



# **Mindfulness To Build Connections**

**Facilitated by Susan Burak, JD, MA, R.C.C.**

# Mindful Connection is at the heart of being human

Meditation has to do with opening what is closed in us;  
Balancing what is reactive and exploring and investigating  
what is hidden.

That is the “why” of meditation practice. We practice to be  
more open, non-judgmental and curious. We practice  
meditation so we can enhance our capacity for “holistic  
listening.”

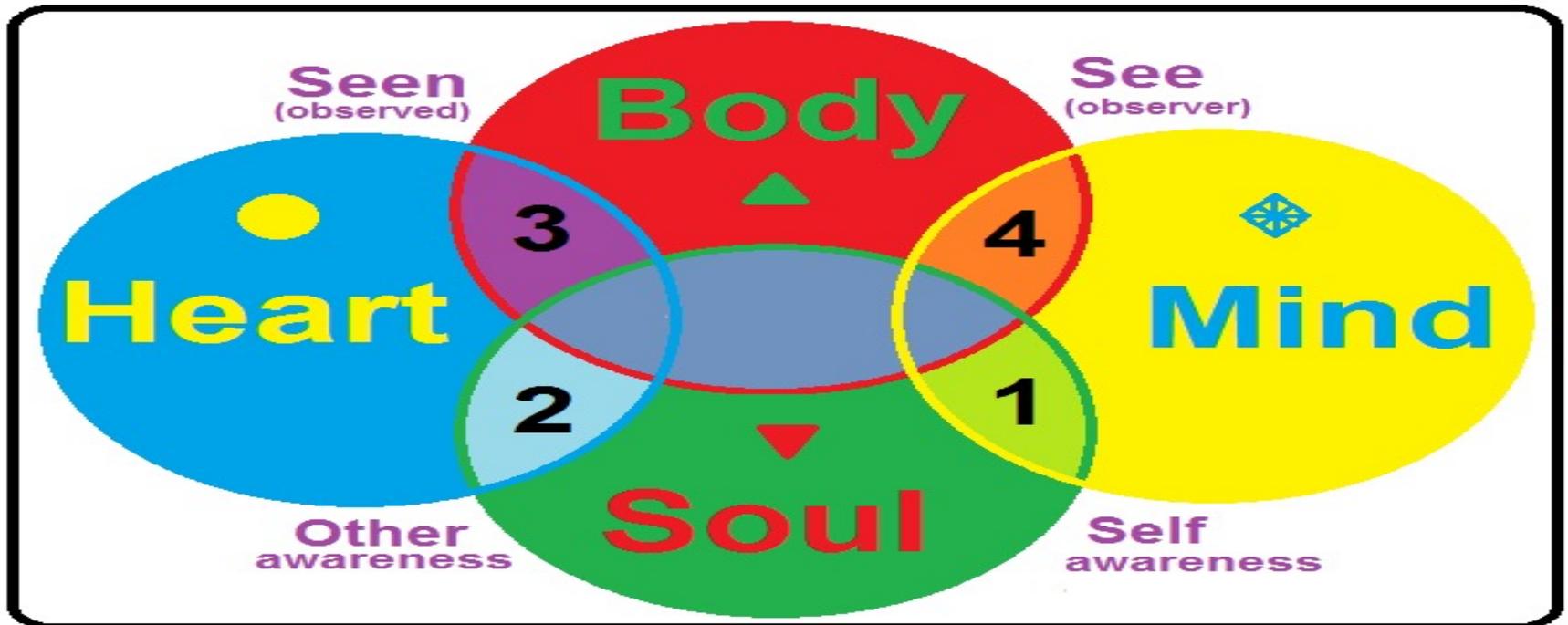
*Jack Kornfield “Seeking the Heart of Wisdom”*



