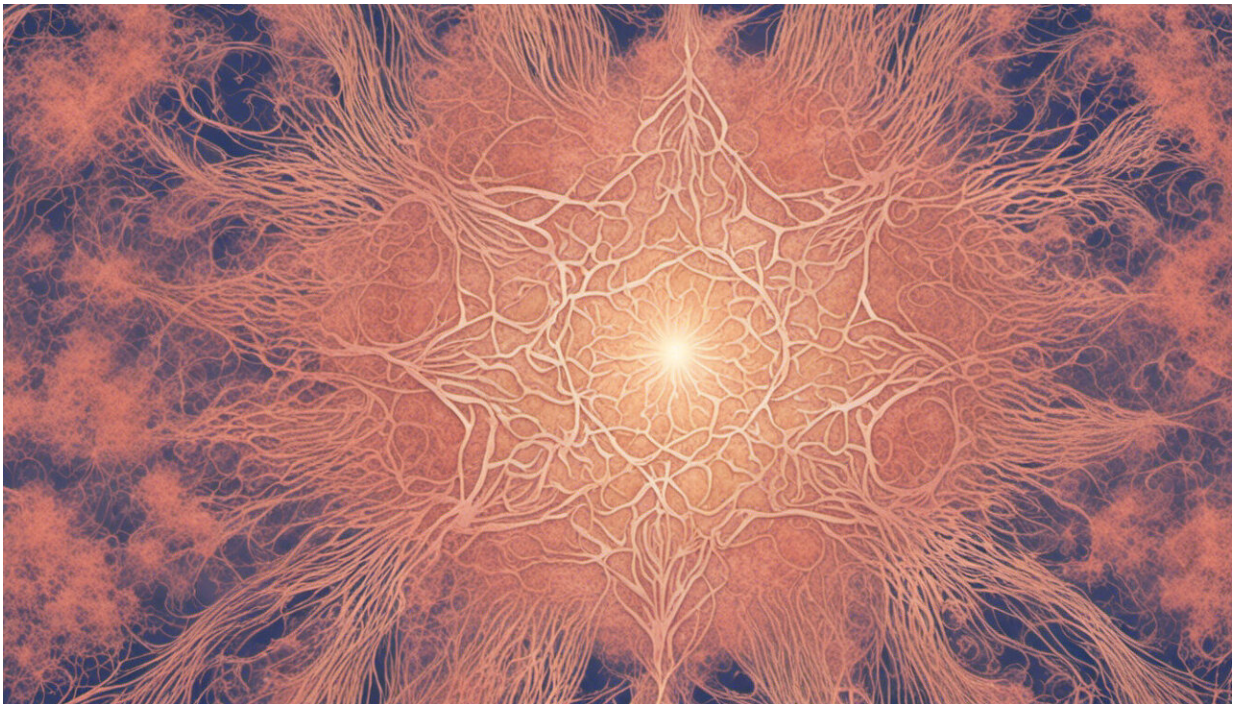


Meditation helps pinpoint neurological differences between two types of love

February 12 2014, by Bill Hathaway



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

(Medical Xpress)—These findings won't appear on any Hallmark card, but romantic love tends to activate the same reward areas of the brain as cocaine, research has shown.

Now Yale School of Medicine researchers studying meditators have

found that a more selfless variety of love—a deep and genuine wish for the happiness of others without expectation of reward—actually turns off the same reward areas that light up when lovers see each other.

"When we truly, selflessly wish for the well-being of others, we're not getting that same rush of excitement that comes with, say, a tweet from our [romantic love](#) interest, because it's not about us at all," said Judson Brewer, adjunct professor of psychiatry at Yale now at the University of Massachusetts.

Brewer and Kathleen Garrison, postdoctoral researcher in Yale's Department of Psychiatry, report their findings in a paper scheduled to be published online Feb. 12 in the journal *Brain and Behavior*.

The neurological boundaries between these two types of love become clear in fMRI scans of experienced meditators. The reward centers of the brain that are strongly activated by a lover's face (or a picture of cocaine) are almost completely turned off when a meditator is instructed to silently repeat sayings such as "May all beings be happy."

Such mindfulness meditations are a staple of Buddhism and are now commonly practiced in Western stress reduction programs, Brewer notes. The tranquility of this selfless love for others—exemplified in such religious figures such as Mother Theresa or the Dalai Llama—is diametrically opposed to the anxiety caused by a lovers' quarrel or extended separation. And it carries its own rewards.

"The intent of this practice is to specifically foster selfless [love](#)—just putting it out there and not looking for or wanting anything in return," Brewer said. "If you're wondering where the reward is in being selfless, just reflect on how it feels when you see people out there helping others, or even when you hold the door for somebody the next time you are at Starbucks."

Provided by Yale University

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