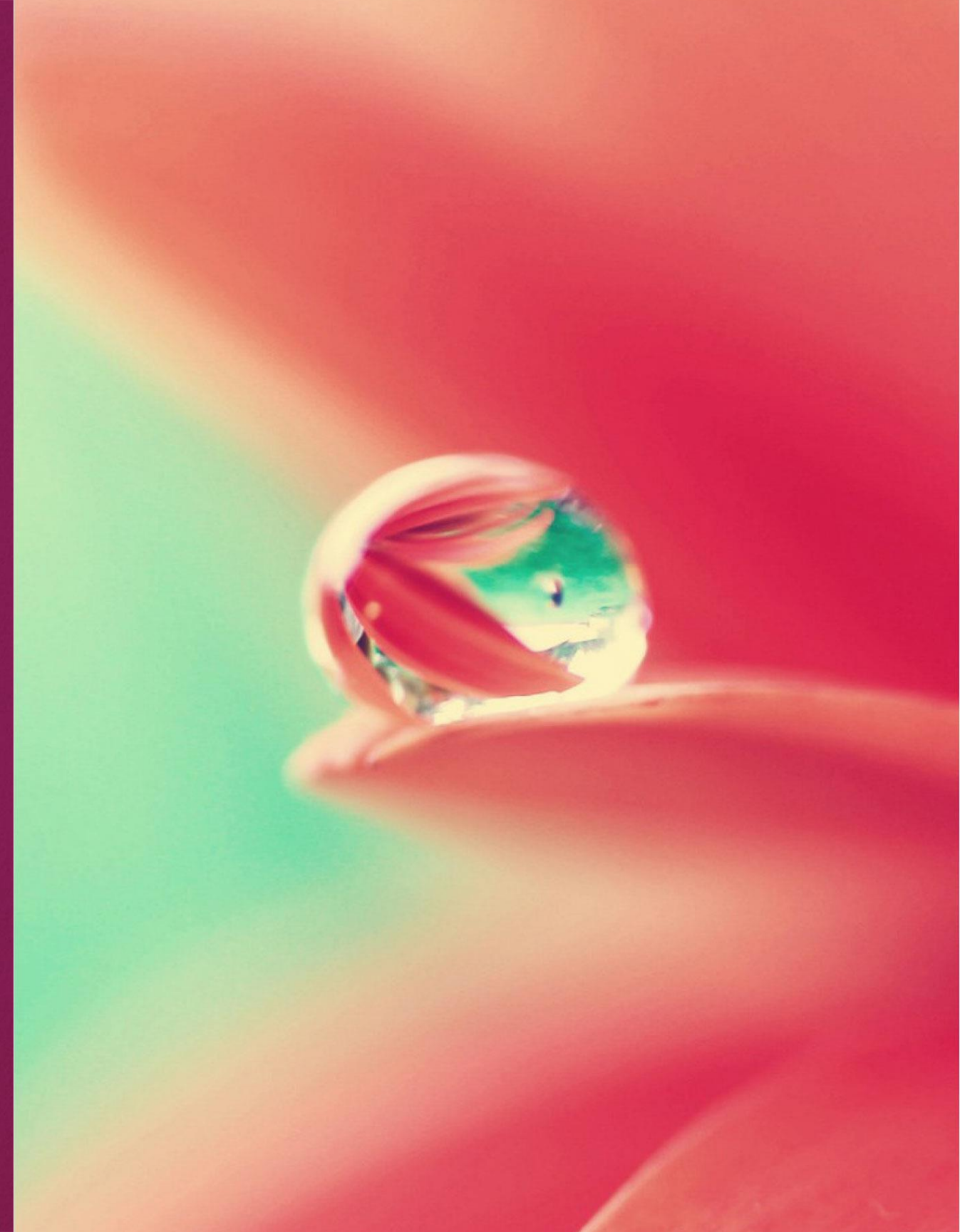


*Think not lightly of good, saying,
“It will not come to me.”*

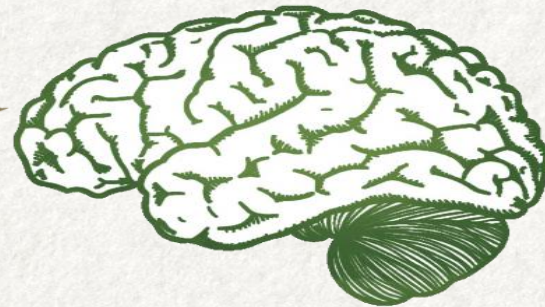
*Drop by drop is
the water pot filled.*

*Likewise, the wise one,
Gathering it little by little,
Fills oneself with good.*

Dhammapada 9.122



The Strong Heart: Kindness, Assertiveness, and Resilient Relationships



1440 Multiversity, August 3-5, 2018

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Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom

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Cultivating Inner Resources

Shaping the Course of a Life

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources

Location of Resources

World

Body

Mind

Some InnerResources

Mindfulness

Character Virtues

Positive Emotions

Compassion, Love

Interpersonal Skills

Patience, Determination, Grit

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.”

Two Wolves in the Heart



People focus on
identifying and using resources
such as character strengths –
but what about **developing** them
in the first place?

The harder a person's life,
the more challenges one has,
the less the outer world is helping –

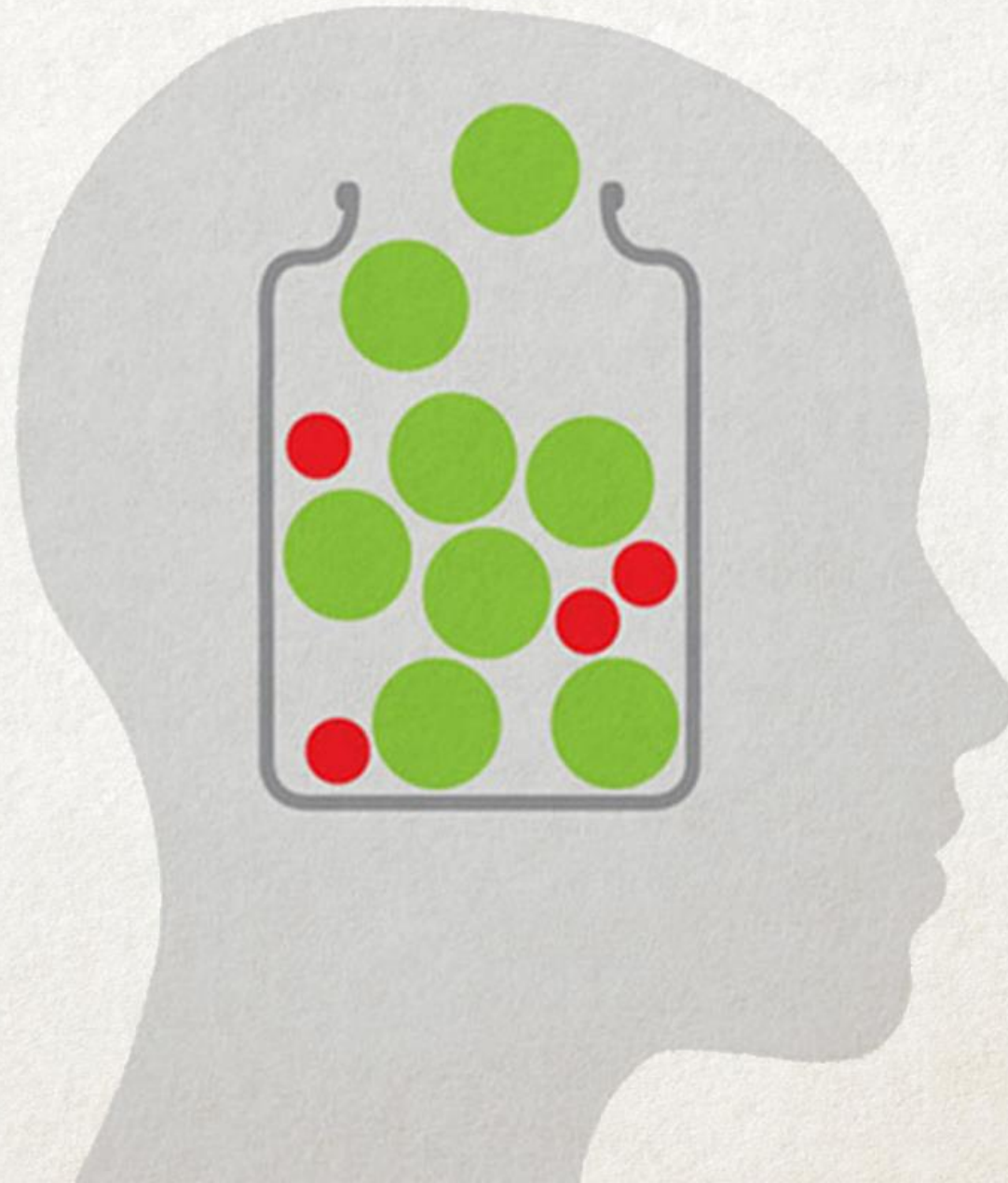
the more important it is
to develop inner resources.

