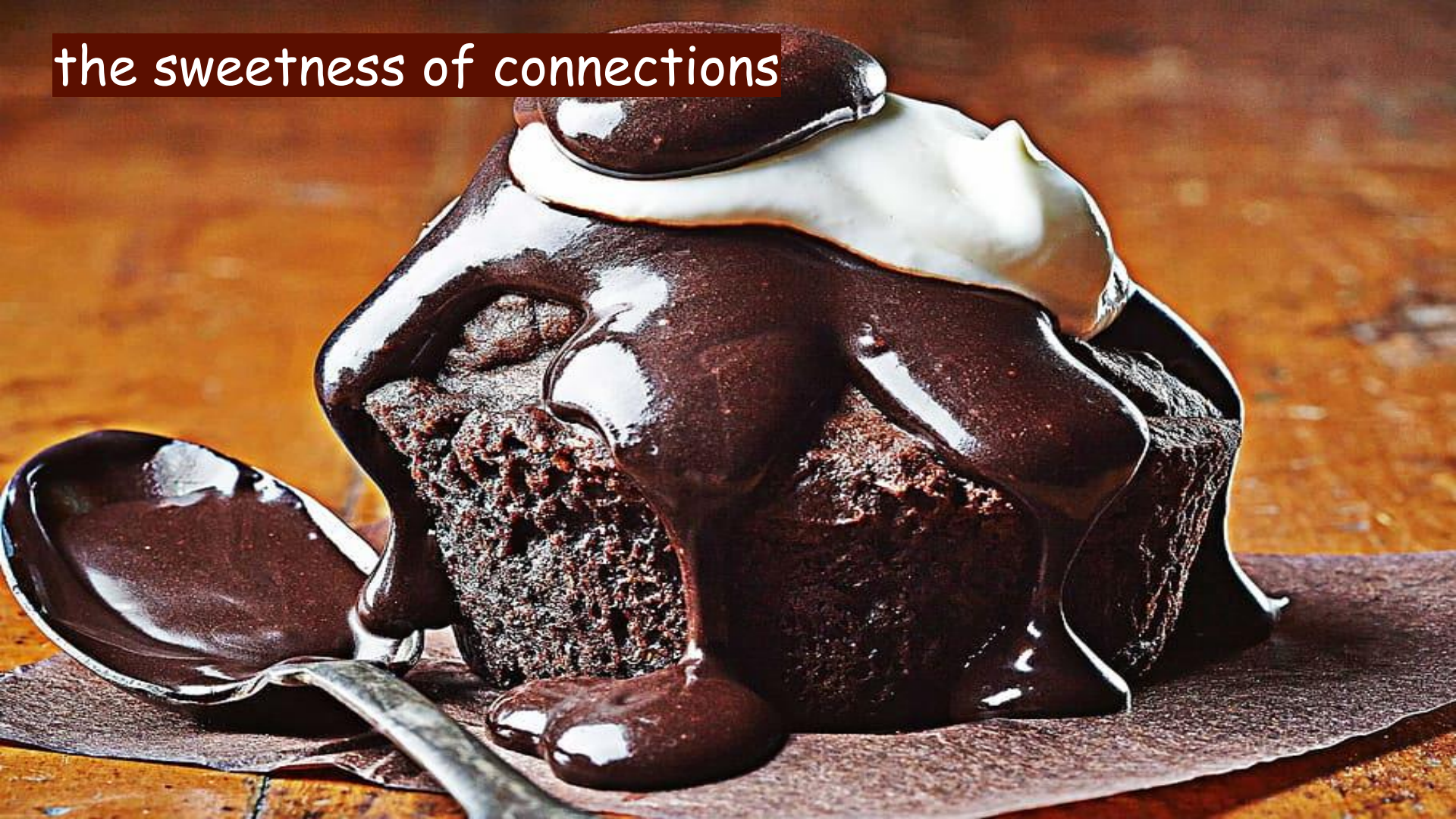


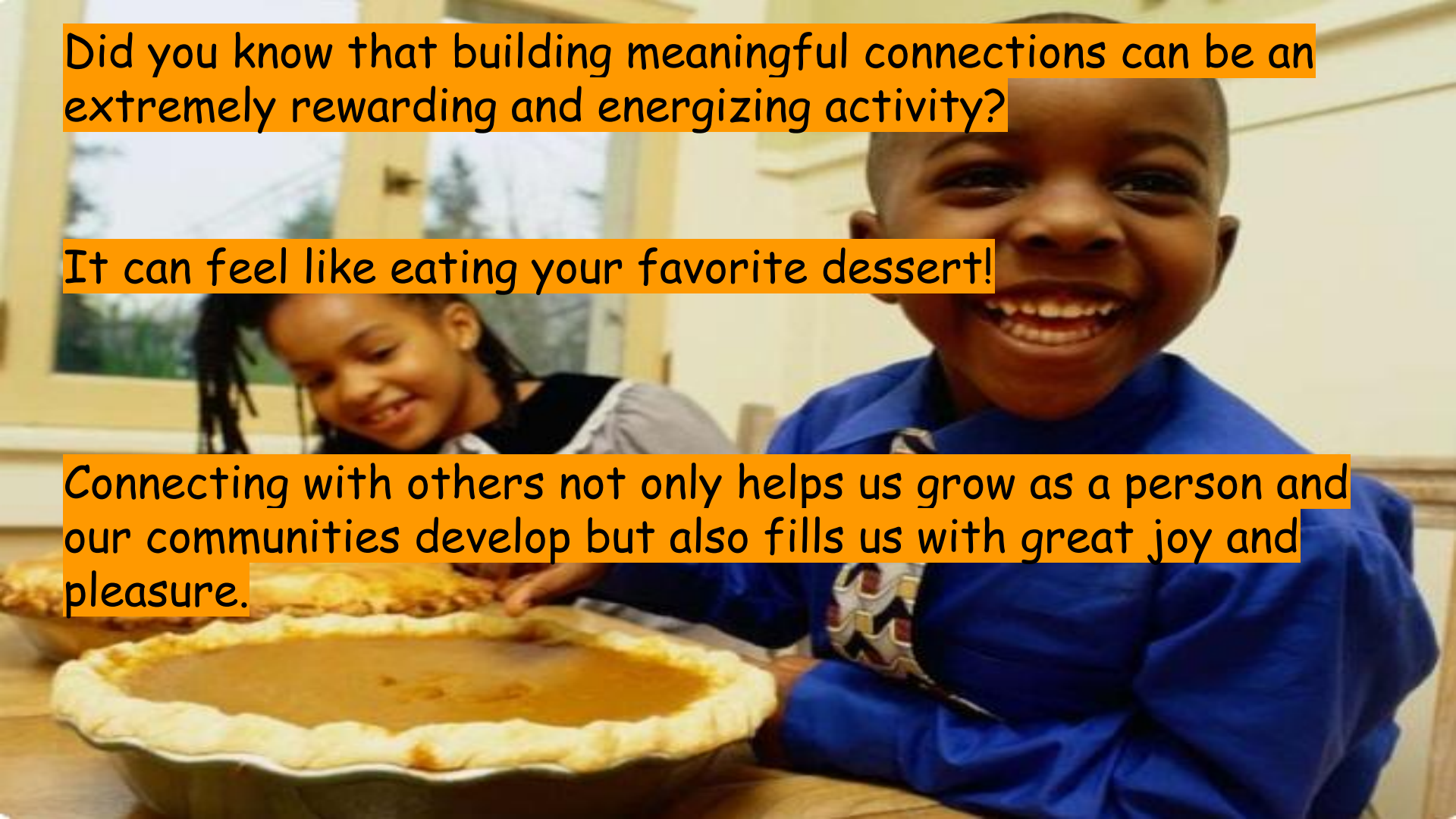
the sweetness of connections