# Objectives

- To understand how distress-induced self expectations trigger over-thinking reinforcing unhelpful thinking styles that keep us frozen in our private logic and safeguarding; and
- To develop clarity, concentration and focus with resilience using our breath as an anchor and focus our intentional awareness to be in Optimum Human Functioning reinforcing our capacity for holistic listening and mindful connection.
- Stress: is a necessary and normal part of human living
- Distress: is the perception and feeling overwhelmed that we cannot cope
- Experiential Exercises
- 1) Connecting with your breathing space
- 2) Palming technique
- 3) Kindness Practice & Enhancing Compassion mutes the Empathic Distress that leads to emotional exhaustion and burnout
- 4) Meditation on the Breath increases the capacity for self-attunement and self-regulation and connections
- SELF-CARE: Focusing on “GLAD” thereby expanding innate strength and resources to enhance your well-being and connection with others

As we increase our Practice in Mindful Connection we become more Self – Aware and increase our capacity for Holistic Listening



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**Mindfulness is paying attention in the present moment, on purpose without judgment. (It keeps you in Optimum Human Functioning)**

*Jon Kabat Zin*

Meditative States are converted into Inner Traits

Self-attunement creates full engagement with all your inner capacities which is the basis for developing resilience, radical acceptance and compassion and connection with others

# Expectations of Ourselves

- Outline the roles you operate within on a regular basis:

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- As a lawyer/legal professional/volunteer I am:

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- When I am in optimum functioning, I Am:

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When I am in optimum functioning, People Are:

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When I am in optimum functioning, The World Is:

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**Our ability to connect affects what we think, feel and do at each age and stage of our lives in all the contexts of our lives (palming exercise)**



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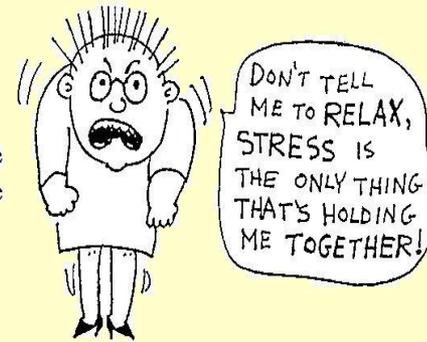


Mind Full, or Mindful?

# If We are “Mind Full” Then Overthinking Keeps Us Frozen in Distress and Blocks Mindfulness

- Meditation is NOT what you think.
- Stop Overthinking
- Change Negative Self-Talk
- Get your mind out of the way as it delivers judgments, “shoulds”, comparisons, and unhelpful thinking styles etc.
- Be Curious about your overthinking: S – Stop
  - T-Take a Breath
  - O-Observe
  - P-Pace Yourself

Too much change in too short a time can cause distress.



