

# The Neurodharma of Love



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# An Introduction

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

*This is a blessing supreme.*

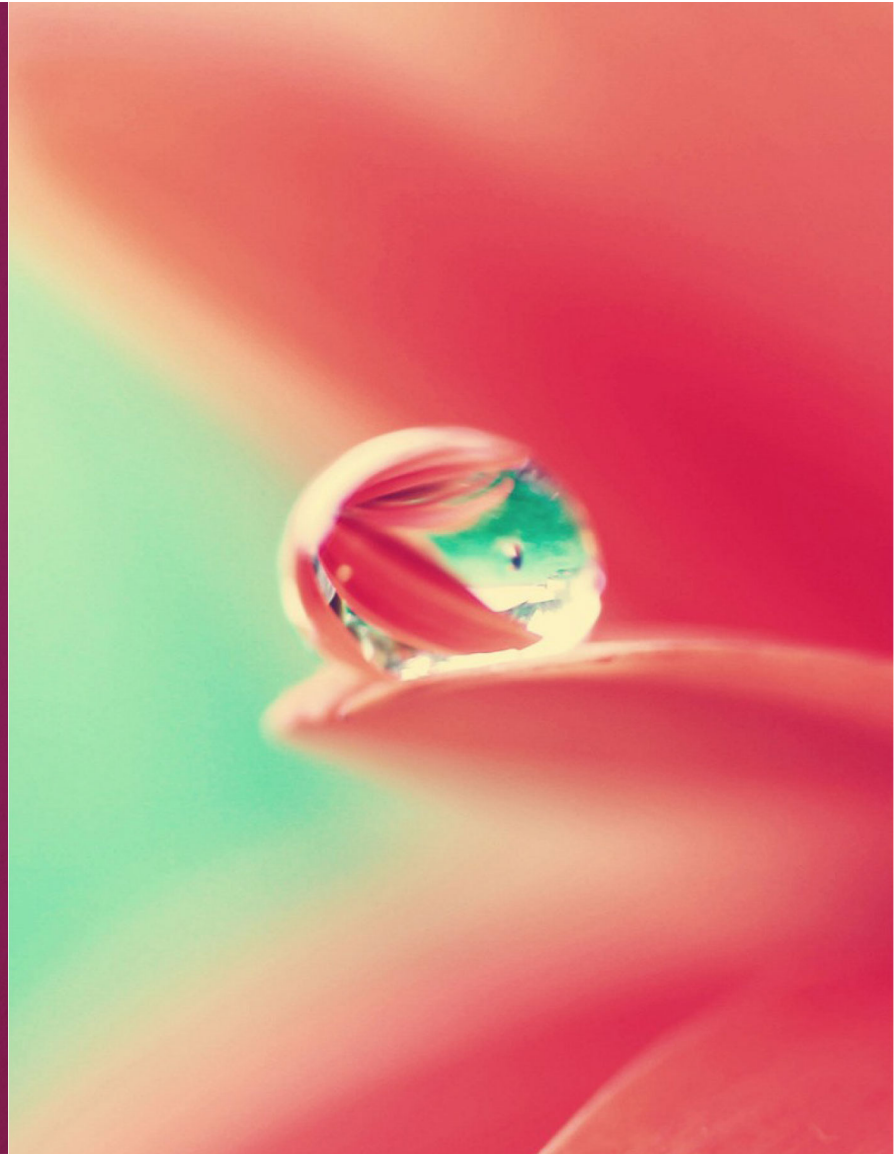
**The Buddha**

*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.*

**Dhammapada 9.122**



# In the Garden of the Mind

**1**

**Be with what  
is there**

**2**

**Decrease  
the negative**

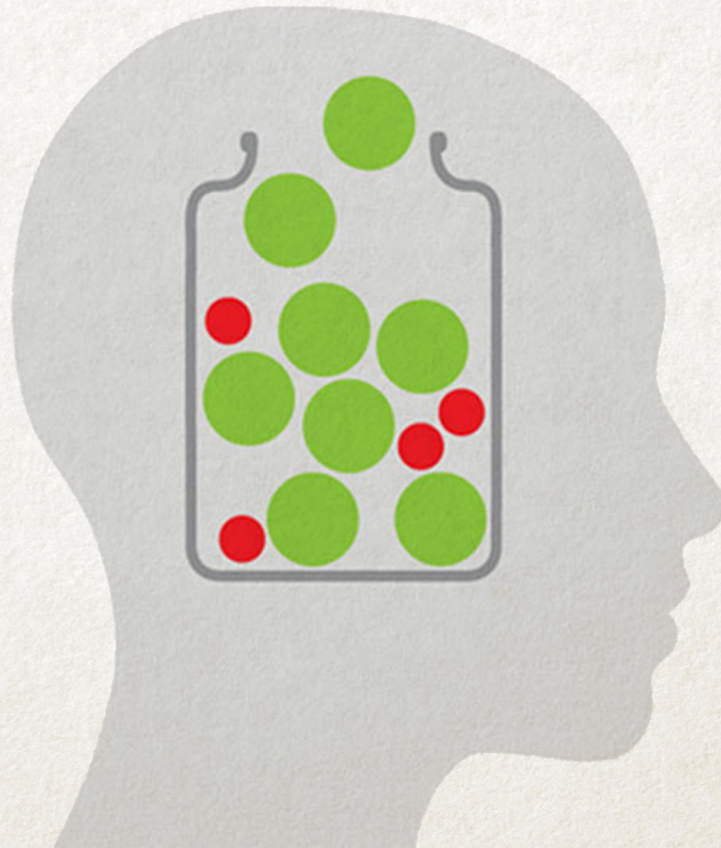
**3**

**Increase  
the positive**

Witness. Pull weeds. Plant flowers.  
Let be. Let go. Let in.  
Mindfulness is present in all three.

“Being with” is primary – but not enough.  
We also need “wise effort.”

# Which Means Changing the Brain For the Better



A network of glowing yellow neurons with a central neuron highlighted in green. The neurons are interconnected by a dense web of thin, yellow fibers, creating a complex, interconnected structure. The central neuron is a larger, more prominent cell with a bright green nucleus and a yellow cytoplasm. The background is dark, making the glowing neurons stand out.

Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

You become more **peaceful**  
by repeatedly installing experiences  
of peacefulness.

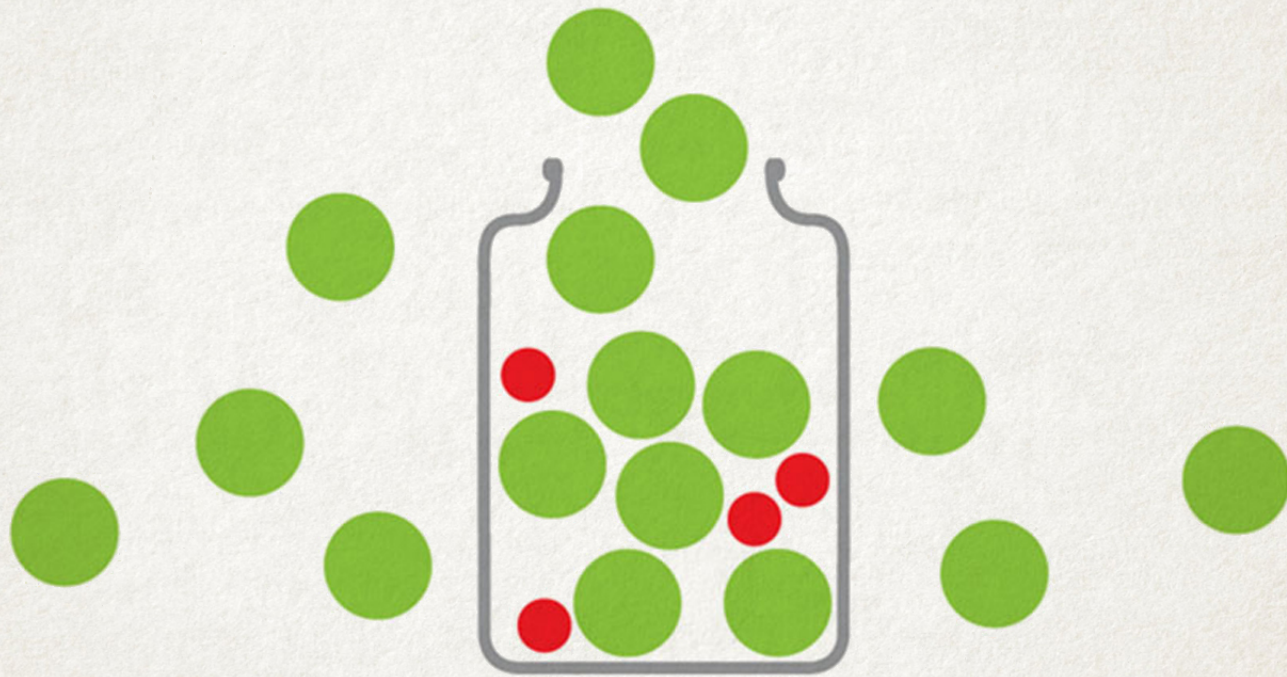
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You become more **grateful** by repeatedly  
installing experiences of gratitude.

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





Have It, Enjoy It

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

**Lao Tzu**





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Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A's go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

**TIP:** If you're alone, reflect or journal.

What are some of the good facts in your life these days?

As the listener, keep finding a genuine gladness about the good facts in the life of our partner.



