

“Bahiya, you should train yourself thus.”

In reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. To the heard, only the heard. To the sensed, only the sensed. To the cognized, only the cognized.

When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, only the heard in the heard, only the sensed in the sensed, only the cognized in the cognized, then there's no you in that.

When there's no you in that, there's no you there. When there's no you there, you are neither here nor yonder nor between the two.

This, just this, is the end of all suffering.

Opening into Allness: **The Practical Neuroscience** **Of Wholeness and Oneness Experiences**

Spirit Rock Meditation Center

July 19, 2015

Rick Hanson, Ph.D.

www.RickHanson.net

Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom



Foundations

**We'll be exploring plausible mental/
neural factors of the sense of
oneness,
selflessness,
emptiness,
and unconditionality.**

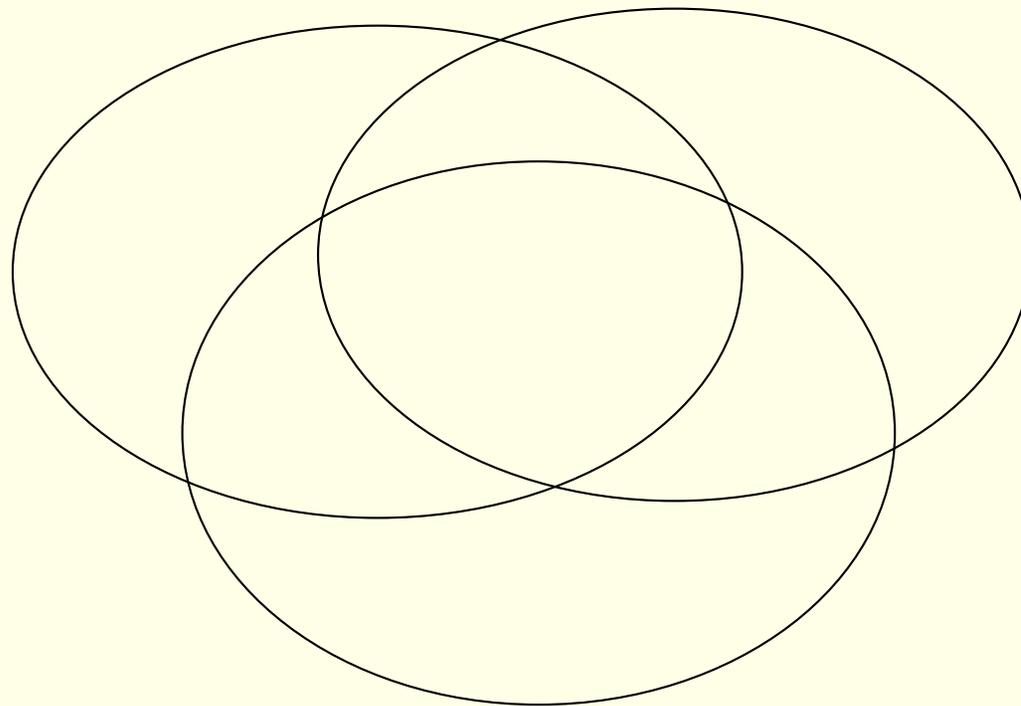
Key Mental/Neural Factors

- Reducing craving by resting in the “green zone” of peace, contentment, and love
- Insight into our standard, doomed, and harmful strategies for happiness – and the possibility of liberation
- Letting go into endings
- Receiving beginnings at the edge of now
- Being mind as a whole
- Experiencing this moment as a local ripple of allness
- Intimations of unconditionality

Common - and Fertile - Ground

Neuroscience

Psychology



Contemplative Practice

A network of glowing yellow neurons with a central neuron highlighted in green. The neurons are interconnected by a dense web of fibers, creating a complex, interconnected structure. The background is dark, making the glowing neurons stand out.

Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

We ask, “What is a thought?”

We don't know,

yet we are thinking continually.