The majority
of our inner resources
are acquired,

through emotional, somatic,
social, and motivational
learning –

which is fundamentally hopeful.

And Which Means Changing the Brain For the Better



Changing the Brain For the Better



Inner resources are acquired in two stages:

Encoding



Consolidation

Activation



Installation

State



Trait

A complex network of glowing yellow neurons is shown against a dark background. The neurons consist of cell bodies and a dense web of branching processes. One central neuron is highlighted with a bright green nucleus. The overall appearance is that of a highly interconnected neural network.

Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

Mechanisms of Neuroplasticity

- (De)Sensitizing existing synapses
- Building new synapses
- Altered gene expression
- Building and integrating new neurons
- Altered ongoing activity in a region
- Altered connectivity among regions
- Altered neurochemical activity
- Information from hippocampus to cortex
- Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
- Slow wave and REM sleep

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

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

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

But – experiencing doesn't equal learning.

Activation **without installation**

may be pleasant,

but no trait resources are acquired.

What fraction of our

beneficial mental states lead to lasting
changes in neural structure or function?

Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias

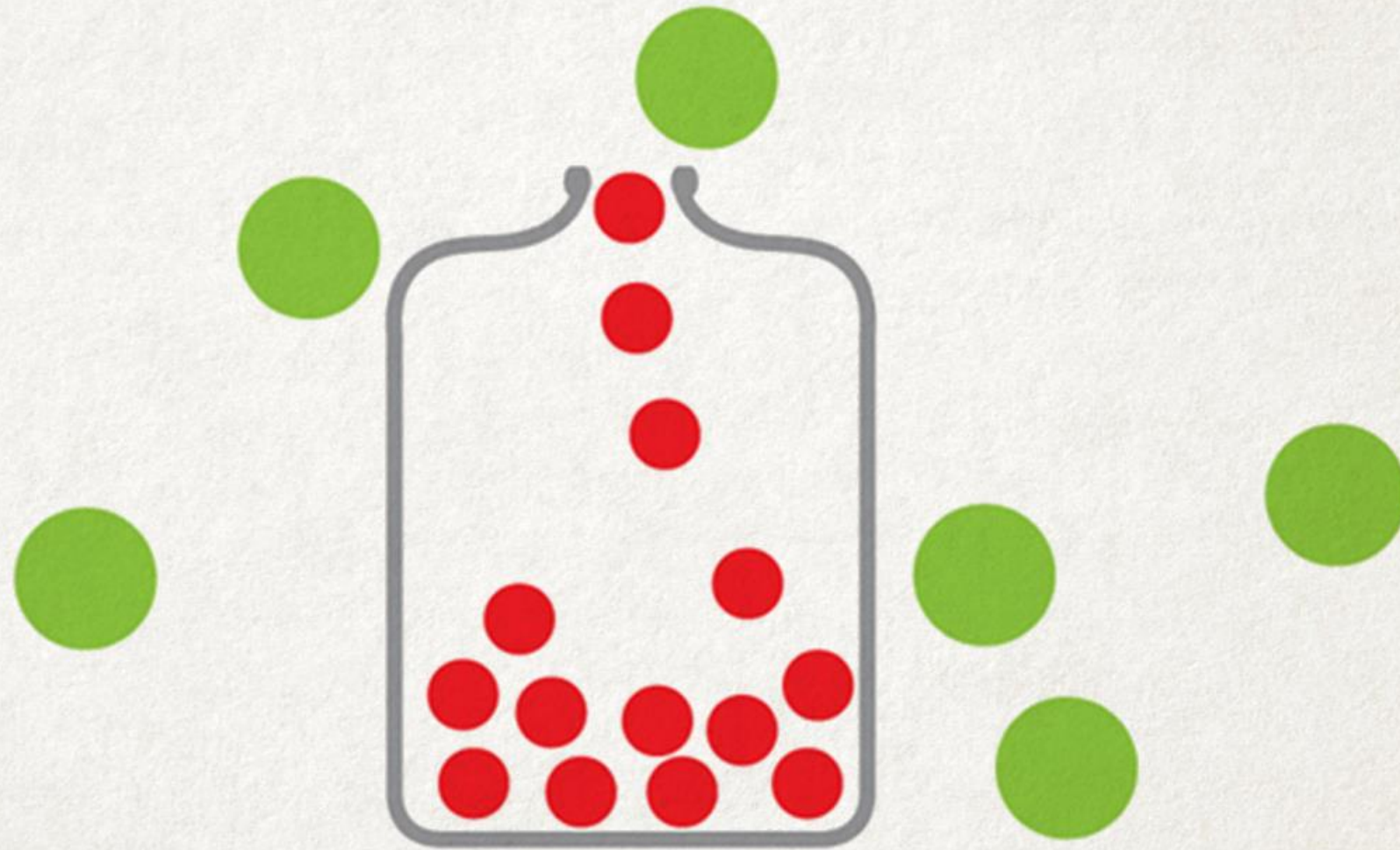
bad experiences

good experiences

The Negativity Bias

As the nervous system evolved, **avoiding “sticks”** was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

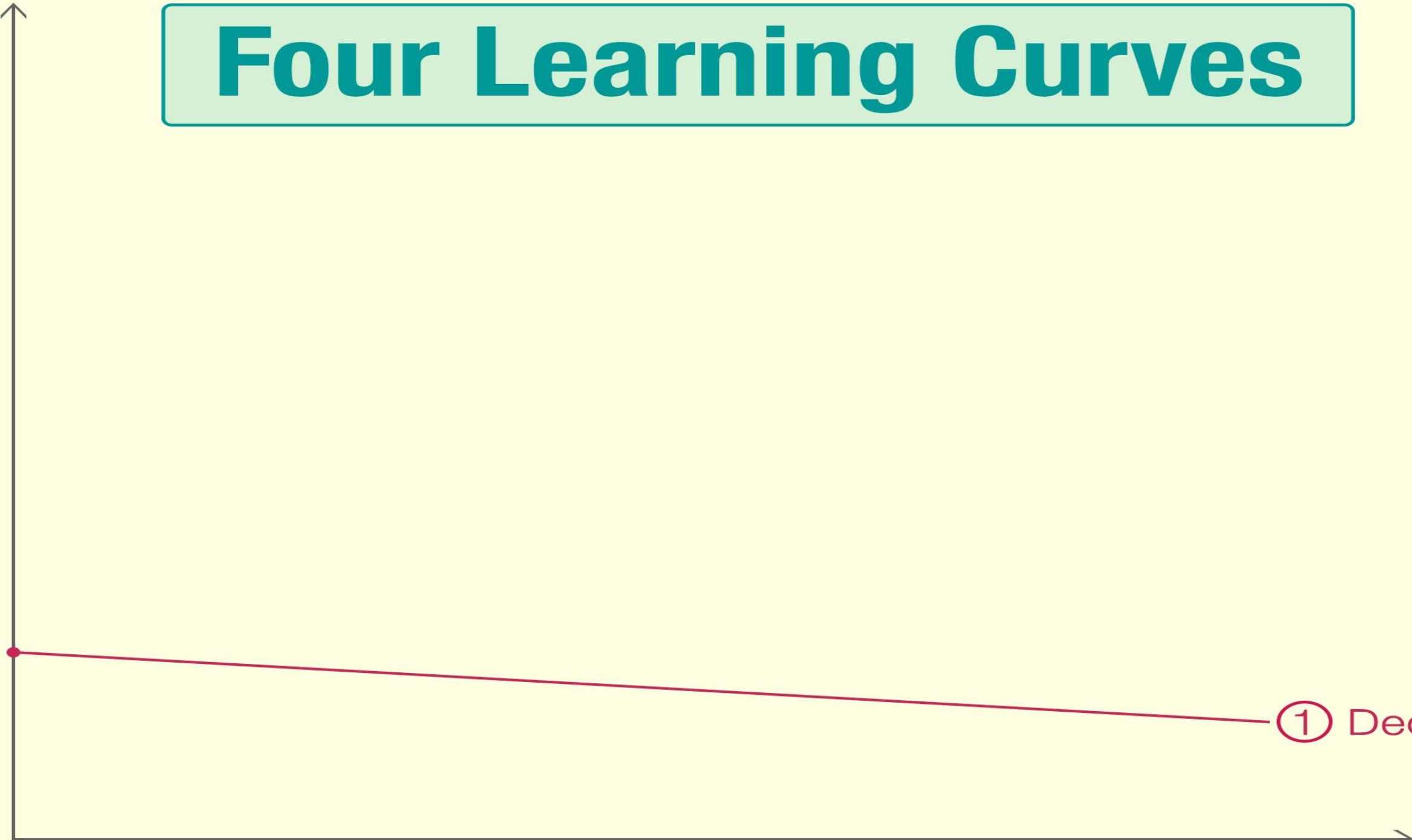
1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Turn it quickly into (implicit) memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.