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# Our Relational Nature

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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**













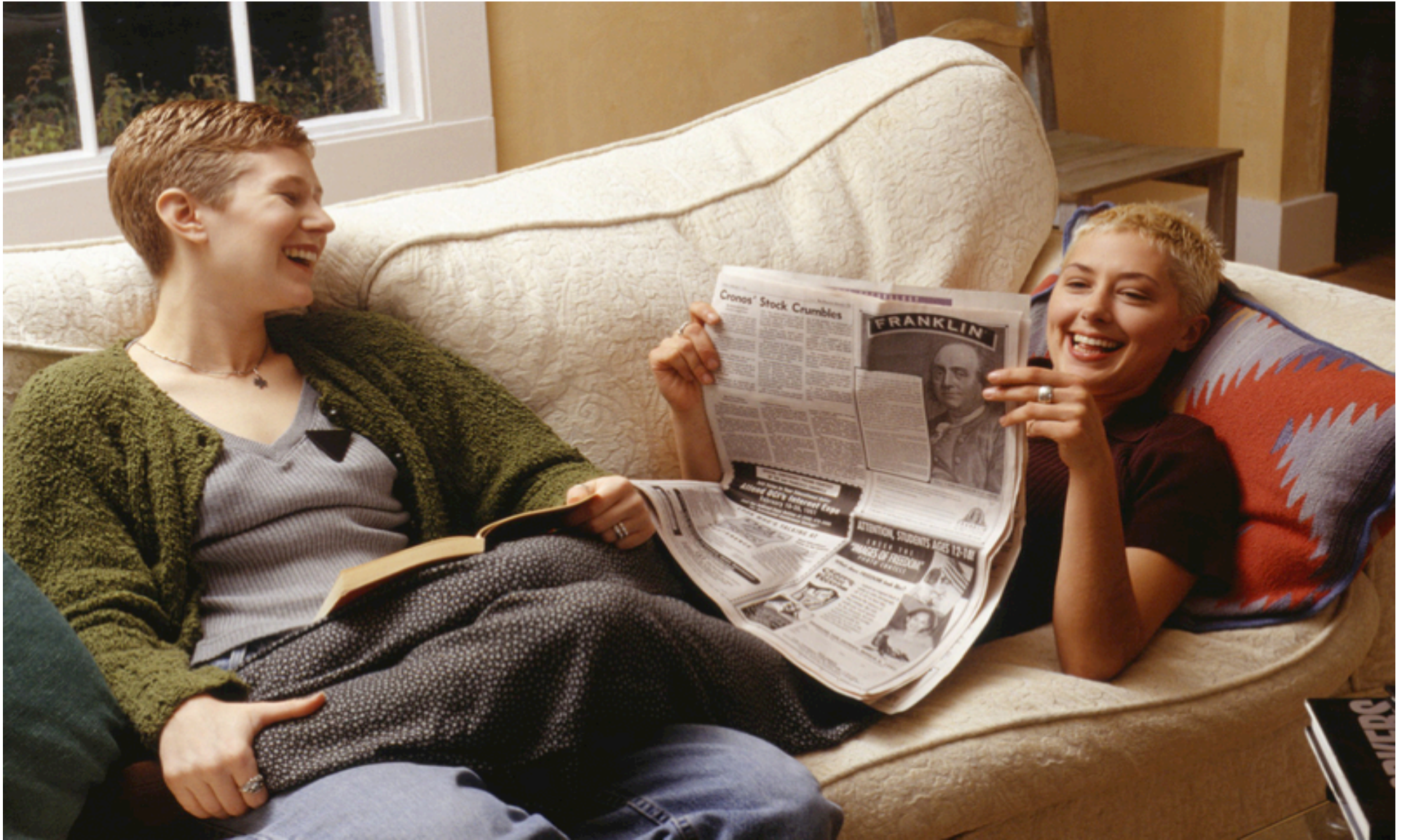






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*If there is anything I have learned about [people], it is that there is a deeper spirit of altruism than is ever evident.*