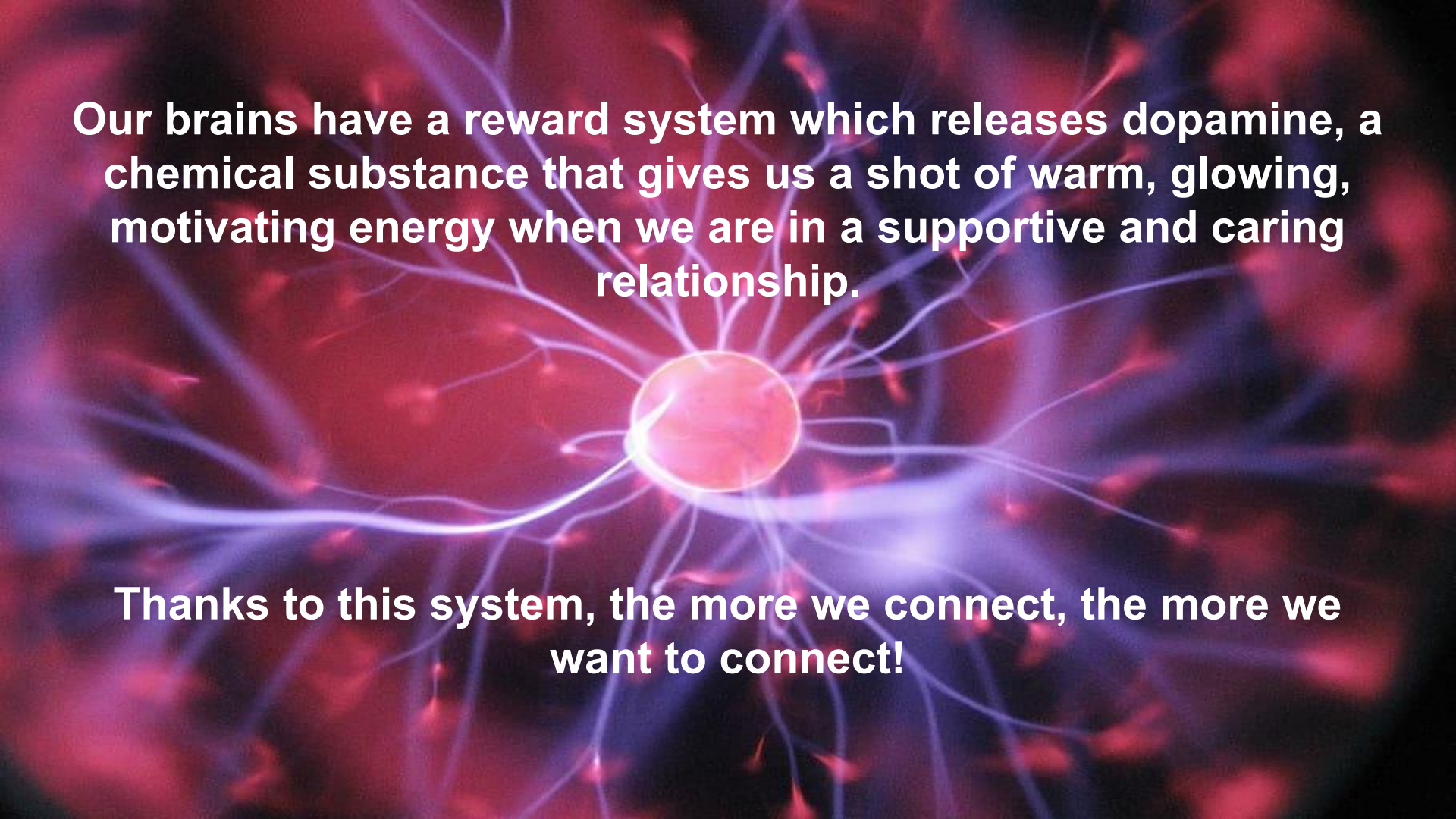


Did you know that building meaningful connections can be an extremely rewarding and energizing activity?

It can feel like eating your favorite dessert!

