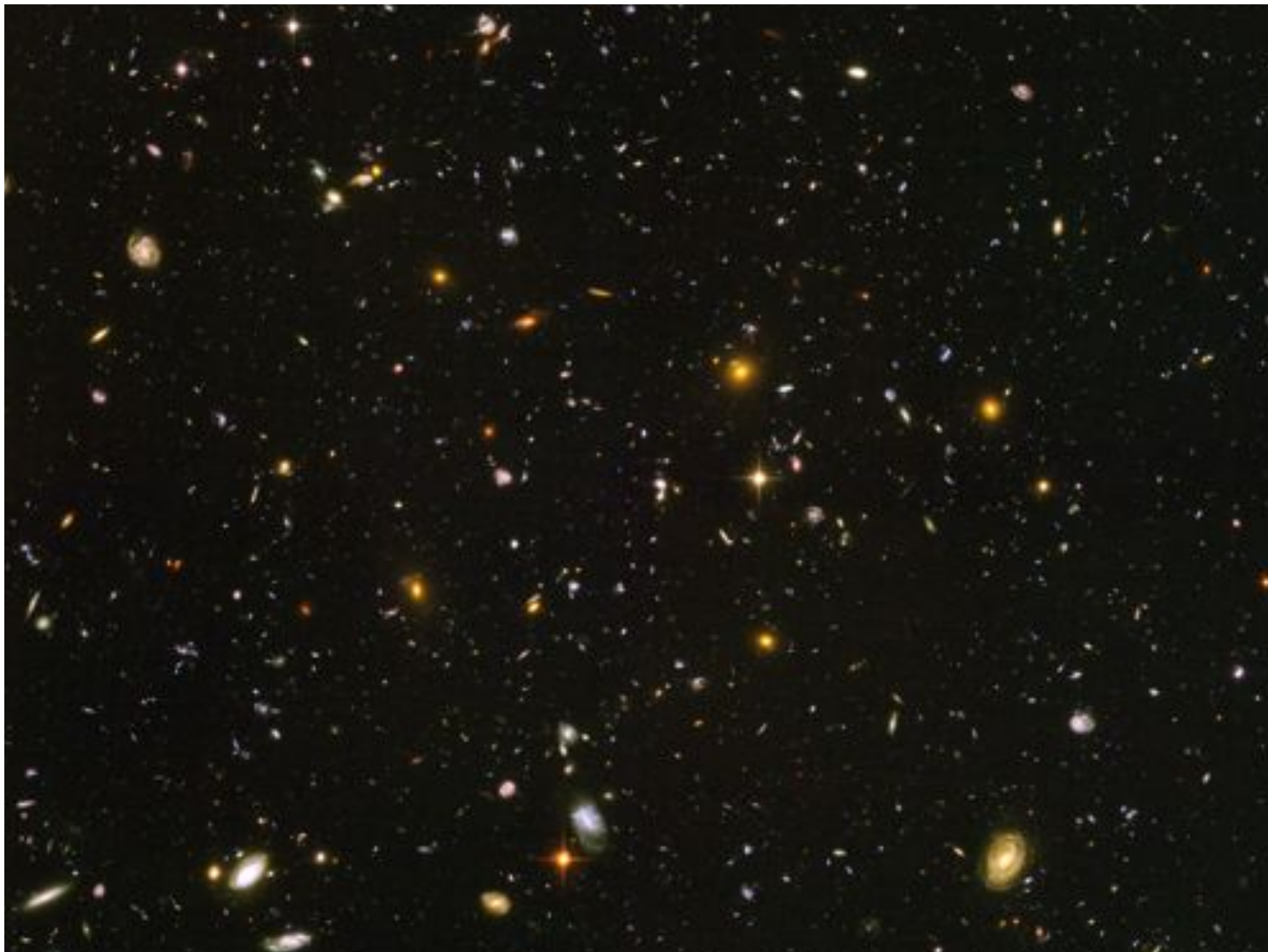












*Monks, brahmins and householders are very helpful to you.
They provide you with the requisites of robes, almsfood,
lodgings, and medicines in time of sickness.*

*And you, monks are very helpful to brahmins and
householders, as you teach them the Dhamma that is good
in the beginning, the middle, and the end, with the correct
meaning and wording, and you proclaim the spiritual life
in its fulfillment and complete purity.*

*Thus, monks, this spiritual life is lived with mutual support
for the purpose of crossing the flood
and making a complete end of suffering.*

The Buddha

One] giving food, gives four things to those who receive it. What four?