*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**



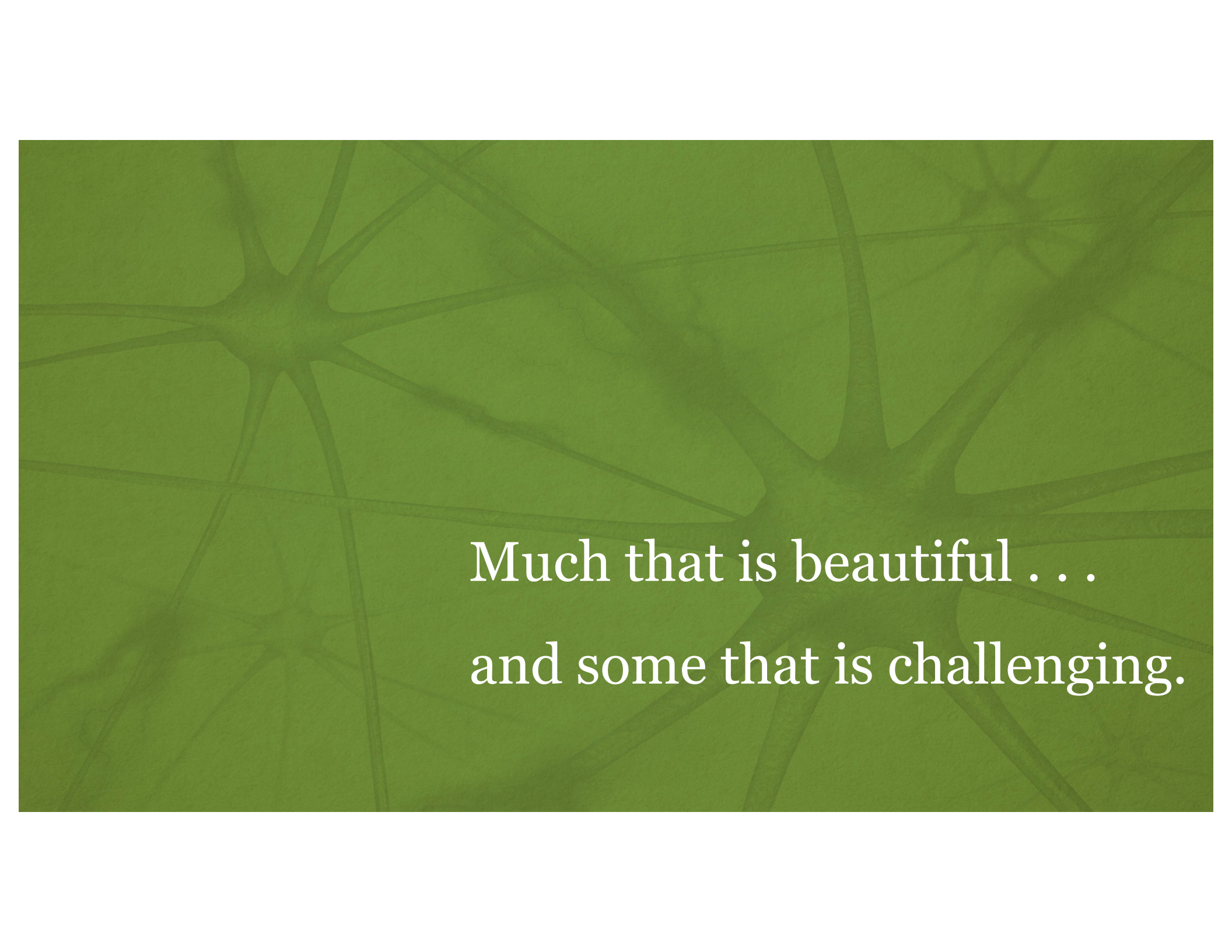