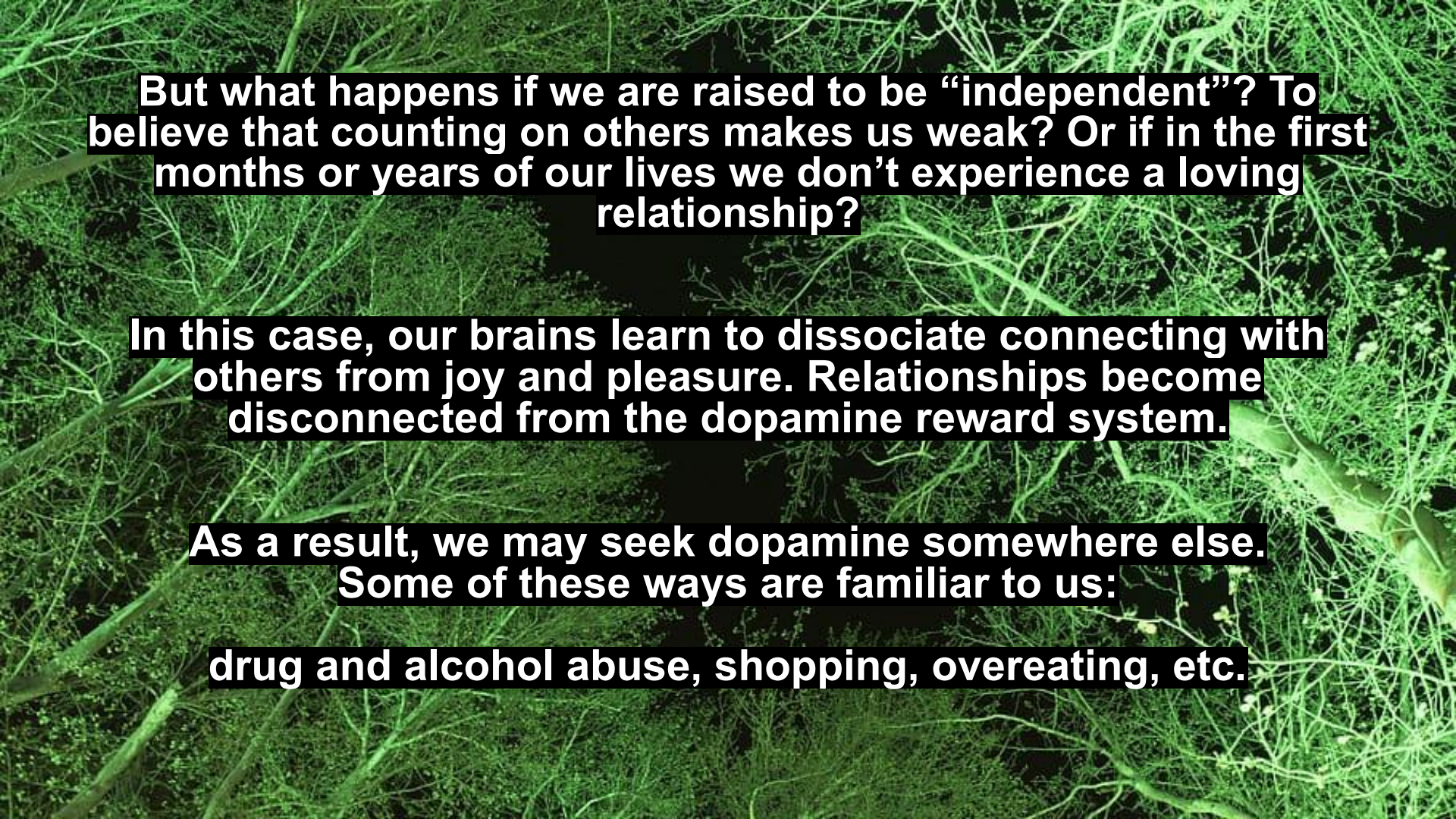
Connecting with others not only helps us grow as a person and our communities develop but also fills us with great joy and pleasure.



A glowing brain with neural connections. The brain is depicted as a central, glowing orange sphere with numerous thin, glowing blue and purple lines radiating outwards, representing neural pathways. The background is dark with a subtle pattern of glowing red and purple spots, suggesting a complex neural network.

**Our brains have a reward system which releases dopamine, a chemical substance that gives us a shot of warm, glowing, motivating energy when we are in a supportive and caring relationship.**

**Thanks to this system, the more we connect, the more we want to connect!**



**But what happens if we are raised to be “independent”? To believe that counting on others makes us weak? Or if in the first months or years of our lives we don’t experience a loving relationship?**

**In this case, our brains learn to dissociate connecting with others from joy and pleasure. Relationships become disconnected from the dopamine reward system.**

**As a result, we may seek dopamine somewhere else. Some of these ways are familiar to us:**

**drug and alcohol abuse, shopping, overeating, etc.**

An illustration of an underwater scene. In the upper left, a green and white striped fish with a large eye looks towards the right. In the upper right, a smaller yellow and white striped fish looks towards the left. The background is a deep blue ocean with bubbles and various colorful coral reefs and sea anemones in shades of red, yellow, and purple. The overall style is whimsical and cartoonish.