She gives long life, beauty, happiness, and strength.

By giving long life, she herself will be endowed with long life, human or divine.

By giving beauty, she herself will be endowed with beauty, human or divine.

By giving happiness, she herself will be endowed with happiness, human or divine.

By giving strength, she herself will be endowed with strength, human or divine.

The Buddha

Ananda approached the Buddha and said, "Venerable sir, this is half of the spiritual life: good friendship, good companionship, good comradeship."

*"Not so, Ananda! Not so Ananda!" the Buddha replied.
"This is the entire spiritual life. When you have a good friend, a good companion, a good comrade, it is to be expected that you will develop and cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path."*

[adapted from *In the Buddha's Words*, Bhikkhu Bodhi]

*There are those who do not realize that
one day we all must die.*

*But those who do realize this
settle their quarrels.*

The Buddha

*In the cherry blossom's shade
there is no thing
as a stranger*

Issa

*If you let go a little,
you will have a little happiness.*

*If you let go a lot,
you will have a lot of happiness.*

*If you let go completely,
you will be completely happy.*

Ajahn Chah

Generosity Takes Many Forms

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

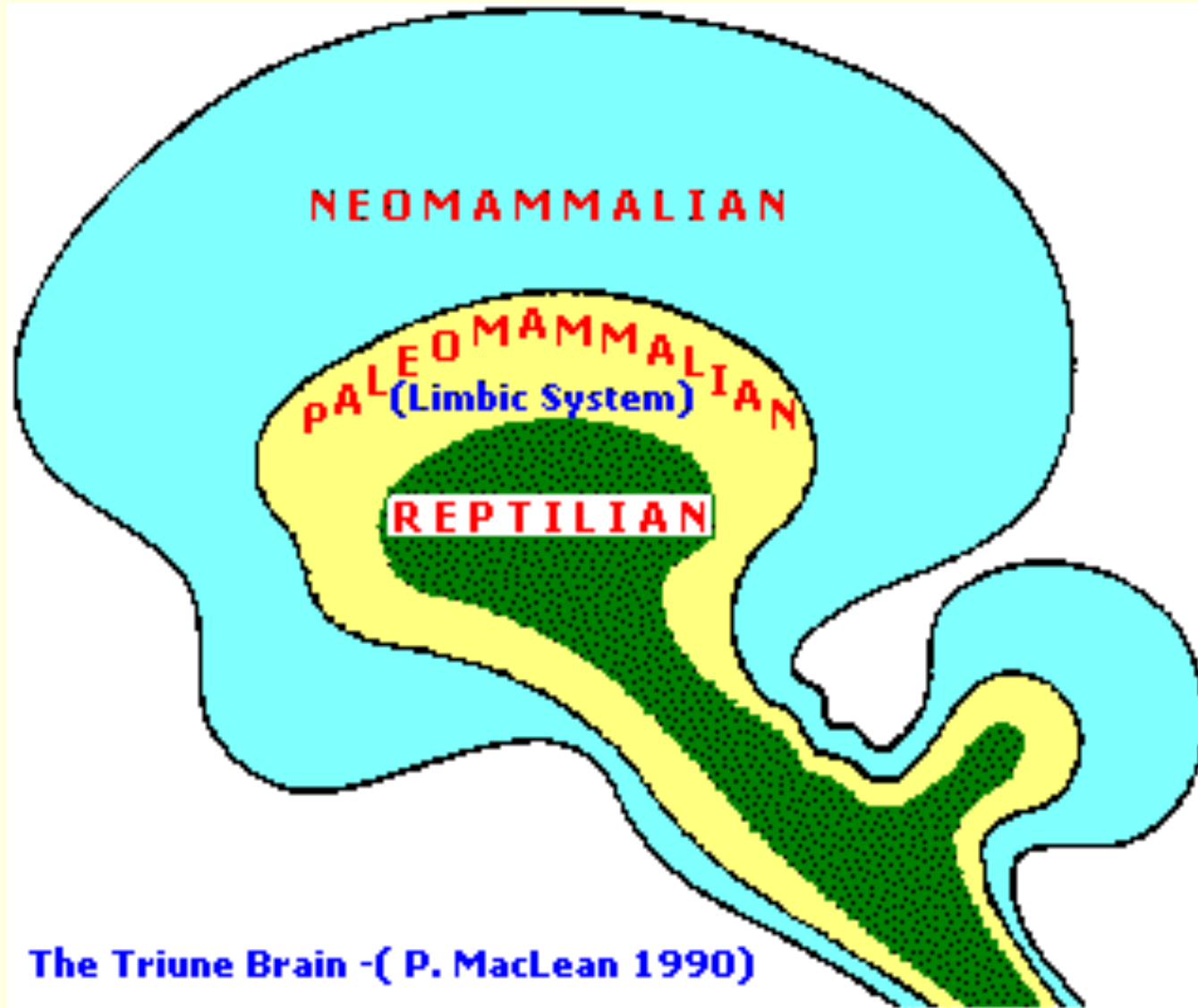


Your Benevolent Nature

The L-o-n-g Course of Evolution

- ~ 4+ billion years of earth
- 3.5 billion years of life
- 650 million years of multi-celled organisms
- 600 million years of nervous system
- ~ 80 million years of mammals
- ~ 60 million years of primates
- ~ 6 million years ago: last common ancestor with chimpanzees, our closest relative among the “great apes” (gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees, bonobos, humans)
- 2.5 million years of tool-making (starting with brains 1/3 our size)
- ~ 150,000 years of *homo sapiens*
- ~ 50,000 years of modern humans
- ~ 5000 years of blue eyes

The Evolving Brain



Three Goal-Directed Systems Evolved in the Brain

- **Avoid** “sticks,” threats, penalties, pain