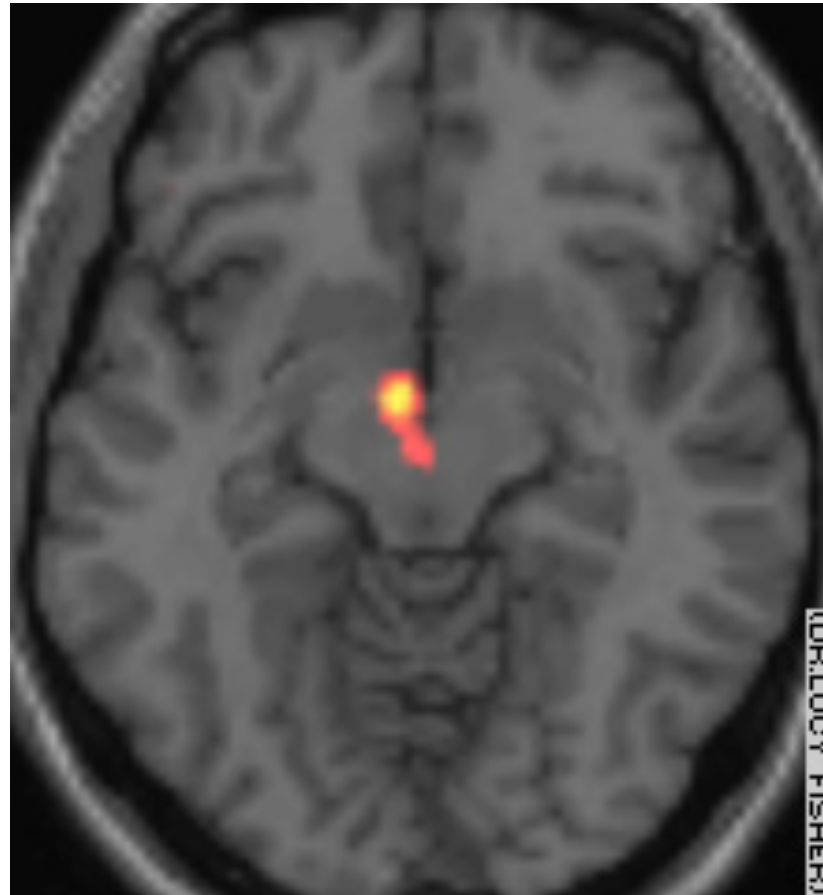


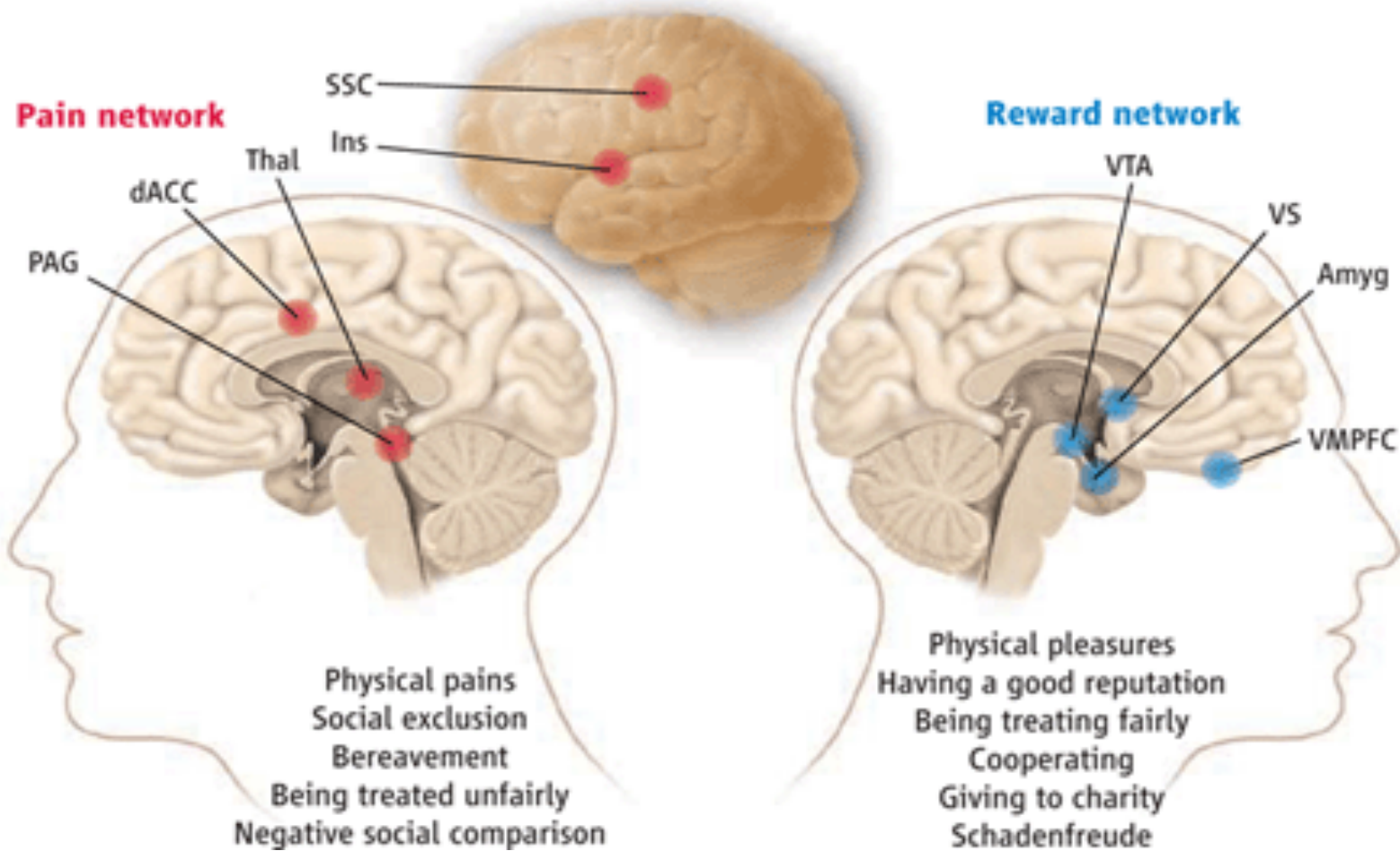
Let's sit a bit  
with the sense of all this.