\*\*\*Take Poll

# Automatic Inner Mirroring

## “Mirror Neurons”

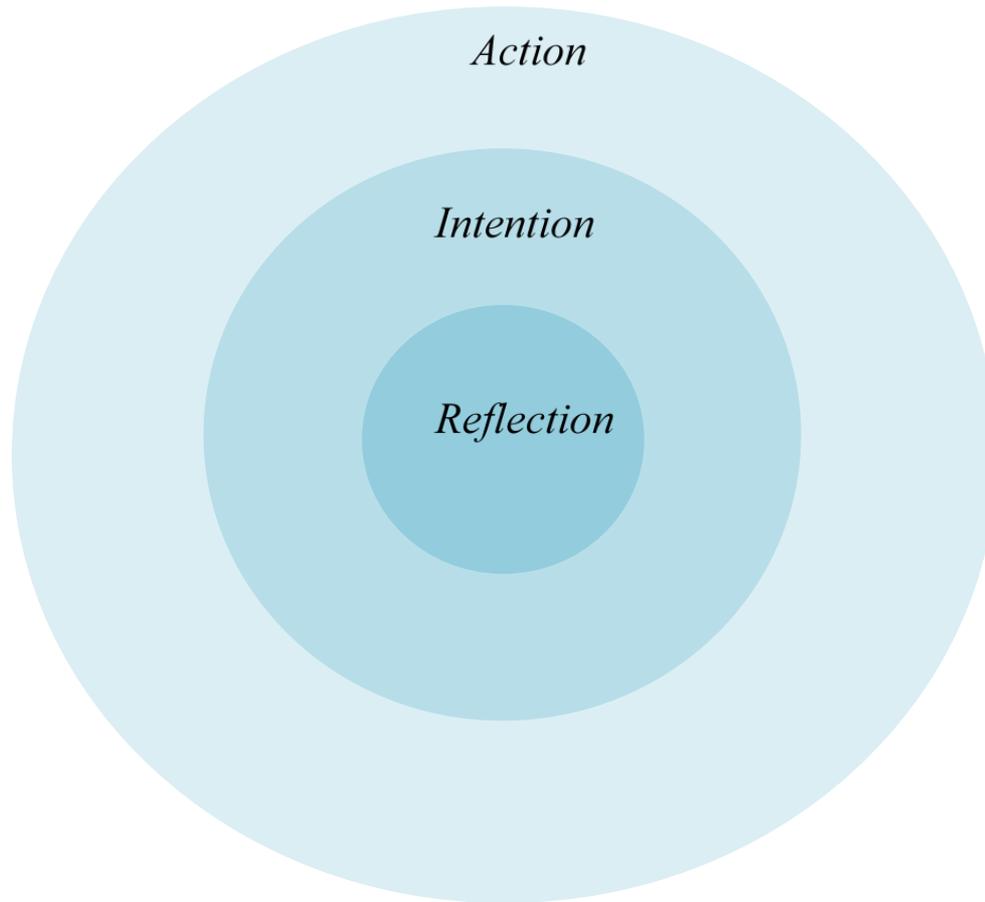
- Our brain’s unconscious inner mirroring of our inner felt sense or mental states and also the innate felt sense of others also stimulates our innate **Negativity Bias**;
- Neuroscience Research has informed us that the “Negative” sticks in our brains like Velcro because internal states become automatic personality traits and the “Positive” washes off us like we are coated with Teflon.
- This is why erosion of optimism and negativity are contagious
- We sponge up the negative “felt sense” of the other
- Meditation and being Present facilitates negativity bias override and maintains your brain and body in optimum human functioning

Hanson, Rick. (2013). *Hardwiring Happiness*. Harmony Books, New York.

## **Negativity Bias Affects our Mind, Brain, and Body**

- Muscle tension
- Backaches
- Headaches
- Sleeping difficulties
- Digestive Problems
- Erosion of Optimism
- Restlessness
- Mood swings
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety about the future
- Exhaustion
- Irritability