- **Approach** “carrots,” opportunities, rewards, pleasure
- **Attach** to “us,” proximity, bonds, feeling close
- Although the three branches of the vagus nerve loosely map to the three systems, the essence of each is its aim, not its neuropsychology.
- Each system can draw on the other two for its ends.

Love and the Brain

- Social capabilities have been a primary driver of brain evolution.
- Reptiles and fish avoid and approach. Mammals and birds *attach* as well - especially primates and humans.
- Mammals and birds have bigger brains than reptiles and fish.
- The more social the primate species, the bigger the cortex.
- Since the first hominids began making tools ~ 2.5 million years ago, the brain has tripled in size, much of its build-out devoted to social functions (e.g., cooperative planning, empathy, language). The growing brain needed a longer childhood, which required greater pair bonding and band cohesion.



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










**The “dana economy”
is the original and natural economy,
with its circular flow of freely given,
unmonetized goods and services.**

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.

Albert Schweitzer



Giving love helps return us to our true nature.

What is the nature of the brain when a person is:

- Experiencing inner peace?
- Self-actualizing?
- Enlightened (or close to it)?

Home Base of the Human Brain

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

- **Calm** (the Avoid system)
- **Contented** (the Approach system)
- **Caring** (the Attach system)
- **Creative** - synergy of all three systems

This is the brain in its *responsive* mode.

Responsive Mode



To Survive, We Routinely Leave Home

- **Avoid:** When we feel threatened or harmed
- **Approach:** When we can't attain important goals
- **Attach:** When we feel isolated, disconnected, unseen, unappreciated, unloved

This is the brain in its **reactive** mode of functioning
- a kind of inner homelessness.

Choices . . .



Or?

Respo



First Fact about Your Brain

As your brain changes, your mind changes.