Venerable Tenzin Palmo

A Three-Legged Stool

- In the context of wisdom and virtue (*panna* and *sila*), practice is like a stool with three legs:
- ***Metta*** – warmheartedness, kindness, compassion
- ***Sati*** – mindfulness, concentration, seeing clearly
- ***Bhavana*** – cultivation, learning, growth



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)

*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

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

Pema Chodron

*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



In the Green Zone

A Telling of the Four Noble Truths

There is suffering.

When craving arises, so does suffering.

When craving passes away, so does suffering.

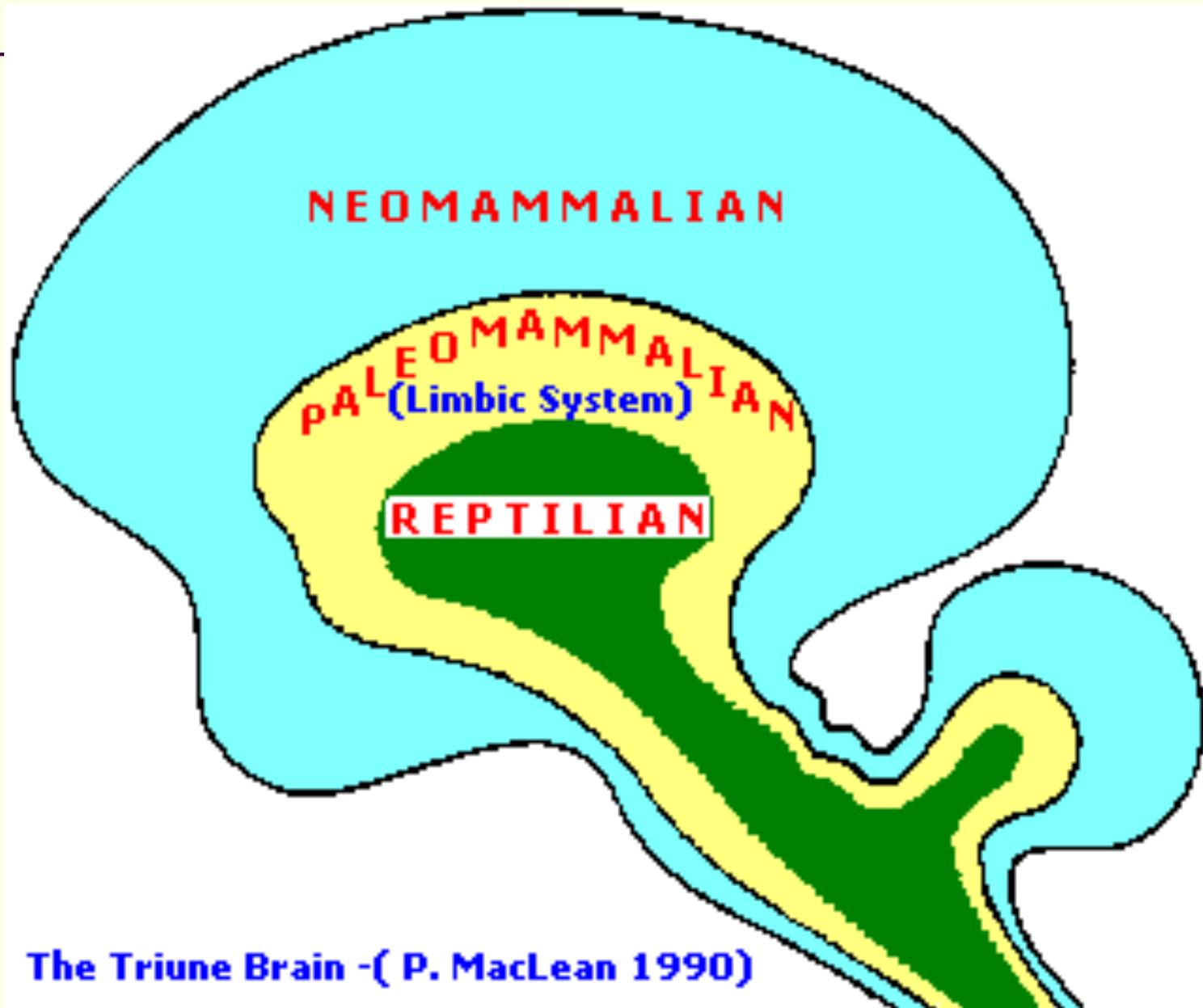
There is a path that embodies and leads to the passing away of this craving and suffering.