The Negativity Bias

Four Learning Curves

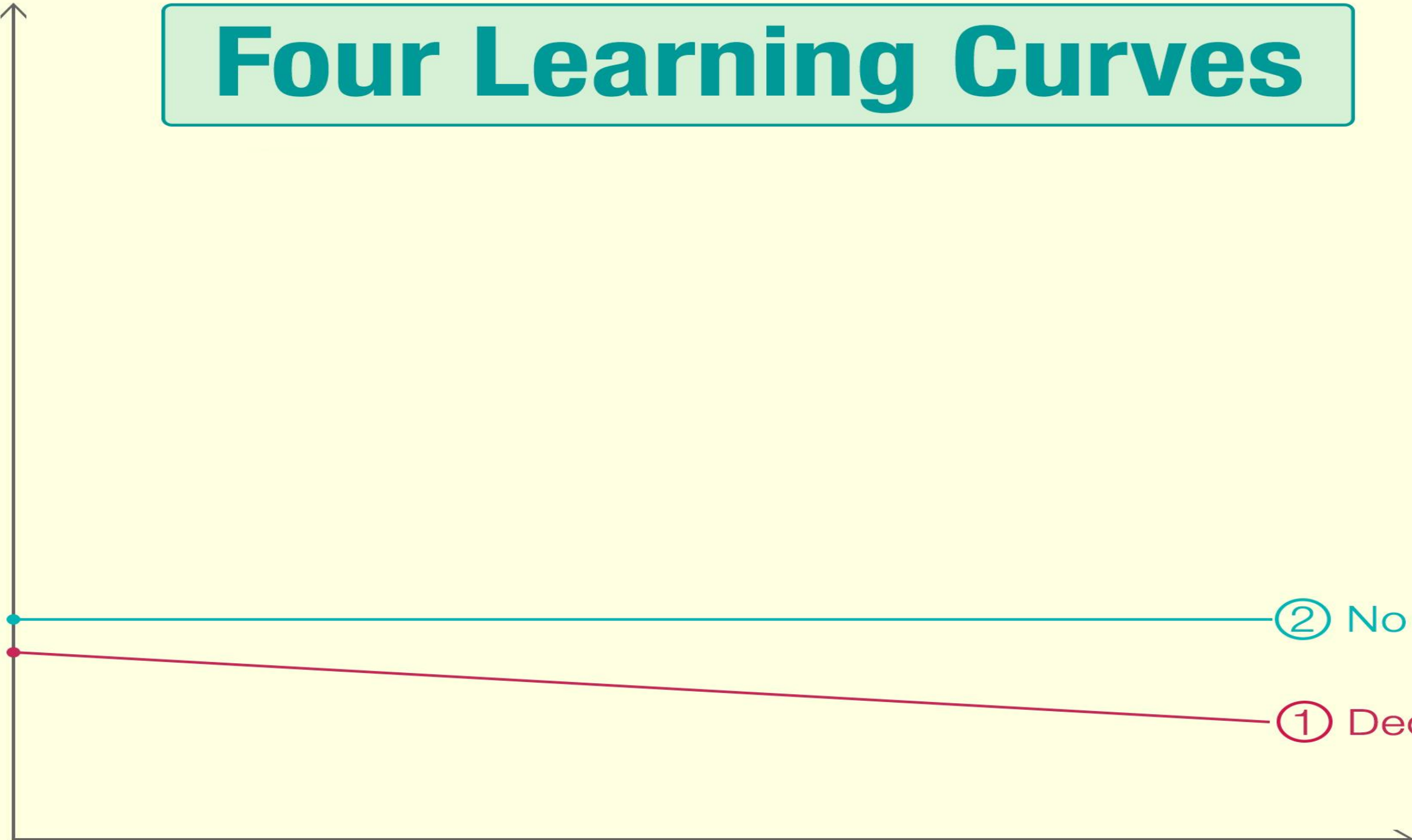
Mental Resources



Time

Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources



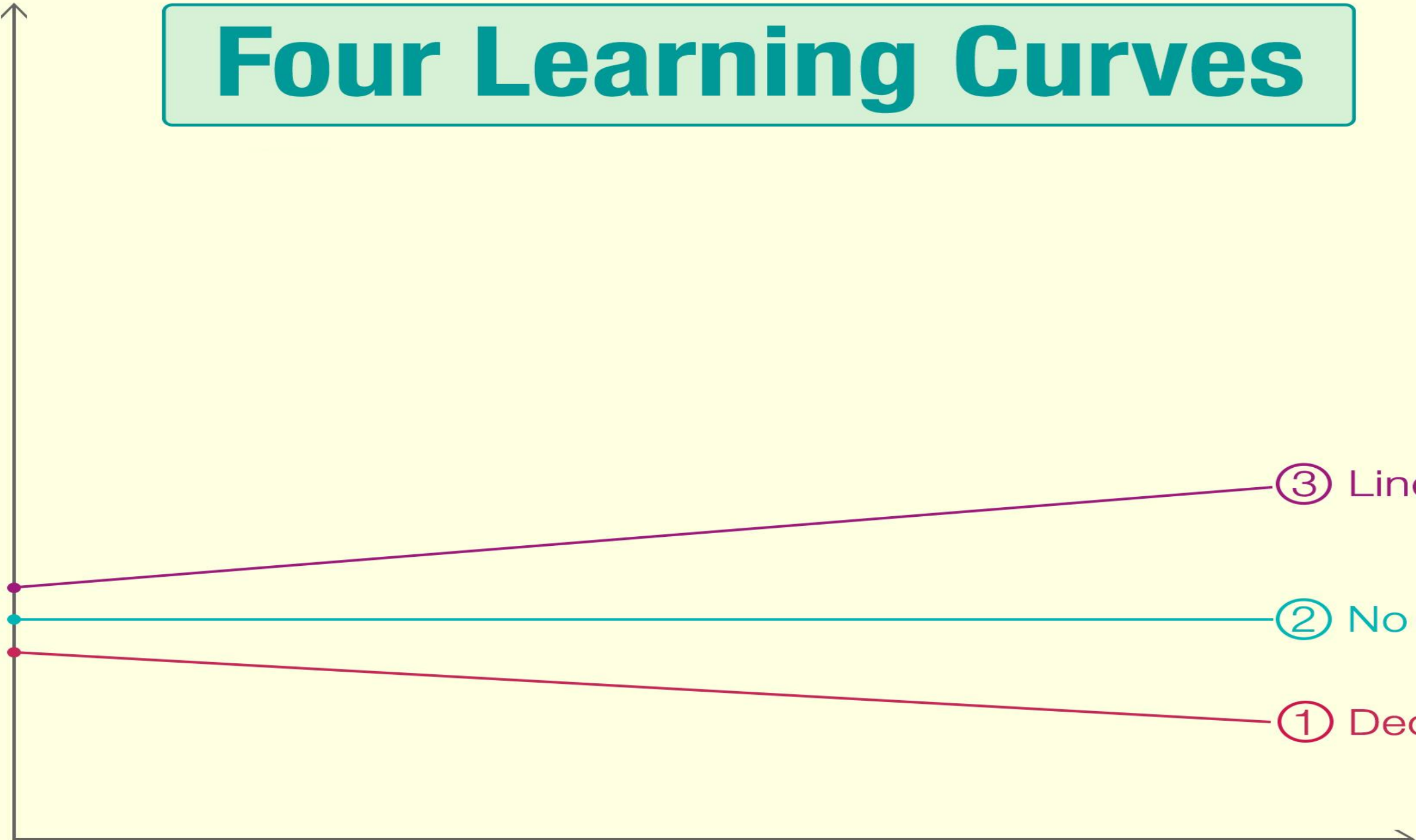
② No growth

① Decline

Time

Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources



③ Linear growth

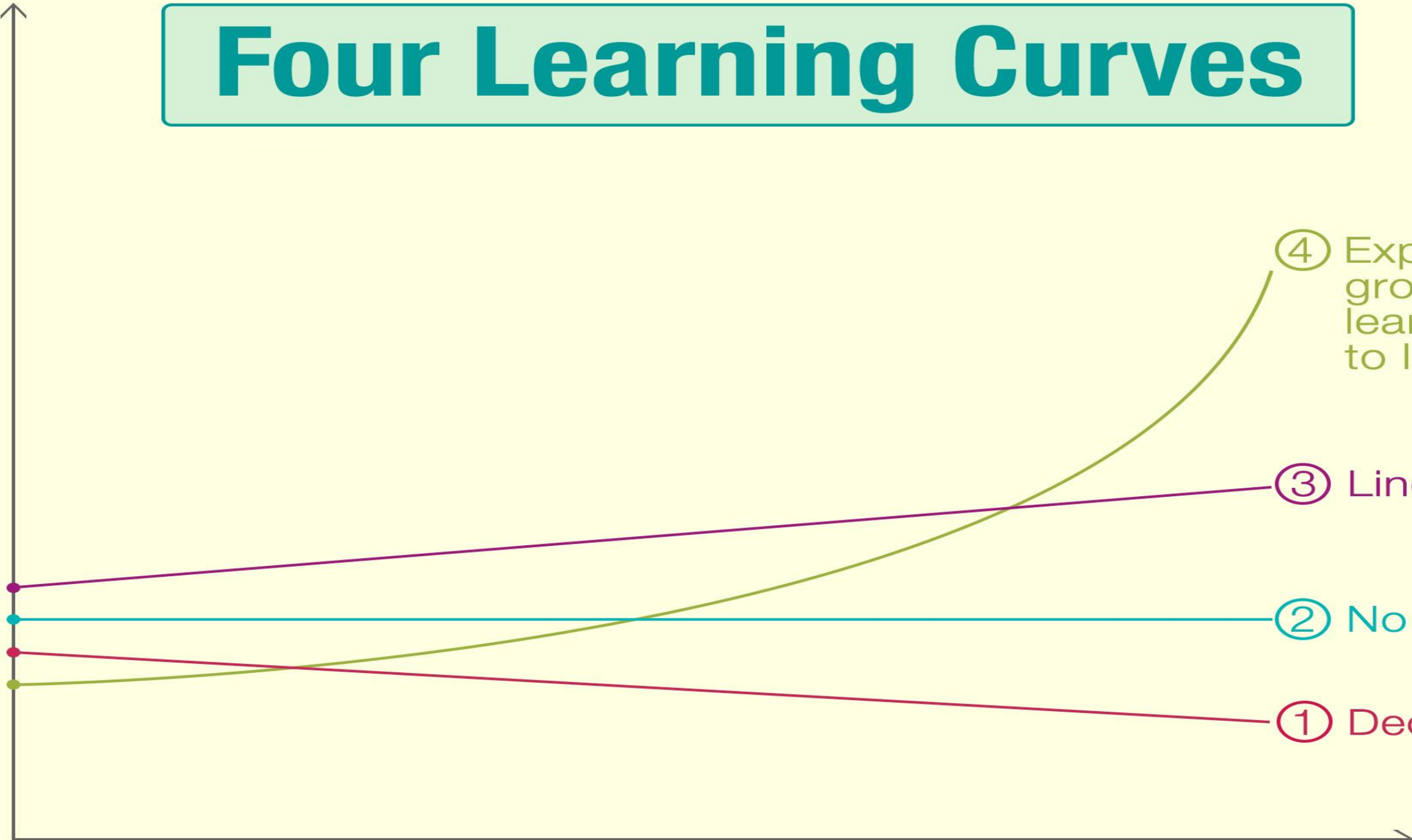
② No growth

① Decline

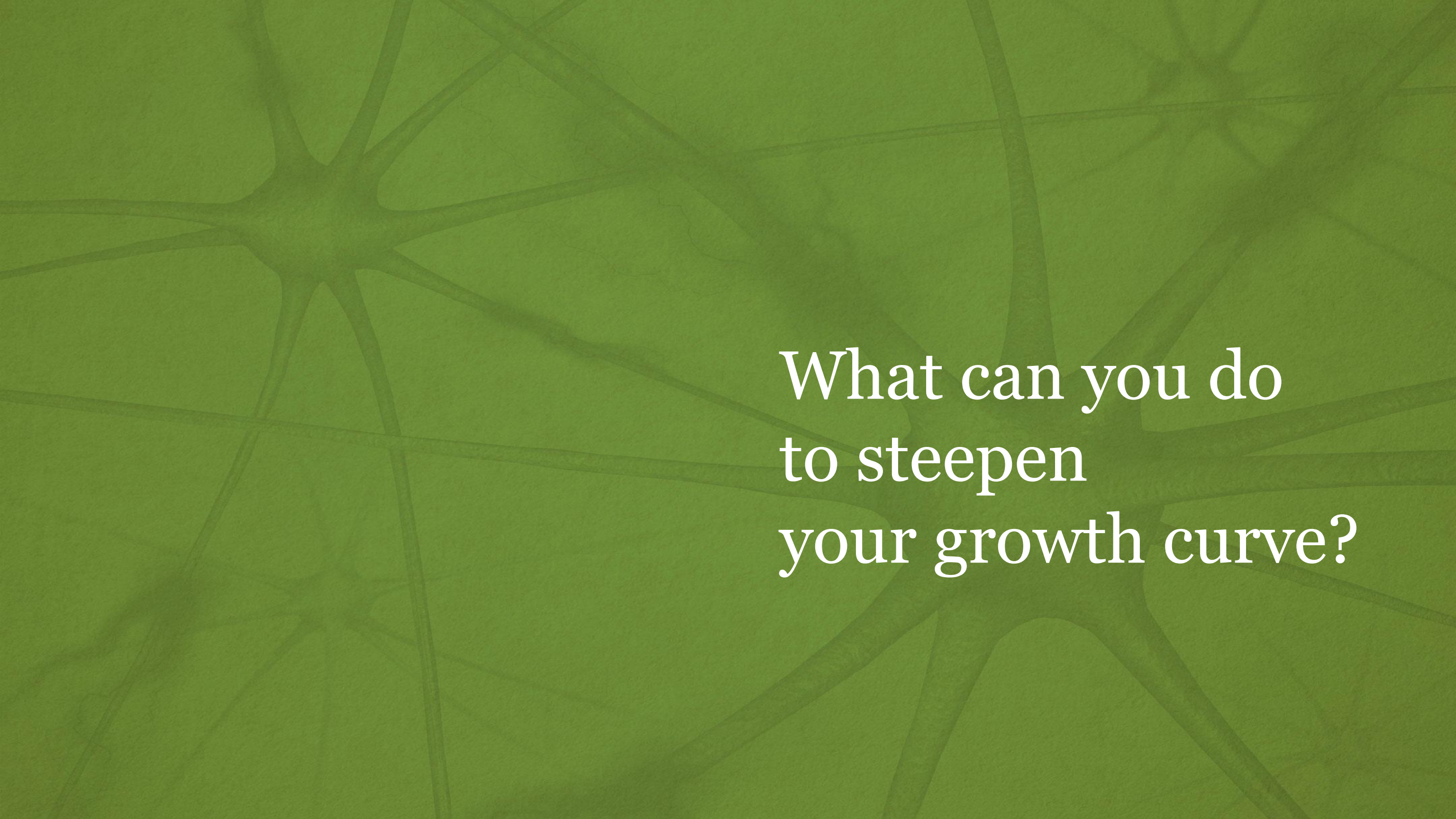
Time

Four Learning Curves

Mental Resources



Time



What can you do
to steepen
your growth curve?