Second Fact about Your Brain

As your mind changes, your brain changes.

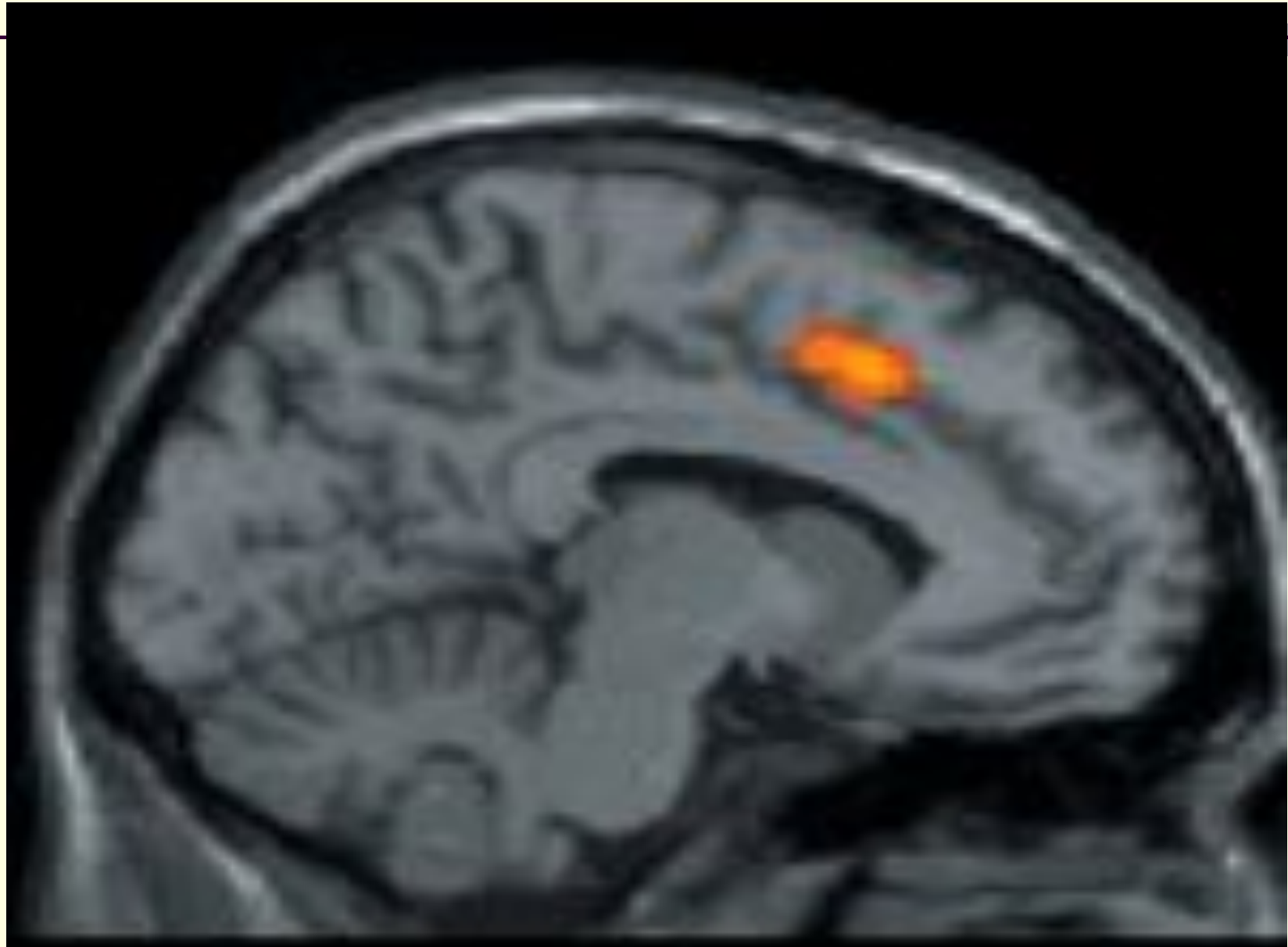
Immaterial mental activity maps to material neural activity.