What causes craving?

What ends these causes?

The Evolving Brain



The Triune Brain - (P. MacLean 1990)

Meeting Three Core Needs

Need

Signal

Strategy

Safety

Unpleasant

Avoiding

Satisfaction

Pleasant

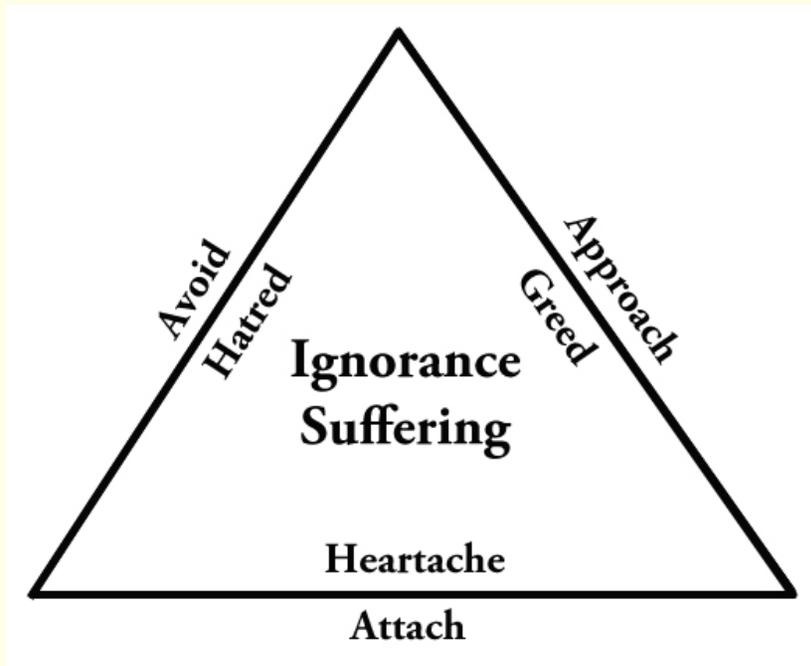
Approaching

Connection

Heartfelt

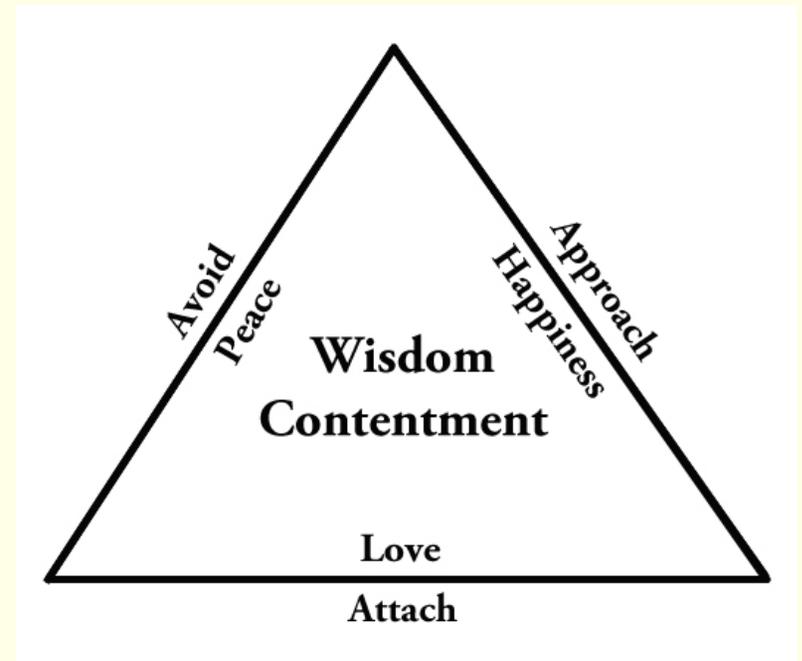
Attaching

Choices . . .