# Mindfulness Paradigm of Well-Being



# Connecting with our Breathing Space

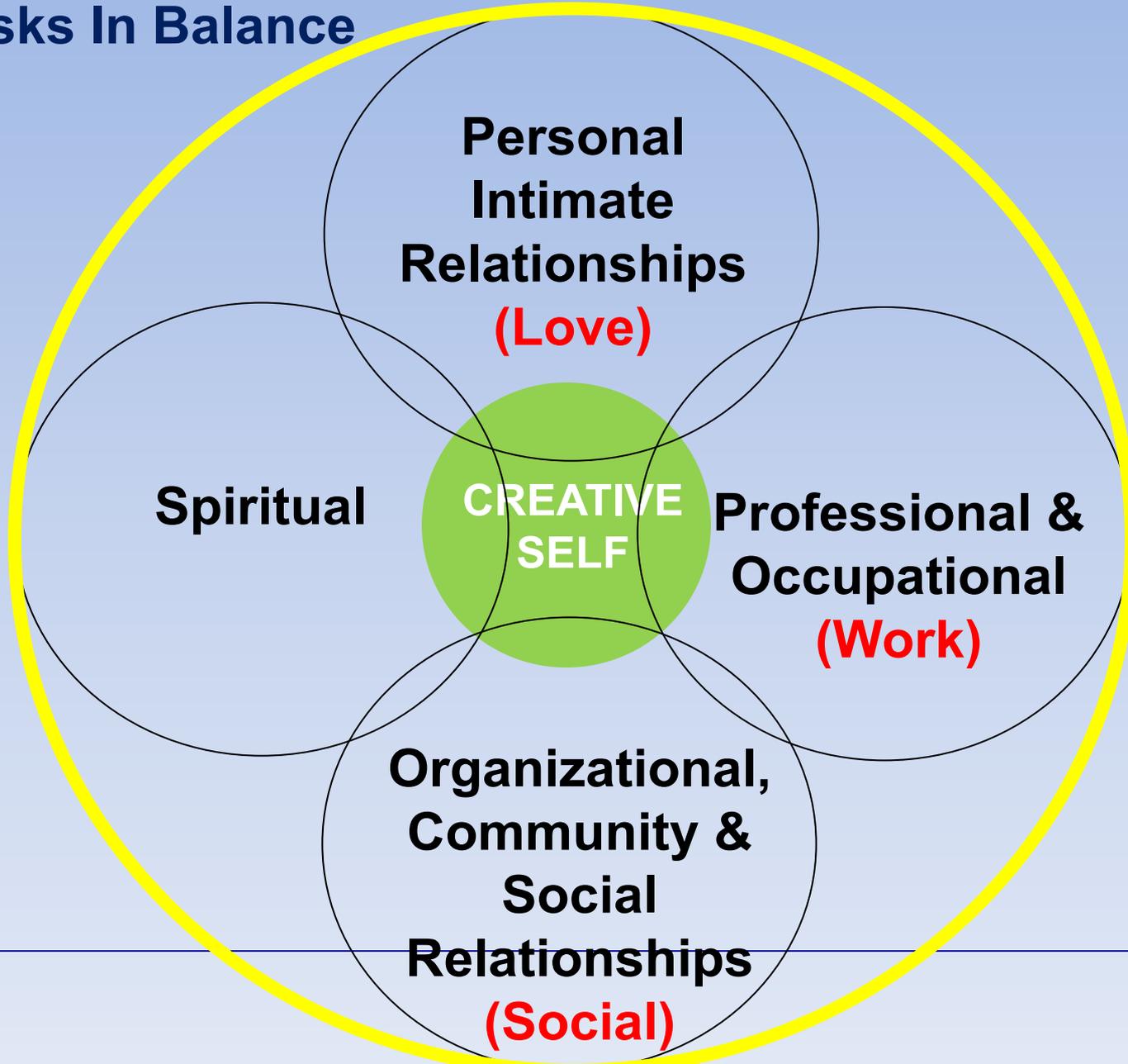
- A person has approximately 50,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day
- Meditation helps calm that “noisy chatter”
- You are not your thoughts
- Connecting with your deep calm breath connects you with your “creative self” which allows you to direct your “intentional awareness” and “purpose”

\*\*\*\*\* (Meditation on the Breath Exercise)

