Topics

- Using your mind to change your brain
- Loving nature
- Benevolence
- Self-compassion
- Lovingkindness
Common - and Fertile - Ground

Neuroscience

Psychology

Contemplative Practice
We ask, “What is a thought?”

We don’t know,

yet we are thinking continually.

Venerable Tenzin Palmo
Using Your Mind to Change Your Brain
Tibetan Monk, Boundless Compassion
You can use your mind to change your brain to change your mind for the better.

This is self-directed neuroplasticity.

How to do this, in skillful ways?
Loving Nature
Evolutionary History

The Triune Brain - (P. MacLean 1990)
Three Stages of Brain Evolution

- **Reptilian:**
  - Brainstem, cerebellum, hypothalamus
  - Reactive and reflexive
  - *Avoid* hazards

- **Mammalian:**
  - Limbic system, cingulate, early cortex
  - Memory, emotion, social behavior
  - *Approach* rewards

- **Human:**
  - Massive cerebral cortex
  - Abstract thought, language, cooperative planning, empathy
  - *Attach* to “us”
When not threatened, ill, in pain, hungry, upset, or chemically disturbed, most people settle into being:

- **Peaceful** (the Avoid system)
- **Happy** (the Approach system)
- **Loving** (the Attach system)

This is the brain in its natural, *Responsive* mode.
The Responsive Mode
The Social Brain

- Social capabilities have driven recent brain evolution.

- Reptiles and fish avoid and approach. Mammals and birds *attach* as well - especially primates and humans - and they have bigger brains than reptiles and fish.

- More social primate species have larger cortex.

- Since the first hominids began making tools 2.5 million years ago, the brain has tripled in size. Much of this new cortex is devoted to social functions (e.g., family attachments, empathy, language, cooperation, friendship, romance, love).
All sentient beings developed through natural selection in such a way that pleasant sensations serve as their guide, and especially the pleasure derived from sociability and from loving our families.

Charles Darwin
Benevolence
If there is anything I have learned about [people], it is that there is a deeper spirit of altruism than is ever evident.

Just as the rivers we see are minor compared to the underground streams, so, too, the idealism that is visible is minor compared to what people carry in their hearts unreleased or scarcely released.

(Hu)mankind is waiting and longing for those who can accomplish the task of untying what is knotted, and bringing these underground waters to the surface.

Albert Schweitzer
If people knew, as I know, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would they allow the stain of niggardliness to obsess them and root in their minds.

Even if it were their last morsel, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared it, if there were someone to share it with.

The Buddha
Benevolence Takes Many Forms

- Attention
- Heart
- Practice
- Time
- Patience
- Service
- Food
- Money
Self-Compassion
The root of compassion is compassion for oneself.

Pema Chodron
If one going down into a river, swollen and swiftly flowing, is carried away by the current -- how can one help others across?

The Buddha
The good life, as I conceive it, is a happy life. I do not mean that if you are good you will be happy; I mean that if you are happy you will be good.

Bertrand Russell
How to Take in the Good (TIG)

1. **Have** a good experience.
   - You are already having one.
   - You deliberately recognize a good fact and let it become a good experience.

2. **Extend** the good experience in:
   - Time - for 10-20-30+ seconds
   - Space - in your body and feelings
   - Intensity - help it become stronger

3. **Absorb** the good experience by intending and sensing that is becoming a part of you, woven into the fabric of your brain and being.
Self-Compassion

- Compassion is the wish that a being not suffer, combined with sympathetic concern. Self-compassion simply applies that to oneself. It is not self-pity, complaining, or wallowing in pain.

- Studies show that self-compassion buffers stress and increases resilience and self-worth.

- But self-compassion is hard for many people, due to feelings of unworthiness, self-criticism, or “internalized oppression.” To encourage the neural substrates of self-compassion:
  - Get the sense of being cared about by someone else.
  - Bring to mind someone you naturally feel compassion for.
  - Sink into the experience of compassion in your body.
  - Then shift the compassion to yourself, perhaps with phrases like: “May I not suffer. May the pain of this moment pass.”
“Anthem”

Ring the bells that still can 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
Lovingkindness
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
Lovingkindness Practice

- Types of wishes
  - Safety
  - Health
  - Happiness
  - Ease

- Types of beings
  - Self
  - Benefactor
  - Friend
  - Neutral
  - Difficult

- Continually “omitting none” in all directions
Outstanding behavior, blameless action, open hands to all, and selfless giving:

This is a blessing supreme.

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

Lao Tsu
Great Books

See www.RickHanson.net for other great books.

See www.RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.


Key Papers - 2


- Hanson, R. 2008. Seven facts about the brain that incline the mind to joy. In *Measuring the immeasurable: The scientific case for spirituality*. Sounds True.


Key Papers - 4


Where to Find Rick Hanson Online

http://www.youtube.com/BuddhasBrain
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www.RickHanson.net
www.WiseBrain.org