Reactive Mode

Or?



Responsive Mode

Can You Stay in the Green Zone When:

Things are unpleasant?

Things are pleasant?

Things are heartfelt?

*In Buddhism,
we work to expand
the range of life experiences
in which we are free.*

U Pandita

Coming Home, Staying Home

Positive experiences of core needs met – the felt sense of safety, satisfaction, and connection: **peace, contentment, and love – activate the 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.

Cultivation Undoes Craving

We rest the mind upon beneficial states so that the brain may gradually take their shape.

This disentangles us from craving as we increasingly rest in a peace, contentment, 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.

Pet the Lizard

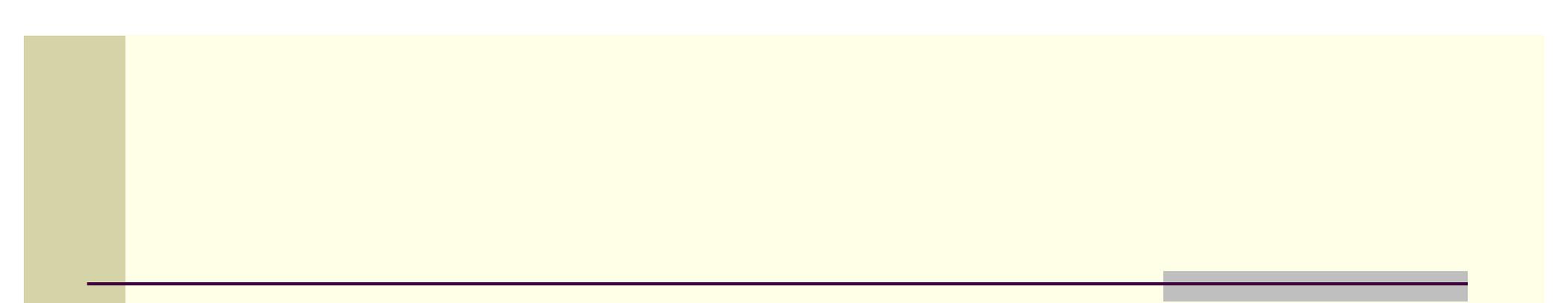


Feed the Mouse



Hug the Monkey





Peace

Contentment

Love



Insight

*Human suffering
comes from
seeking happiness*

where it cannot be found.

Kagyü Samyé Ling Guidebook

Where Do We Seek?

- In the material realm: things, people, places, events, situations
- In the mental realm: experiences, conscious and unconscious processes
- In both, we try to hold on to what is changing.
- Our efforts are not merely incapable of bringing us lasting happiness: they are tense, pressured, contracted, and frustrated: saturated with suffering.

The Feeling of Not Craving or Suffering

- Somehow we recognize an alternative to the conventional doomed machinery of happiness.
- Plopping, stopping, giving up, not fabricating, not concocting, letting go
- Taking refuge in the nature of things; things change but their nature doesn't.
- And perhaps something transcendental as well.

WHAT IS IT THAT IS TRUE?



*O house-builder, you are seen!
You will not build this house again.
For your rafters are broken
and your ridgepole shattered.*

*My mind has reached the unconditioned;
I have attained the destruction of craving.*

*The entire world is in flames,
the entire world is going up in smoke;
the entire world is burning,
the entire world is vibrating.*

*But that which does not vibrate or burn,
which is experienced by the noble ones,
where death has no entry –
in that my mind delights.*

The Buddha

Itivuttaka 2.16

*The born, come-to-be, produced,
The made, the conditioned, the transient,
Conjoined with decay and death,
A nest of disease, perishable,
Sprung from nutriment and craving's cord –
That is not fit to take delight in.*

*The escape from that,
The peaceful, beyond reasoning, everlasting,
The not-born, the unproduced,
The sorrowless state that is void of stain,
The cessation of states linked to suffering,
The stilling of the conditioned – bliss.*

Two Sides of Practice

- One side of practice is to disentangle from the machinery of craving, purifying the mind, and cultivating factors of awakening.
- The other side is to open directly to what is not craving and suffering.
- “Gradual cultivation, sudden awakening, cultivation, awakening, cultivation . . . Moments of awakening, many times a day.”
- We’re focusing on **abiding as what calls you.**

This spiritual life does not have gain, honor, and renown for its benefit, or the attainment of moral discipline for its benefit, or the attainment of concentration for its benefit, or knowledge and vision for its benefit.