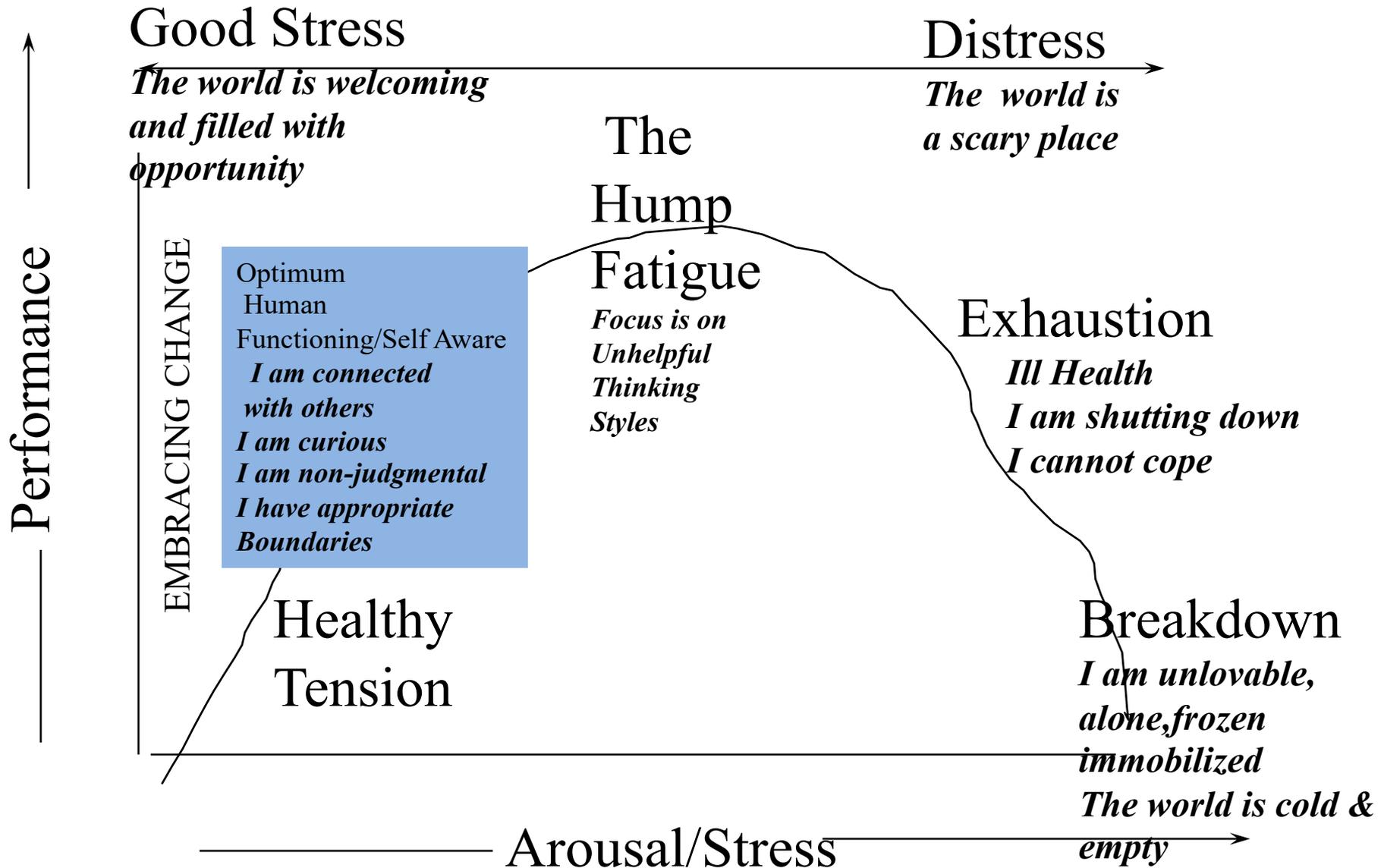
# Debrief “Connecting with Breathing Space”

- 1) What was your experience?
- 2) Did this help you connect better to yourself?
- 3) Do you think that a regular practice of connecting with your breath will help you be a better listener?
- 4) Do you think that a regular practice of connecting with your breath will help you be more attuned with what is going on with others?