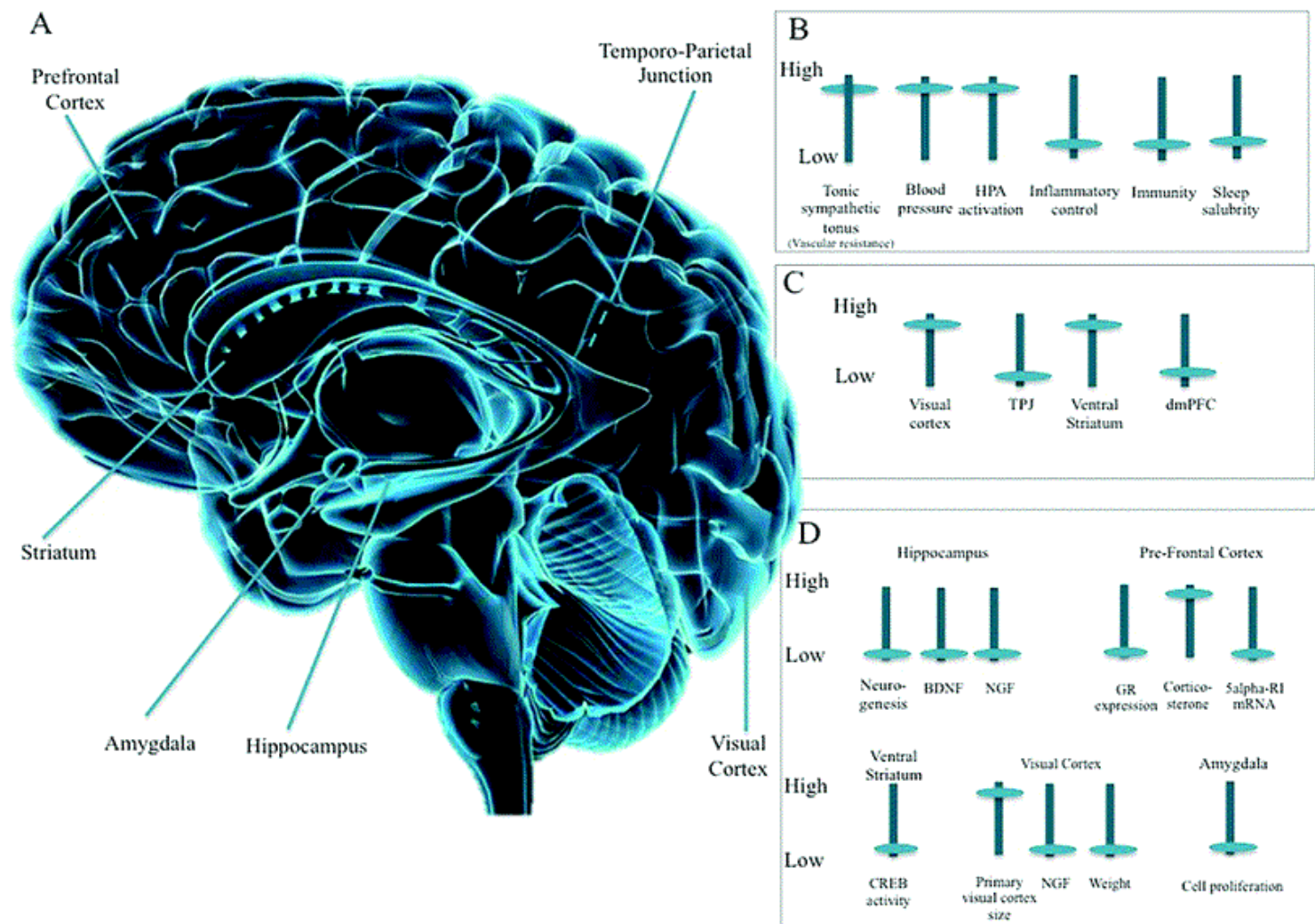
Much that is beautiful . . .  
and some that is challenging.

# Rewards of Love





Pain : Dorsal ant  
Reward : Ventri



Cacioppo et al. (2014) Toward a neurology of loneliness. *Psychological Bulletin*.

# Two Wolves in the Heart



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# A Secure Base

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” *The good life,  
as 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**





# Autonomy and Intimacy

- Two great themes: independence/dependence, separation/joining, me/we
- They serve each other: autonomy helps you feel safe in the depths of intimacy, and intimacy nurtures the sense of worth and “secure base” that helps you explore life and dare greatly.
- When you feel autonomous and strong inside, you’re more able to manage differences and conflicts with others from the “green zone” without going “red” into fear, anger, and aggression.

# Feeling Strong

- Bring to mind times that you felt strong, determined, enduring . . . Focus on feeling strong . . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.
- Bring to mind someone you are *for*. Find a sense of support, loyalty, perhaps fierce compassion . . . Know what this feels like – and apply it to yourself . . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.
- Imagine experiencing strength while dealing with a challenge . . . Let the sense of this sink into you.

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

**Pema Chodren**

# Self-Compassion

Compassion is the wish that beings not suffer, with warm-hearted concern. Compassion is sincere even if we can't make things better.

Self-compassion simply applies this to oneself.

## To encourage self-compassion:

**1**

Get the sense of being cared about.

**2**

Bring to mind beings you care about. Find compassion for them.

