# **What religion does to your brain**

Research in the field of "neurotheology" or the neuroscience of theological belief has made some surprising discoveries that will change how we think about spirituality and religion.

For example, some scientists suggest that religious experience activates the same brain circuits as sex and drugs.

Researchers led by Dr. Jeff Anderson, Ph.D. — from the University of Utah School of Medicine in Salt Lake City — examined the brains of 19 young Mormons using a functional MRI scanner.

When asked whether, and to what degree, the participants were "feeling the spirit," those who reported the most intense spiritual feelings displayed increased activity in the bilateral nucleus accumbens, as well as the frontal attentional and ventromedial prefrontal cortical loci.**These pleasure and reward-processing brain areas are also active when we engage in sexual activities, listen to music, gamble, and take drugs. The participants also reported feelings of peace and physical warmth**. When study participants were instructed to think about a savior, about being with their families for eternity, about their heavenly rewards, their brains and bodies physically responded," says first study author Michael Ferguson.These findings replicates those of earlier studies which found that engaging in spiritual practices raises levels of seretonin,which is the "happiness" neurotransmitter, and endorphins." Such neurophysiological effects of religion seem to give us a new concept about religion.