# Life Tasks In Balance

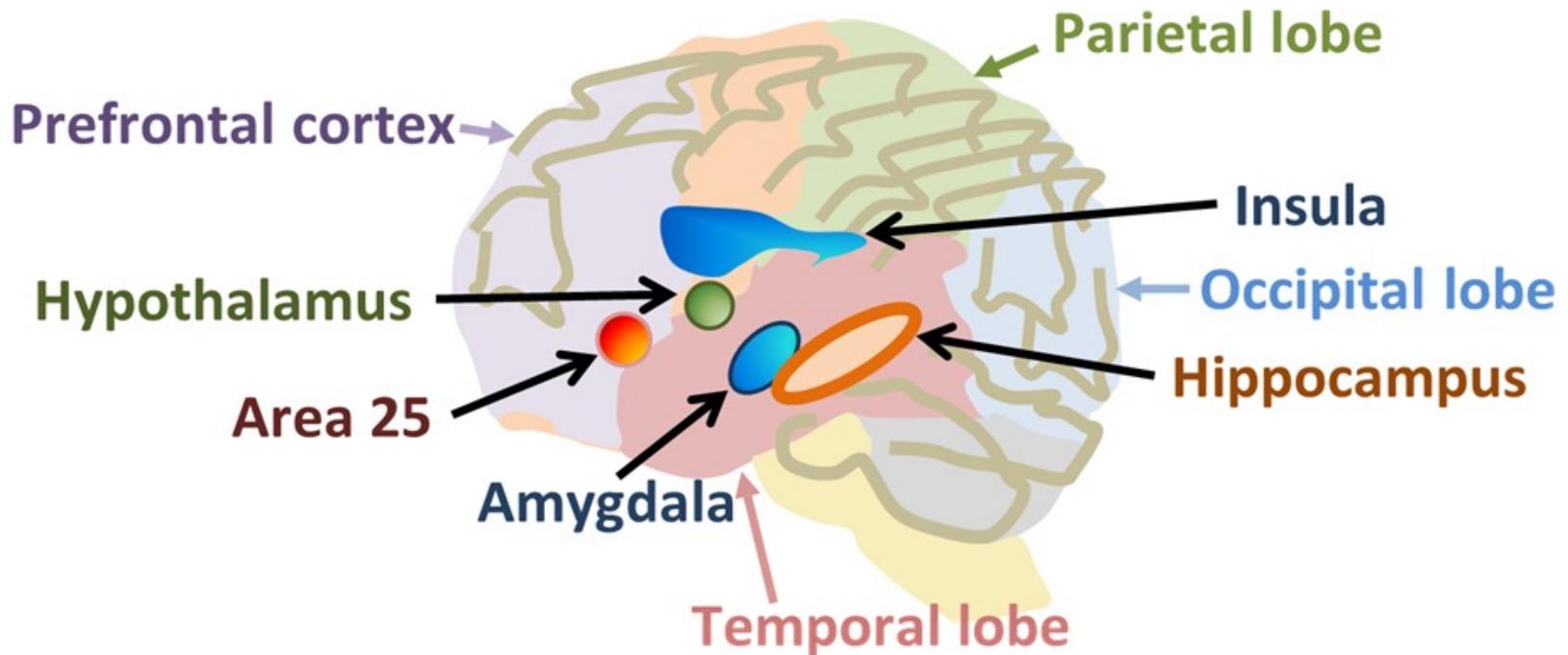


# Optimum Human Functioning



# When in Optimum Human Functioning

- **Cerebral Cortex** is the intentional and auto-pilot of the Mind, Brain and Body and when it is in full attunement we can feel the reality of our experience and act on it without getting overwhelmed and lost in it. The Cerebral Cortex governs the following: body regulation; attuned communication; emotional balance; response reflexivity; insight; empathy; and fear modulation.
- **Insula (deep in Cerebral Cortex)** activates the same brain compassion circuits as the parental love for a child. Its activity is enhanced when we focus with intentional compassion and feel loving kindness for those who are suffering.
- It creates positive regard for those who are suffering and activates the mind-body circuits of intentional action to help one suffering to confront and deal with their difficulty
- Ancient traditions call this *Kuan Yin*: “the one who listens and hears the cries of the world in order to come and help”



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# Self Protection: Our Bodies Fight to Maintain Homeostasis (Optimum Human Functioning)