Learning

is the strength of strengths,
since it's the one we use
to grow the rest of them.

Knowing how to learn

the things that are important to you
could be the greatest strength of all.

Let's Try It

Notice

Relaxing as
you exhale

Create

Gratitude,
gladness

Create

Warm feelings
for someone

For each of these:

Have the experience. Enrich it. Absorb it.

The Neuropsychology of Personal Growth

HEAL: Turning States into Traits

Activation

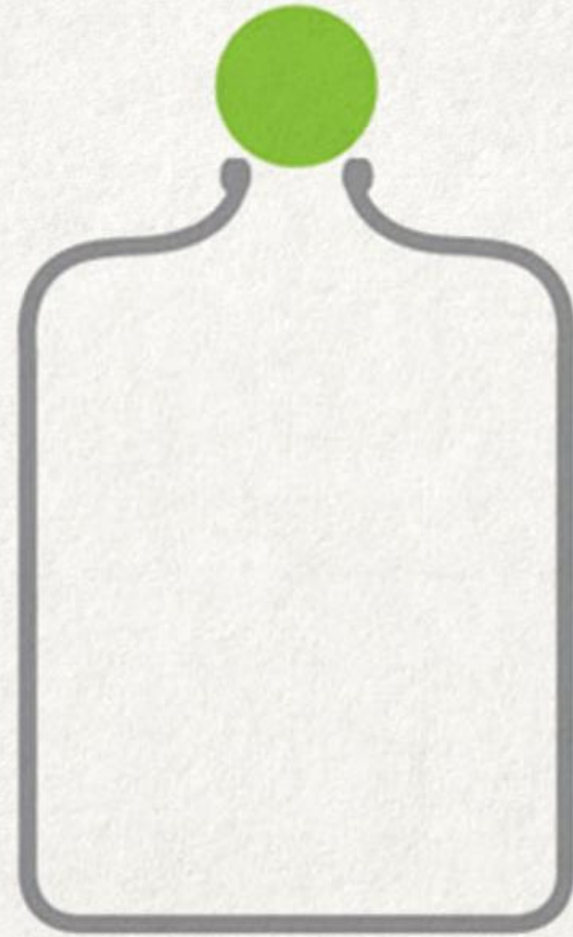
1. **Have** a beneficial experience

Installation

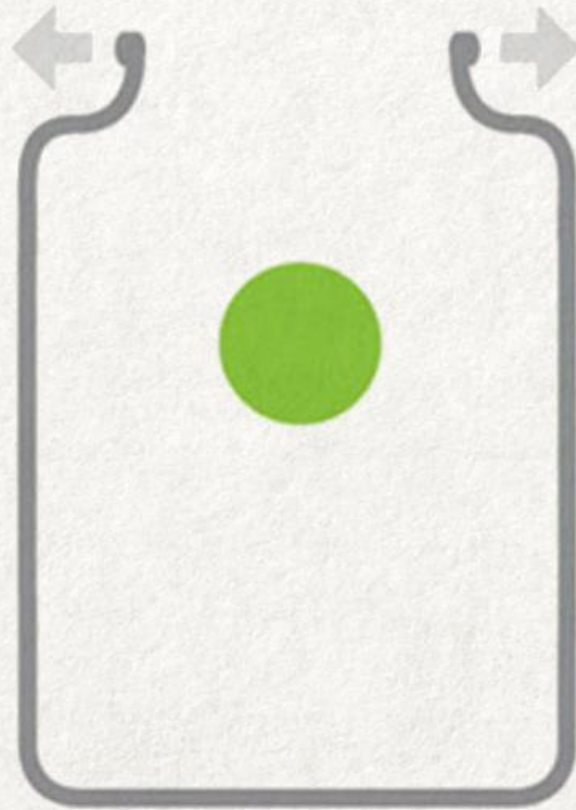
2. **Enrich** the experience

3. **Absorb** the experience

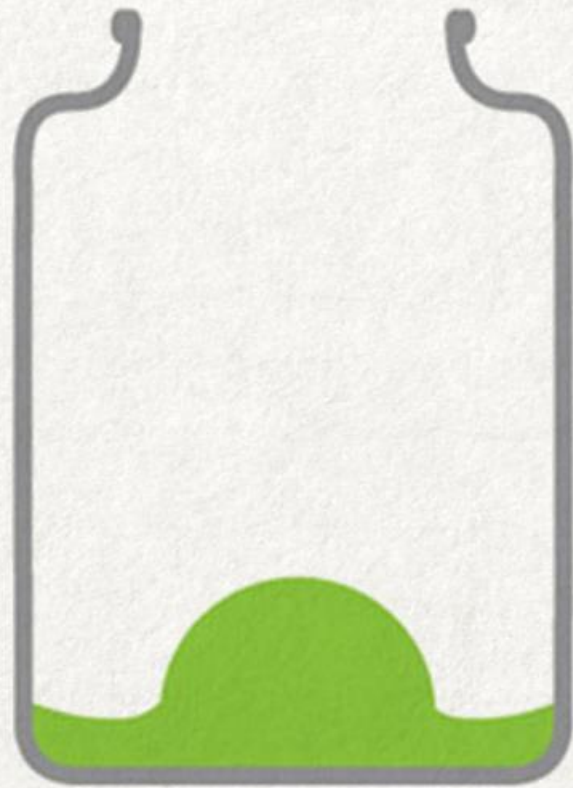
4. **Link** positive and negative material
(Optional)