*But it is this **unshakable liberation of mind** that is the goal of this spiritual life, its heartwood, and its end.*



Letting Go into Endings

*Let go of the past, let go of the future,
let go of the present,
and cross over
to the farther shore of existence.*

*With mind wholly liberated,
you shall come no more to birth and death.*

Dhammapada 24.348

*Enlightenment is
to forget this moment
and grow into the next.*

Fade into emptiness as you exhale.

Suzuki Roshi

Letting Go

- Rest in a sense of alrightness . . . of peace, contentment, and love
- Awareness of breathing (or something else changing)
- Letting go, especially when exhaling
- Mindful of endless endings, changing
- Sometimes recognizing what is also true as this moment passes away



Receiving Beginnings At the Edge of Now

The Present Moment

- **Now** is the great mystery: infinitely thin temporally, yet containing all of this moment, including the causes from the past that condition the next moment of the future.
- Imagine super-slow motion mindfulness of the emergent edge of Now, coming into being as it passes away.
- In your brain, the alerting aspects of attention track the leading edge of the “windshield” of consciousness.
- These alerting networks entwine with allocentric networks that support the sense of oneness with all things.

Receiving This Moment

Things are happening . . .
No need to understand them,
connect them,
know what they are,
control them . . .
Whoosh, they're racing by.

Just sitting . . .
Or standing or walking . . .
No gaining idea . . .
Living on the edge of now.