All organisms are structured for self-protection:

safe – not safe

Coping strategies linked to our survival and safeguarding mechanisms, emotions, behaviours, and cognitive processes

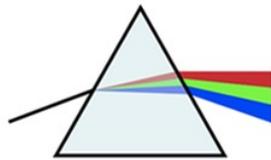
‘Symptoms’ often triggered by “Unhelpful Thinking Styles” relate to threat and hijack our rational thinking and are embedded in our Private Logic

We are like “Goldilocks”, we function best when our perception is that things are “just right”

Rock, David. (2009). Your Brain At Work. Harper Collins. New York, N.Y.

# Unhelpful Thinking Styles Reinforce Private Logic and Safeguarding

## Selective abstraction



Drawing conclusions on the basis of just one of many elements of a situation.

## Minimisation



Downplaying the importance of a positive thought, emotion or event.

## Personalisation

***"this is my fault"***

Attributing personal responsibility for events which aren't under a person's control.

## Arbitrary inference



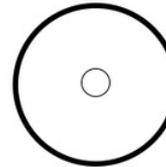
Drawing conclusions when there is little or no evidence

## Magnification



"Making a mountain out of a molehill" - blowing things out of proportion.

## Overgeneralisation



Making sweeping conclusions based on a single event.

# By Transforming Neural Pathways

## Meditation Helps to:

- Reduce distress levels and keep you in Optimum Human Functioning by reducing the mind's constant chatter and process our emotions without getting lost in them.
- Enhance Compassion and Empathy
- Break out of Overthinking and Negativity Bias by retraining our habits of focus thereby enhancing your Compassion Circuits
- Facilitate change by being grounded and non-reactive
- Enhance our Sense of Self and Build Confidence and Boost Morale

\*\*\*(Loving Kindness Exercise)

## Loving-Kindness Practice Exercise

- Begin by sitting in a relaxed and comfortable position and gently close your eyes
- As you sit become aware of the movement of your breath draw in and let it out slowly
- Awareness of the changing sensations of the breath as it moves in and out of your body.
  
- And now shifting awareness to the heart centre – just allowing the awareness to rest in the heart- you may notice warmth, softness, maybe hardness or tightness in this area—whatever your experience may be is just fine.
  
- And now beginning to direct toward yourself, this care, this wish for your own well-being and happiness. You may find it helpful to keep an image or felt sense of yourself as an adult or a child in your mind. Or you may find it helpful to place your hand upon your heart to feel this connection with yourself – to feel this warm care.
- Silently and softly, as though arising in the heart, begin to repeat any of the following phrases as they feel right for you. Feel free to adapt any of these phrases to create your own:
- ***May I be safe and protected from inner and outer harm***  
***May I be happy and peaceful***  
***May I be healthy and strong***  
***May I live in this world with ease and well-being***

***Now direct these thoughts to someone who is close to you. Now direct these thoughts to someone you are in conflict with..... Now just sit and direct these thoughts back to yourself.....Let yourself be with your experience***

***(Warning: empirically validated evidence showed that the practice leads to doubling of charitable donations)***

## **Personal Energizers that help you stay in the Optimum Human Functioning Zone**

Mentally review your present situation and list the activities, people, places which energize and rejuvenate you:

- Support you
- Encourage you
- Balance you
- Laugh with you
- Engage you
- Do restorative positive focus groups with positively energizing people.

# GLAD Exercise

**At the end of each day as you reflect on the events of the day turn your mind to:**

- **G:** think of something for which you have **Gratitude**;
- **L:** focus on something new you have **Learned**;
- **A:** focus on what **Appreciation** you showed to someone and someone showed to you;
- **D:** focus on something that **Delighted** you.

*The true journey of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having fresh eyes.*

*It is an inside job.*

*How we perceive Self,  
Others, and the World.*

*Self-attunement creates  
Resilience and Connection*



**Marcel Proust**

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