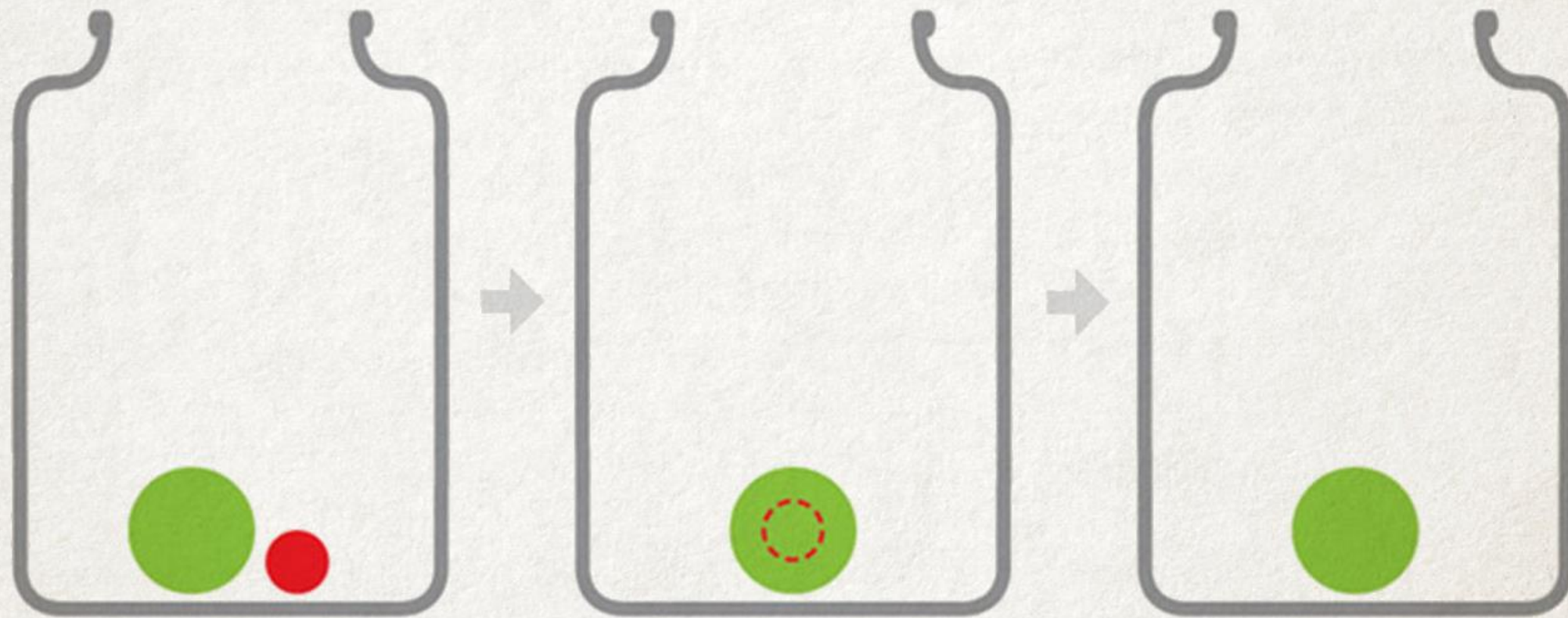
Have a Beneficial Experience



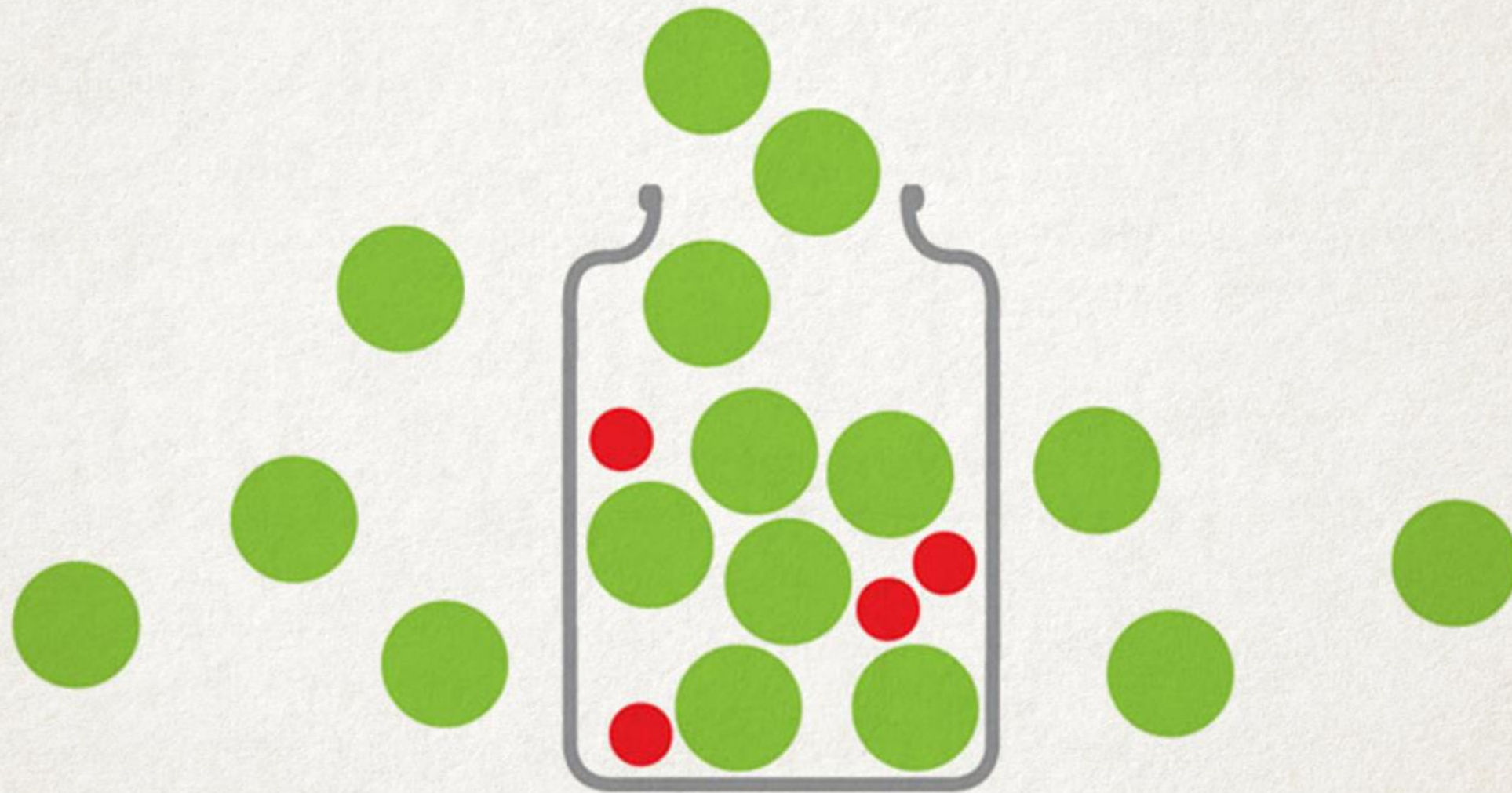
Enrich It



Absorb It



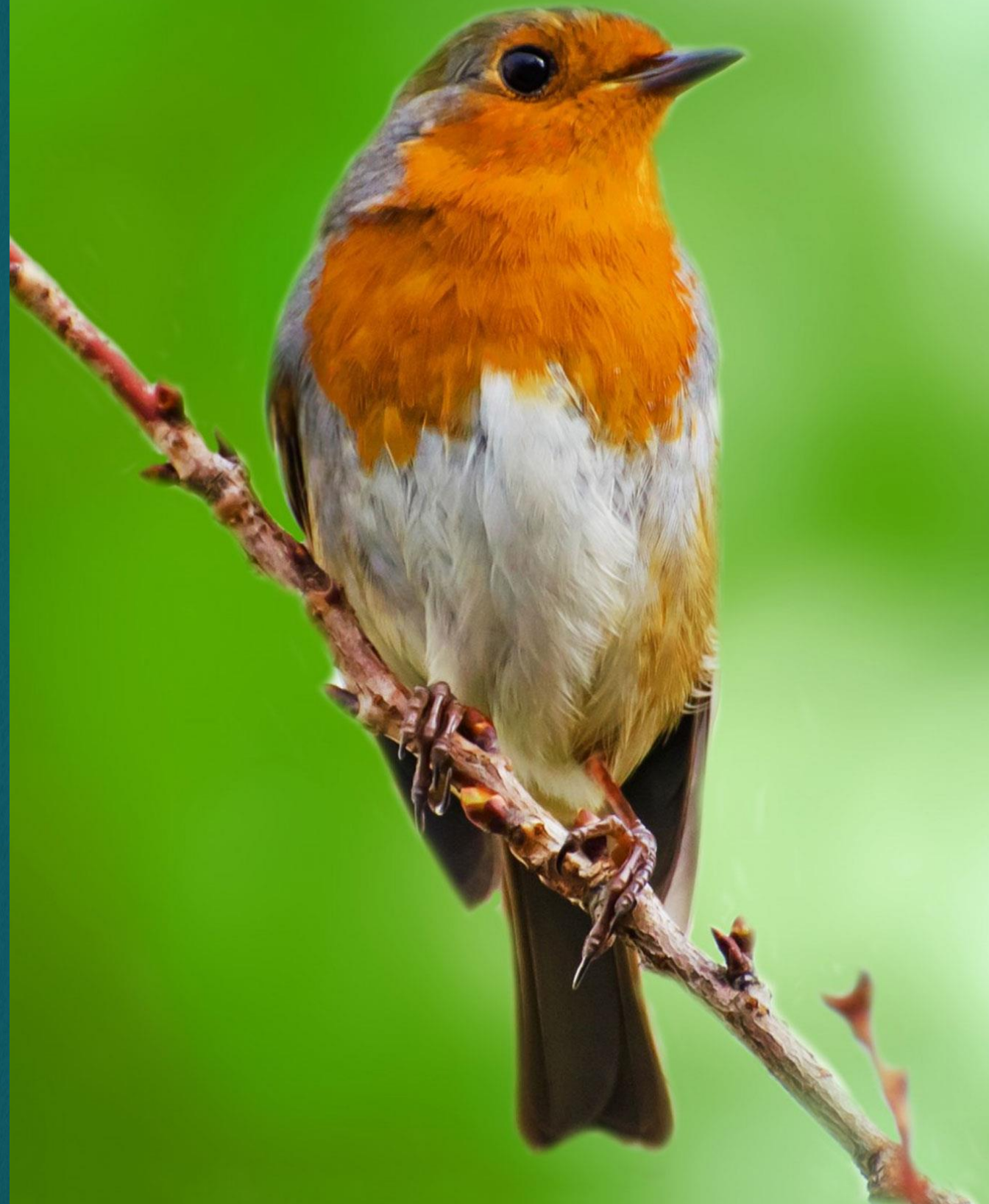
Link Positive & Negative Material



Have It, Enjoy It

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

Lao Tzu





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:

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.

Meeting Your Needs

Our Three Fundamental Needs



Safety



Satisfaction



Connection

Meeting Our Three Fundamental Needs



Safety

**Avoiding
harms**

(threat response)



Satisfaction

**Approaching
rewards**

(goal pursuit)

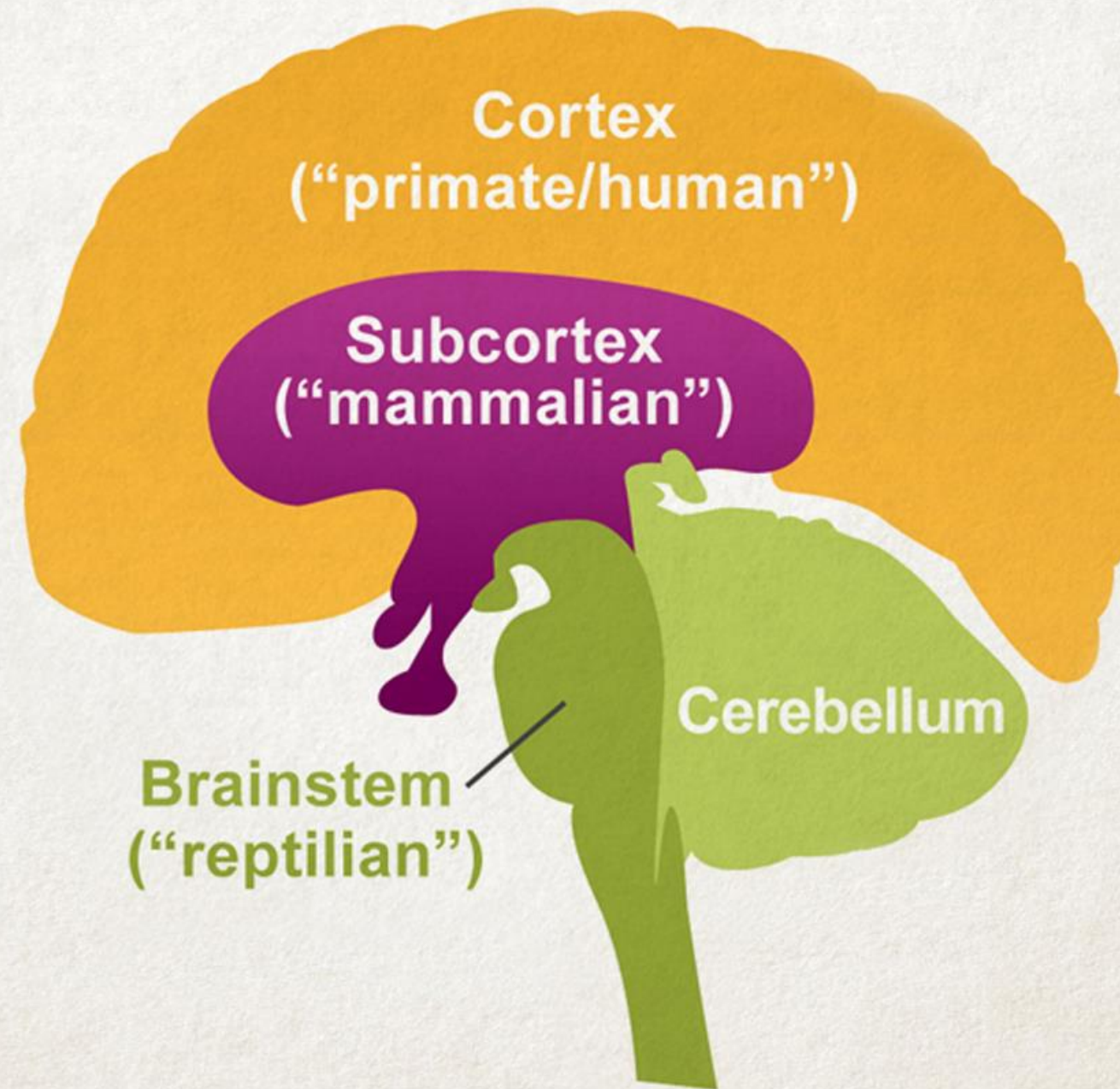


Connection

**Attaching
to others**

(social engagement)

The Evolving Brain



Pet the Lizard



Feed the Mouse



Hug the Monkey



Coming Home

Peace

Contentment

Love

A Secure Base

Balancing 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.

Calming the Visceral Core

- A brief explanation of heartrate variability
- Relax.
- Gently lengthen exhalations . . . As long as or longer than inhalations . . . Then letting breathing be soft and natural.
- Bring attention into the chest and area of the heart.
- Be aware of heartfelt feelings . . . Perhaps love flowing in and flowing out in rhythm with the breath.

Feeling Alright Right Now

- Aware of the body going on being . . . Enough air to breathe . . . The heart beating fine . . . Basically alright . . . Now
- You may not have been basically alright in the past and you may not be basically alright in the future . . . But now you are OK . . . Still basically OK . . . Now
- Letting go of unnecessary anxiety, guarding, bracing
- Reassurance, relief, calming is sinking into you . . . Still basically alright . . . Now

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.

Self-Compassion

- Bring to mind beings who care about you . . . Focus on feeling cared about. . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.
- Bring to mind beings for whom you have compassion . . . Receive the sense of compassion into yourself . . . Know what compassion feels like.
- Be aware of your own burdens, stresses, and suffering – and bring compassion to yourself . . . Get a sense of caring, warmth, support, compassion sinking deeply into you.