Being Mind As a Whole

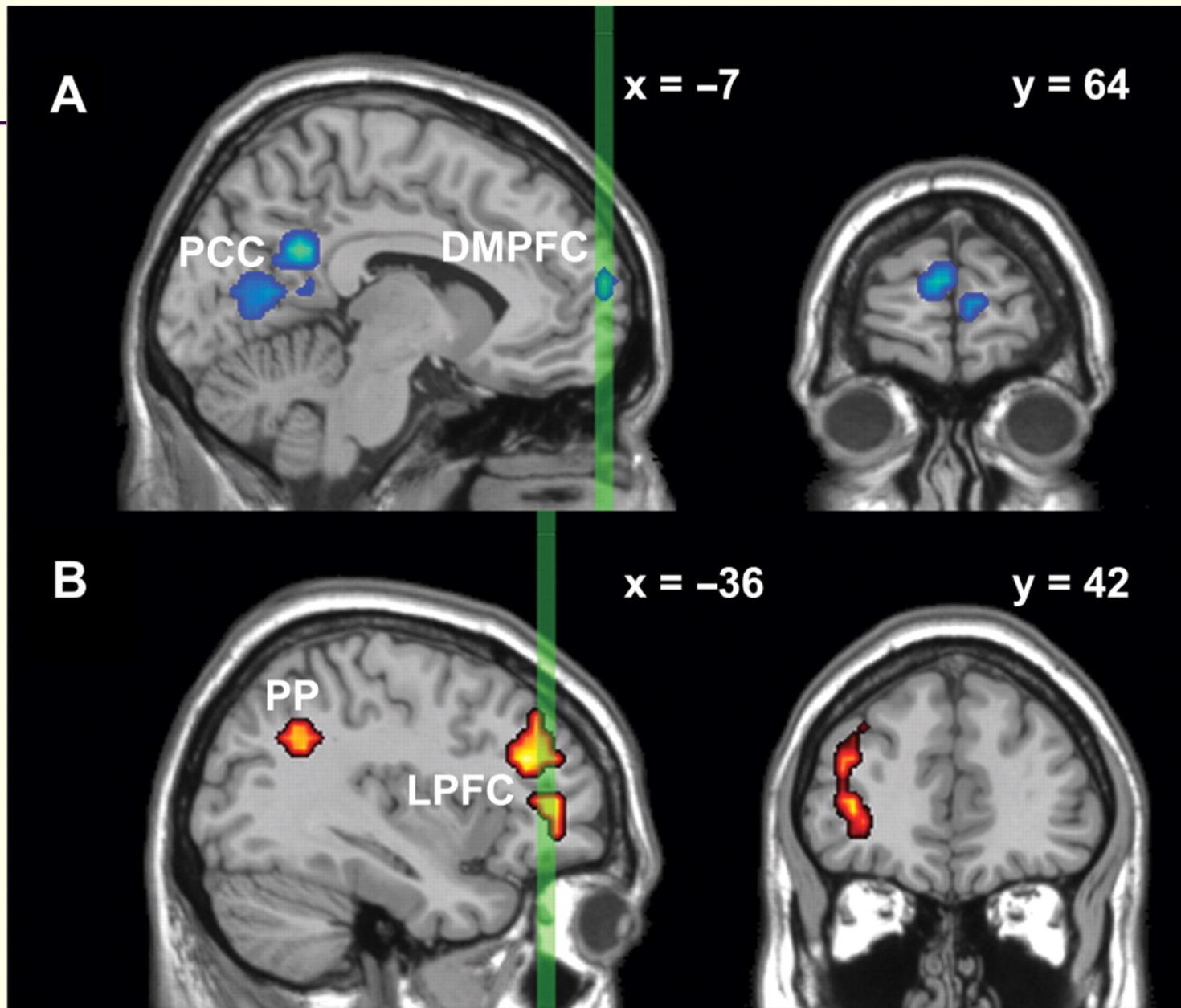
The Parts and the Whole

- In the mind, suffering is parts tussling with parts.
- Meanwhile there is always mind as a whole, the totality of phenomenology, all one fabric, including awareness.
- Mind as a whole simply is, never a problem.
- In any moment of being mind as a whole, suffering falls away.
- Being mind as a whole can bring a felt knowing of its nature.



**What helps us experience
mind as a whole?**

Self-Focused (blue) and Open Awareness (red)



Farb, et al. 2007. *Social Cognitive Affective Neuroscience*, 2:313-322

Opening into Mind as a Whole

- Sense the breath in one area. Be aware of multiple sensations as a single experience.
- Gradually expand to include more sensations of breathing as a whole, as a single percept . . .
Abiding as a whole body breathing.
- Include sounds: a single unified experience . . .
Include sights . . . Thoughts and feelings . . .
Including awareness . . . All a single whole . . .
Abiding as mind as a whole.



Egocentric and Allocentric Networks

Egocentric Perspective

- Based on upper processing streams in the brain that involve: upper portions of the thalamus that confer “self” salience; rear regions of the “default network” (e.g., precuneus, posterior cingulate cortex); parietal regions that construct an enduring and unified sense of “my body in space”
- Establishes “where it is in relation to me”; lower visual field
- Develops earliest in childhood
- “Subjective” - Things exist in relation to me.
- Action-oriented - Focus on reacting to carrots and sticks

Allocentric Perspective

- Based on lower processing streams in the brain that involve: lower regions of the thalamus that confer “world” salience;
- Establishes “what it is independent of me”; upper visual field
- Begins developing around age four
- “Objective” - Things exist in a physical space in which their location is impersonal, not in reference to the viewpoint of an observer.
- This perspective pervades *kensho* and other forms of non-dual awareness. It is strengthened in open awareness meditations that draw heavily on the alerting, lower attentional system.
- Being-oriented

The Egocentric/Allocentric Dance

- Normal egocentric/allocentric fluctuations occur ~ 3-4 times a minute.
- As one perspective increases, the other decreases.
- With “contact,” allocentric processing increases briefly as the new stimulus is considered in its own right
- Then egocentric processing surges forward as one figures out what to do about the “feeling tone” (pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, heartfelt) of the stimulus.

