Think not lightly of good, saying, "It will not come to me."

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

Likewise, the wise one, gathering it little by little, fills oneself with good.

Dhammapada 9.122
Hardwiring Happiness:
Turning Passing Experiences into Lasting Inner Strength and Peace

Stockholm
June 11, 2015

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The Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom
WiseBrain.org RickHanson.net
The Fruit and the Path
What Is Well-Being?

Hedonia

Eudaimonia
Benefits of Well-Being

- Feels good (duh)
- Better health and longer life
- Greater resilience
- More productive and successful
- More fulfilling and stronger relationships
- More cooperative, giving, and loving toward others
- More inner resources for healing
- Less basis inside for craving and suffering
What Develops Well-Being?
Finding Resources

World

Body

Mind
Resources in Your Mind

- Understandings
- Capabilities
- Positive emotions
- Attitudes
- Motivations
- Virtues
INNER STRENGTHS ARE BUILT FROM BRAIN STRUCTURE
How do you get these inner strengths into your brain?
Two wolves in the heart
Self-Directed Neuroplasticity
Mental activity entails underlying neural activity.
Ardent, Diligent, Resolute, and Mindful
Repeated mental activity entails repeated neural activity.

Repeated neural activity builds neural structure.
Neurons that fire together,
wire together.
We can use the mind
To change the brain
To change the mind for the better
To benefit ourselves and other beings.
Positive Neuroplasticity
The Neuropsychology of Learning

Learning – changing neural structure and function – has two stages:

From short-term memory buffers to long-term storage

From state to trait

From activation to installation.
Inner strengths are grown from experiences of them – activated states – that are installed as traits.
You become more compassionate by installing experiences of compassion.

You become more grateful by installing experiences of gratitude.

You become more mindful by installing experiences of mindfulness.
Most experiences of inner strengths are enjoyable.

They feel good because they are good for us and others.
Unfortunately, we’re good at activation but bad at installation.
Meanwhile, painful, harmful experiences are being rapidly converted into neural structure.
The Negativity Bias
The Brain’s Negativity Bias

As our ancestors evolved, avoiding “sticks” was more important than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Install it fast in implicit memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
As our ancestors evolved, avoiding “sticks” was more important than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it,
4. Install it fast in implicit memory,
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
The brain is good at learning from bad experiences but bad at learning from good ones.

Even though learning from good experiences is the primary way to grow resources for well-being.
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias

bad experiences

good experiences
The Negativity Bias
Taking in the Good
Learning to Take in the Good
Let’s Try It

- **Notice** something beneficial already present in awareness.
  - Have the experience.
  - Enrich it.
  - Absorb it.

- **Create** the experience of compassion.
  - Have the experience.
  - Enrich it.
  - Absorb it.
Have a Good Experience
Elements of Experience

- **Thought** – belief; perspective; expectation; image; memory; idea

- **Perception** – sensation (e.g., relaxation, vitality); sight; sound; taste; smell

- **Emotion** – feeling; mood

- **Desire** – want; wish; hope; value; drive; motivation; purpose; dream; passion; determination

- **Action** – behavior; posture; knowing how to
The Two Ways
To Have a Beneficial Experience

Notice one you are already having.
- In the foreground of awareness
- In the background

Create one.
How to Create A Beneficial Experience

Look for good facts in:

1. Immediate situation
2. Current or recent events
3. Stable conditions
4. Your character
5. The past
6. The future
7. Bad situations
8. The lives of others
9. Your imagination

10. Care about others
11. Directly evoke a beneficial experience
12. Produce good facts
13. Share about good facts with others
Turning a Good Fact Into a Good Experience

- Bring awareness to your body.

- Soften and open yourself.

- Be a little active in your mind, recognizing aspects of the good fact that naturally elicit an experience.

- Imagine how another person might naturally feel in response to the good fact.

- Have kindness for yourself, encouraging yourself to have a beneficial experience.
Enrich It
How to Enrich an Experience

- Duration
- Intensity
- Multimodality
- Novelty
- Salience
Absorb It
How to Absorb an Experience

- **Enriching** makes the experience more powerful. **Absorbing** makes memory systems more receptive by priming and sensitizing them.