“Anthem”

Ring the bells that can still ring

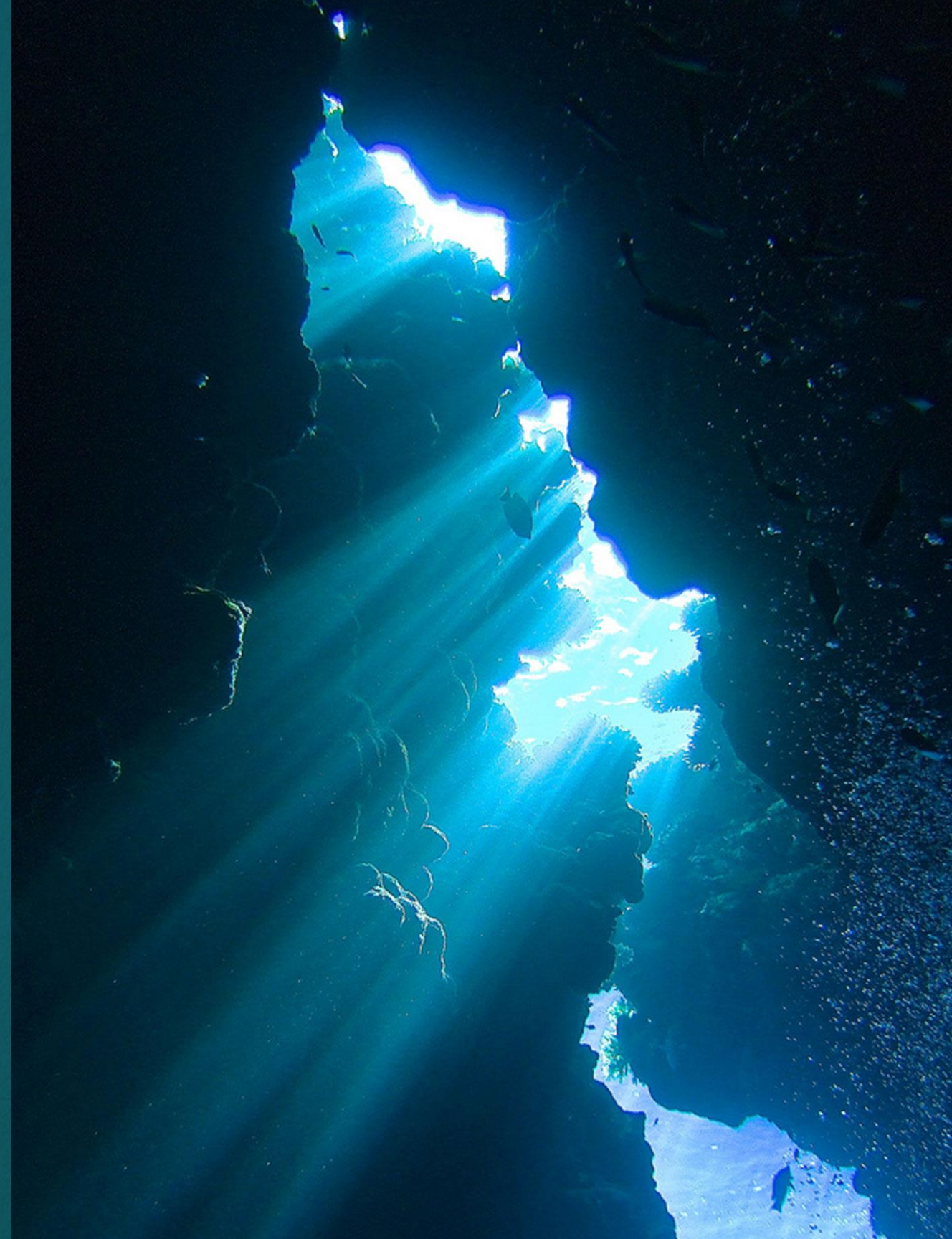
Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in

That's how the light gets in

Leonard Cohen



Warming the Heart

Resting in Love

- Bring to mind beings you care about . . . Friends, family, pets, people who have helped you . . . Compassion for suffering . . . Kindness and friendliness . . .
- Focus on feelings of caring and love . . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.
- Bring to mind beings who care about you . . . Focus on feeling cared about. . . Use HEAL to take in this experience.

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

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 . . .

Empathy

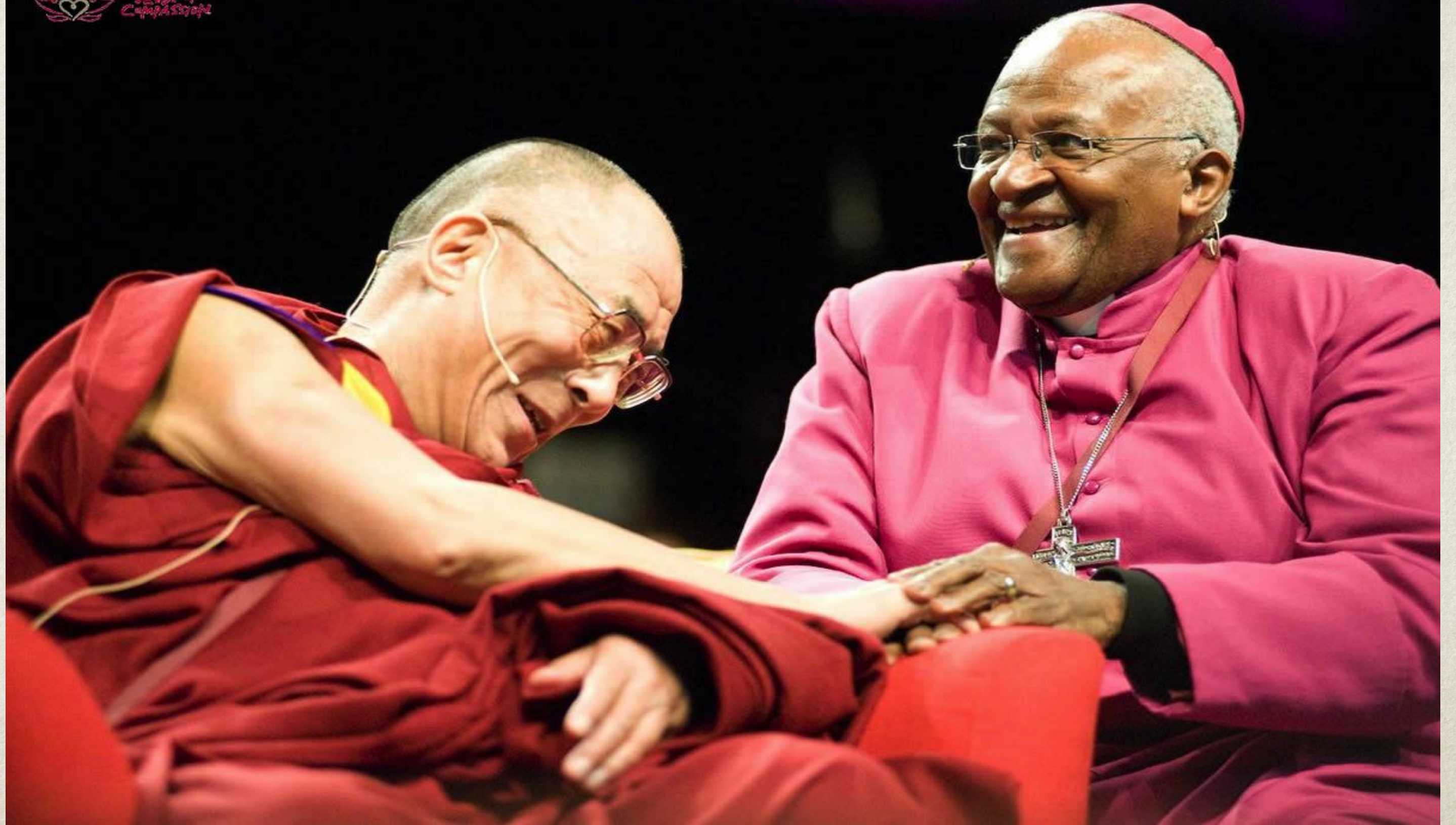
The Wisdom of Connection

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



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.

Unilateral Virtue

Wisdom is . . . all about understanding the underlying spacious and empty quality of the person and of all experienced phenomena.

To attain this quality of deep insight, we must have a mind that is quiet and malleable.

Achieving such a state of mind requires that we first develop the ability to regulate our body and speech so as to cause no conflict.

~ Venerable Ani Tenzin Palmo

*If we could read the secret history
of our enemies,
we should find in each [person's] life
sorrow and suffering enough
to disarm any hostility.*

~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*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

*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

Right Speech

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

Benefits of Unilateral Virtue

- It simplifies things: all you have to do is just live by your own code, and others will do whatever they do.
- It feels good in its own right.
- It minimizes inflammatory triggers, evokes good treatment, empowers you to ask for it.
- It stands you on the moral high ground.

Healthy Assertiveness

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

“Us” and “Them”

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.

So that all cubs are our own . . .

All beings are our clan . . .

All life, our relatives . . .

The whole earth, our home . . .

Hug the Monkey



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See **RickHanson.net** for other good books.

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See www.RickHanson.net/key-papers/ for other suggested readings.

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