Strengthening Allocentric Processing – 1

- Taking in experiences of the allocentric mode – regarding reality impersonally, panoramic perspective, little sense of “I,” feeling connected – will naturally strengthen its neural substrates.
- Open awareness practices in which there are many moments of new contact would strengthen the “alerting” networks of attention and incline the brain toward allocentric mode.
- Lower regions of the thalamus – with concentrations of GABA neurons – inhibit egocentric processing. GABA is calming; training in tranquility could strengthen these GABA-based nodes and reduce egocentrism.

Strengthening Allocentric Processing – 2

- “Craving” causes egocentric processing (and suffering). Craving itself is caused by a sense of deficit or disturbance in core needs: safety, satisfaction, connection. So repeatedly internalizing the experience of needs being met builds up a sense of fullness and balance, reducing underlying causes of craving and thus egocentric processing.
- We can relate to our mind from an egocentric or allocentric perspective. Suffering comes from parts tussling with other parts within an egocentric frame. So abide as mind as a whole.

Strengthening Allocentric Processing – 3

- Each moment of mind depends on a vast network of causes: the body, nature, human culture, and material reality . . . stretching back through human history, the evolution of life, and w-a-y back to the Big Bang.

This moment of experience is the local expression of this allness – like a small ripple contains within itself something of the whole ocean.

The felt recognition of mind depending upon this allness, being an expression of it, is the epitome of allocentric mode.



This Local Ripple of Allness

*When we try to pick out anything by itself,
we find it hitched
to everything else in the universe.*

John Muir

Only Allness

- Much as mind is a whole, the material universe is a whole and can be taken as a whole.
- Going a step further, Allness is everything, including the material universe – from quantum foam to super-clusters of galaxies – as well as life here and everywhere, and one's own mind and that of others.
- Each moment of experience is the local expression of this net of causes: each something embodies everything.
- Allness itself is perfect, never a problem.

To study the Way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be

enlightened

illuminated

lived

by all things.

Dogen

**Coming into presence in this moment, continually
letting go**

**Opening into a growing sense of peace . . .
contentment . . . love . . .**

Disengaging from parts, abiding as mind as a whole

**Recognizing mind as a local rippling of a vast sea of
causes, opening into being the sea of allness**



Intimations of Unconditionality

*Pointing directly to the heart-mind,
see your own nature
and become Buddha.*

Hakuin

Be still

Listen to the stones of the wall

Be silent, they try

To speak your

Name.

Listen to the living walls.

Who are you?

Who

Are you? Whose

Silence are you?

Thomas Merton



Know the mind.

Shape the mind.

Free the mind.

Suggested Books

See www.RickHanson.net for other great books.

- Austin, J. 2009. *Selfless Insight*. MIT Press.
- Begley, S. 2007. *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*. Ballantine.
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Key Papers - 1

See www.RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.

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Key Papers - 2

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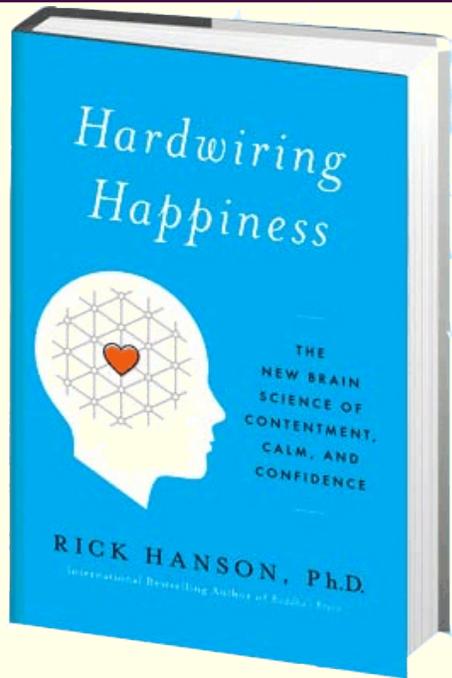
Key Papers - 3

- 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.
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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



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