This produces temporary changes in your brain and lasting ones.

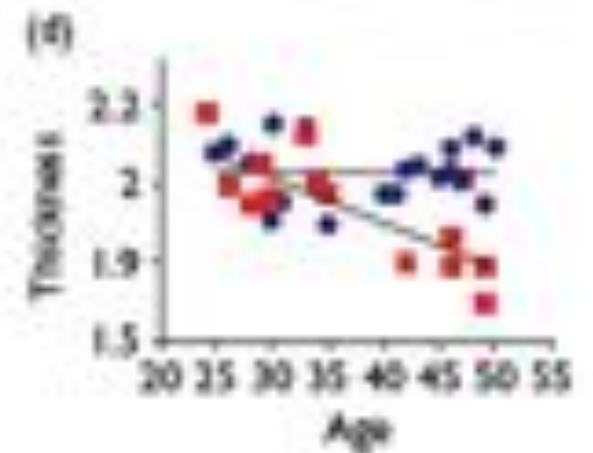
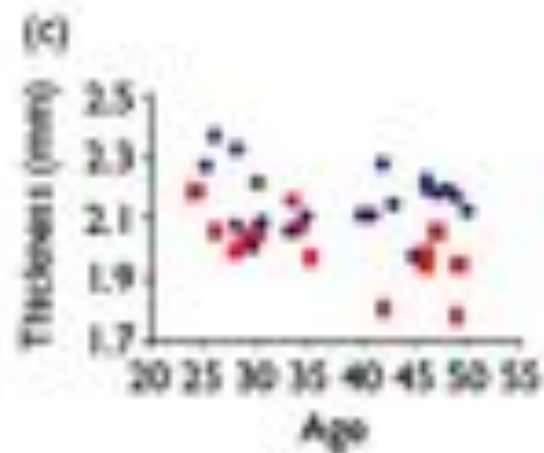
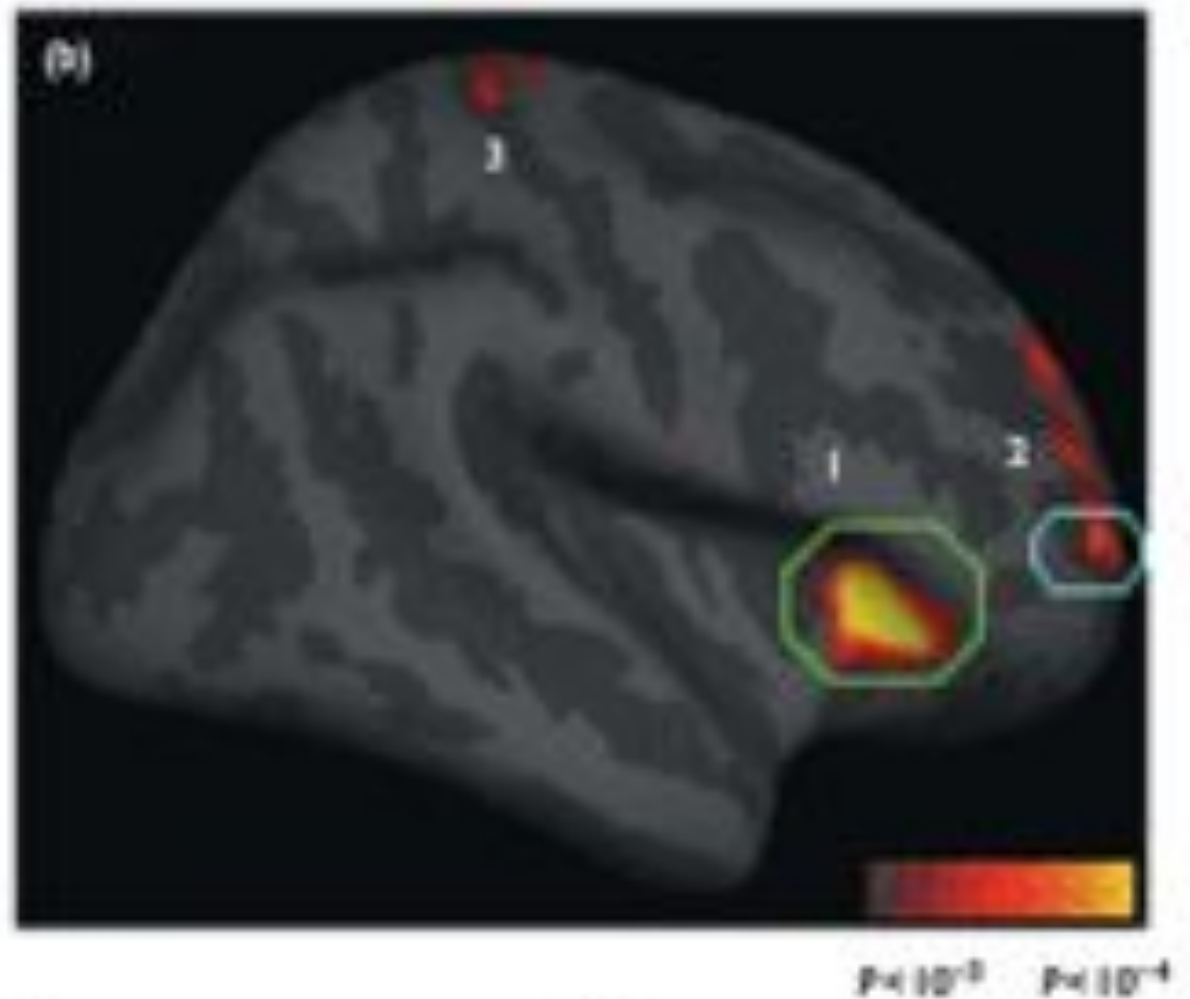
Temporary changes include:

- Alterations in brainwaves (= changes in the firing patterns of synchronized neurons)
- Increased or decreased use of oxygen and glucose
- Ebbs and flows of neurochemicals

Buddhist Meditation



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



Third Fact about Your Brain

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?

Grounding in the responsive mode, including through taking the fruit of generosity as the path, is especially important in these depleting times.

What returns us to our home base?

What helps us sustain our own giving?

What keeps the dana economy going?



The Circle of Love

To Give, We Must Receive

- If we do not receive the dana of others - of the universe - we obstruct the flow of giving.
- Receiving dana, including the dana of the experience of the fruits of your giving, enacts a realization of the intertwining, interdependent network of everything.
- Because of interdependence, when we give we get: we are giving ourselves to ourselves, giving into the field that we already always are.

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

Pema Chodren

*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 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

The Negativity Bias

- In our evolutionary history, threats usually had more impact on survival than opportunities. Sticks are more salient than carrots:
 - The amygdala is primed to label experiences negatively.
 - The amygdala-hippocampus system flags negative experiences prominently in memory.
 - *The brain is thus like Velcro for negative experiences but Teflon for positive ones.*
- Consequently, the Avoid system routinely hijacks the Approach and Attach systems, and “bad is stronger than good”:
 - It takes five positive interactions to undo a negative one.
 - People will do more to avoid a loss than get a gain.
 - It’s easy to create learned helplessness, but hard to undo.



Taking in the Good of Your Giving

How to Take in the Good

1. Look for positive **facts**, and let them become positive experiences.
2. Savor the positive experience:
 - Sustain it for 10-20-30 seconds.
 - Feel it in your body and emotions.
 - Intensify it.
3. Sense and intend that the positive experience is soaking into your brain and body - registering deeply in emotional memory.

The Buddha's Words on Lovingkindness

Wishing: In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease.

Omitting none, whether they are weak or strong, the great or the mighty, medium, short, or small, the seen and the unseen, those living near and far away, those born and to-be-born: May all beings be at ease.

Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another. Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings; radiating kindness over the entire world: spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will.

One should sustain this recollection.

This is said to be the sublime abiding.