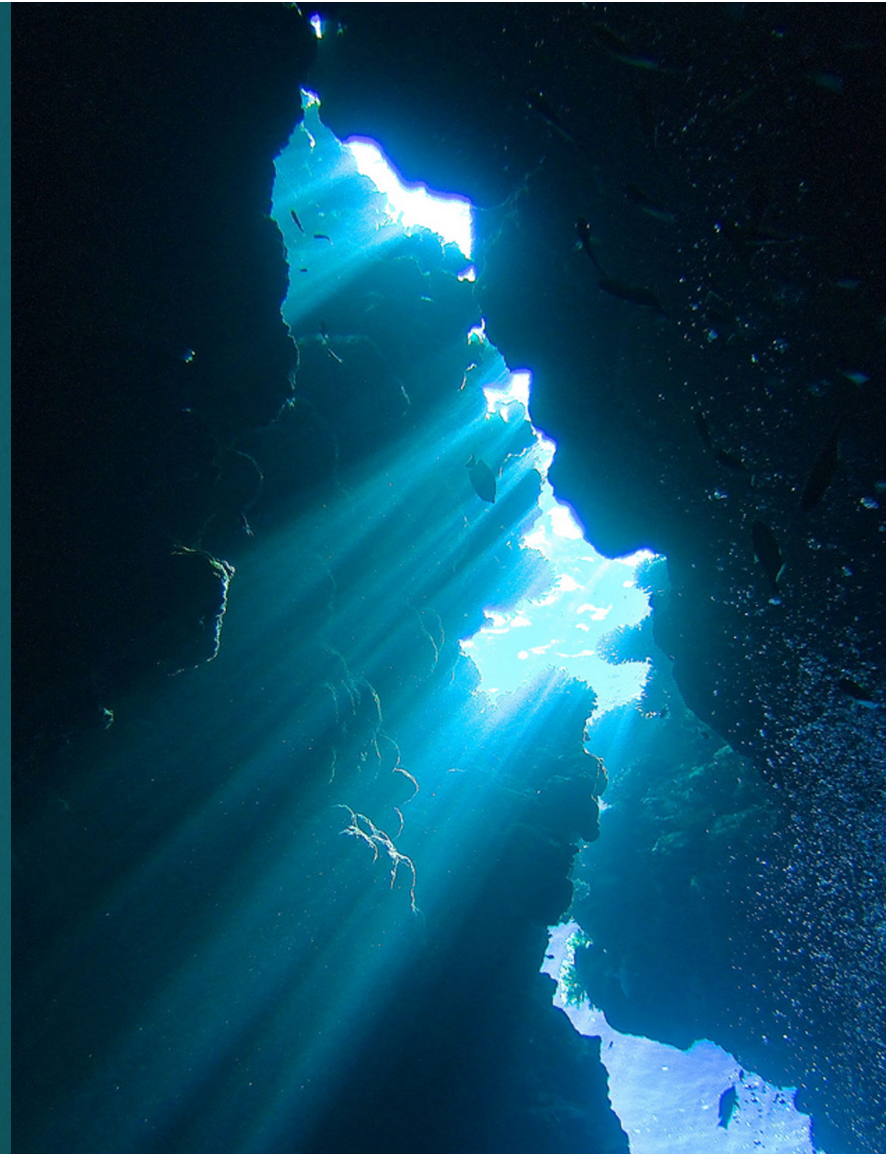
**3**

Shift the compassion to yourself.

# “Anthem”

*Ring the bells that can still 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**



# Feeling of Worth

- It is natural and important to feel that you have worth as a person – which does not mean arrogance or ego.

## **You develop this sense of worth through:**

- Others including, appreciating, liking, and loving you
- You respecting yourself

## **Take in experiences of being:**

- Capable, skillful, talented, helpful
- Included, wanted, sought out
- Appreciated, acknowledged, respected
- Liked, befriended, supported
- Loved, cherished, special



Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A's go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

**TIP:** If you're alone, reflect or journal.

What are some of the things you have **accomplished** in your life?

*(Including lots of seemingly small things)*

Take in your partner's recognition of you.

# A Confident Heart

- Feeling caring . . . And cared about.
- Stepping back and seeing yourself objectively . . . Recognizing your capabilities . . . Your good intentions . . . What you have been through and dealt with and overcome.
- Finding the respect for yourself that you would have for a person just like you . . . Letting go of needing to prove yourself or impress anyone . . . Recognizing your decency and efforts . . . Your good heart . . .



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# Warming the Heart

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*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.*

# Resting in Love

- Bring to mind beings you care about . . . Friends, family, pets, people who have helped you . . .
- Find compassion for their suffering . . .
- Find kindness and friendliness . . . The wish that they be happy . . . Feeling happy yourself about their happiness . . .
- Focus on feelings of caring and love . . . Let this experience sink into you as you sink into it.