**Everyone wants to feel good!**

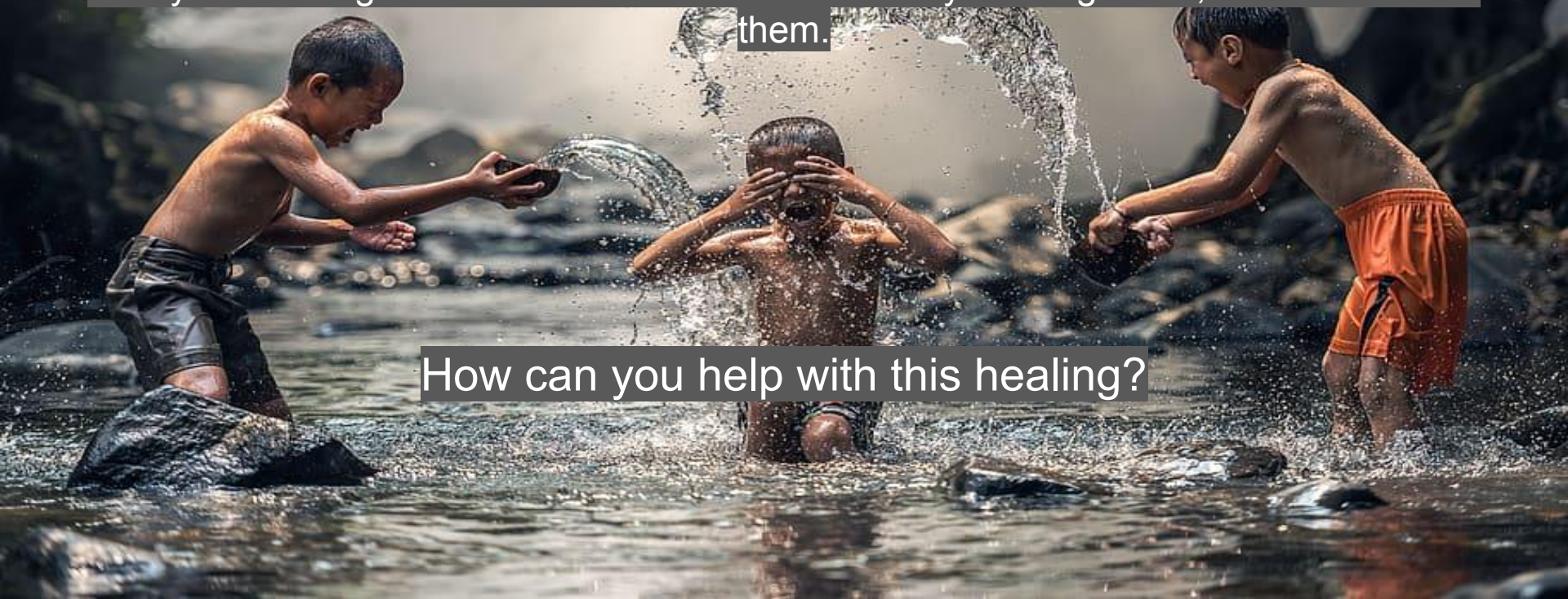
**But our source of dopamine can be as constructive as making friends, helping others, cuddling a baby—or it can be as destructive as drug addiction and consumerism.**

**When we are under pressure to be highly competitive and independent, we are at risk of cutting ourselves off from one of the primary healthy sources of dopamine.**

It is possible, however, to rewire our brain so that it gets more pleasure out of relationships—to crave human contact instead of unhealthy substitutes.

There is plenty we can do to nourish our brain pathways for connection! If they are damaged we can start to heal them. If they are neglected, we can cultivate them.

How can you help with this healing?



*What is this quote asking us to do?*


*If you wanted to start practicing this today, what would you do?*

*Can you think of any way to encourage your friends to practice it?*



**If you meet those of different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness. Think of them as different coloured roses growing in the beautiful garden of humanity, and rejoice to be among them."**

**Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks**

 Stand By Me - Cover







**Poetry of Resistance and  
PhotoSophia sharing**