*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**

# Right Speech

- Well-intended
- True
- Beneficial
- Timely
- Expressed without harshness
- And - ideally - wanted

# Forgiveness

- Two levels of forgiveness: disentangling yourself . . . and a full pardon. In both there can be a recognition of wrongdoing and a valuing of justice.
- Disentangling involves standing up for yourself while not feeding resentments and grievances, and deliberately releasing the charge on what happened.
- A full pardon involves compassion, a recognition of the many causes of what happened, a release of punishment, and a full letting go.

# Forgiving Yourself

- Centering in peace . . . Being aware of something to forgive . . .  
Seeing the big picture, so many causes . . .
- Taking responsibility for your part . . . Feeling appropriate remorse .  
. . . Knowing the steps you will take . . .
- Knowing you have owned your part . . . Recognizing your goodness .  
. . . Recognizing your pain . . . Finding compassion for yourself . . .  
Releasing harshness toward yourself . . . Bringing kindness, respect,  
blessing to yourself . . . Forgiving yourself . . . Imagining other  
beings forgiving you . . . Letting go . . . Forgiving yourself . . .



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“Us” and “Them”

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# Us and Them

- Within-group cooperation, and between-group aggression.
- Our biological nature is much more inclined toward cooperative sociability than toward aggression and indifference or cruelty. We are just very reactive to social distinctions and threats.
- That reactivity is intensified and often exploited by economic, cultural, and religious factors.
- Two wolves in your heart:
  - Love sees a vast circle in which all beings are “us.”
  - Hate sees a small circle of “us,” even only the self.

*Which one will you feed?*

*In between-family fights, the baboon's 'I'  
expands to include all of her close kin;  
in within-family fights,  
it contracts to include only herself.*

*This explanation serves for baboons  
as much as for the Montagues and Capulets.*

**Dorothy Cheney and Robert Seyfarth**

# Feeding the Wolf of Love

- Don't over-identify with "us."
- Release aversion to others.
- Focus on similarities between "us" and "them."
- Recognize and have compassion for the suffering of "them."
- Consider "them" as young children.
- Recognize good things about "them."
- Keep extending out the sense of "us" to include everyone.

# A Widening Circle

- Bring to mind beings you care about . . . Friends, family, pets, people who have helped you . . .
- Get a sense of “us” . . . Then bring more and more beings into that circle . . .
- Finding common ground . . . Widening the circle of “us” . . .
- Resting in the largest sense of “us” . . .

**So that all cubs are our own . . .**

**All beings are our clan . . .**

**All life, our relatives . . .**

**The whole earth, our home . . .**



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# Empathy

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*A human being is a part of a whole, called by us "universe," a part limited in time and space. [We] experience [ourselves], [our] thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest ... a kind of optical delusion of ... 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**

# What Is Empathy?

- It is sensing, feeling, and understanding how it is for the other person. In effect, you *simulate* his or her inner world.
- It involves (sometimes subtly) all of these elements:
  - Bodily resonance
  - Emotional attunement
  - Conceptual understanding
- Empathy is usually communicated, often tacitly.
- We can give empathy, we can receive it, and we can ask for it.

# Neural Substrates of Empathy

- Three *simulating* systems:
  - Actions: “mirror” systems; temporal-parietal
  - Feelings: resonating emotionally; insula
  - Thoughts: “theory of mind”; prefrontal cortex
- These systems interact with each other through association and active inquiry.
- They produce an automatic, continual re-creation of aspects of others’ experience.

# Empathy Skills

- Pay attention.
- Be open.
- Read emotion in face and eyes.
- Sense beneath the surface.
- Drop aversion (judgments, distaste, fear, anger, withdrawal).
- Investigate actively.
- Express empathic understanding.

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# Healthy Assertiveness

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# Healthy Assertiveness

What it is:

Speaking your truth  
and pursuing your aims  
in the context of relationships.

# Healthy Assertiveness

## What supports it:

- Being on your own side
- Self-compassion
- Naming the truth to yourself
- Refuges: Three Jewels, reason, love, nature, transcendental, awareness, practice
- Taking care of the big things so you don't grumble about the little ones
- Health and vitality

# Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It - 1

- Know your aims; stay focused on the prize; concede small points to gain on large ones
- Ground in empathy, compassion, and love
- Practice unilateral virtue



# Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It - 2

- Communicate for yourself, not to change others
- Wise Speech; be especially mindful of tone
- NVC: “When X happens, I feel Y because I need Z.”
- Dignity and gravity
- Distinguish empathy building (“Y”) from policy-making

# Healthy Assertiveness: How to Do It - 3

- If appropriate, negotiate solutions.
- Establish facts as best you can (“X”)
- Find the deepest wants (“Z”)
- Focus mainly on “from now on”
- Make clear plans, agreements
- Scale relationships to their actual foundations