- Intend and sense the experience is sinking into you.
  - Imagery – Water into a sponge; golden dust sifting down; a jewel into the treasure chest of the heart
  - Sensation – Warm soothing balm

- Giving over to the experience; letting it change you

- Letting go of resisting, grasping, clinging: “craving”
Link Positive and Negative Material
Conditions for the Link Step

- Divided awareness; holding two things at once

- Not hijacked by negative; if so, drop negative

- Positive material is more prominent in awareness.
Degree of Engagement with Negative

- The idea of the negative material
- A felt sense of the negative material
- The positive material goes into the negative material (e.g., soothing balm, filling up hollow places, connecting with younger layers).

→ Throughout, the positive material remains more prominent in awareness.
The Tip of the Root

- For the fourth step of TIG, try to get at the youngest, most vulnerable layer of painful material.

- The “tip of the root” is commonly in childhood. In general, the brain is most responsive to negative experiences in early childhood.

Prerequisites

- Understanding the need to get at younger layers
- Compassion and support for the inner child
- Capacity to “presence” young material without flooding
HEAL Yourself

Have a positive experience.

Enrich it.

Absorb it.

Link positive and negative material.
Have It, Enjoy It
In the Garden of the Mind

1. Be with what is there.
2. Decrease the negative.
3. Increase the positive.

Let be. Let go. Let in.

Mindfulness is present in all three.

“Being with” is primary – but not enough.
We also need “wise effort.”
Join us for **Cultivating Inner Strength - Monastic Daylong [Dana - No Fee Day]**
with Ayya Anandabodhi and Ayya Santacitta
on **Sunday, July 8**
from 9:30 am - 5 pm.

(Photo by Ed Ritger)
Let’s Try It

- **Notice** the experience present in awareness that you are basically alright right now.
  - Have the experience.
  - Enrich it.
  - Absorb it.

- **Create** the experience of gratitude.
  - Have the experience.
  - Enrich it.
  - Absorb it.
It’s Good to Take in the Good

- Development of specific inner strengths
- Implicit benefits
- Sensitizes brain to the positive
- Creates positive cycles
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tsu
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then you’ll take turns, with one partner mainly speaking while the other person listens, exploring this question:

What are some of the good facts in your life these days?

→ As the listener, find a genuine happiness at these good things in the life of your partner.
Using Positive Neuroplasticity
With Others
The Four Ways to Offer a Method

- Doing it implicitly
- Teaching it and then leaving it up to the person
- Doing it explicitly with the person
- Asking the person to do it on his or her own
Using HEAL in Trainings

- Take five minutes to explain its rationale and teach it explicitly.

- In the flow, occasionally encourage enriching and absorbing, using natural language.

- Tell people they can use HEAL outside of class to deepen internalization of what they’re learning.

- Don’t use HEAL when it’s inappropriate (e.g., radically choiceless awareness, highly self-critical about any kind of performance).
Key Resource Experiences
The Evolving Brain

The Triune Brain - (P. MacLean 1990)
## Meeting Three Core Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>Approaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Heartfelt</td>
<td>Attaching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Craving Arising . . .

*When there is a presumed or felt deficit or disturbance of safety, satisfaction, or connection:*

The **body** fires up into the stress response; outputs exceed inputs; long-term building is deferred.

The **mind** fires up into:
- **Fear** (Avoiding)
- **Frustration** (Approaching)
- **Heartache** (Attaching)

The brain in allostatic, **Reactive, craving** mode
Craving Passing Away . . .

With no presumed or felt deficit or disturbance of safety, satisfaction, and connection:

The body defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing, and pleasant abiding.

The mind defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:
- **Peace** (Avoiding)
- **Contentment** (Approaching)
- **Love** (Attaching)

The brain in homeostatic, **Responsive**, **minimal** craving mode
Choices . . .

Reactive Mode

Responsive Mode
Can You Stay in the Green Zone When:

Things are unpleasant?

Things are pleasant?

Things are heartfelt?
Coming Home, Staying Home

Positive experiences of core needs met - the felt sense of safety, satisfaction, and connection - activate Responsive mode.

Activated Responsive states can become installed Responsive traits. Responsive traits foster Responsive states.

Responsive states and traits enable us to stay Responsive with challenges.
Pet the Lizard
Feed the Mouse
Hug the Monkey
Some Types of Resource Experiences

**Avoiding Harms**
- Feeling basically alright right now
- Feeling protected, strong, safe, at peace
- The sense that awareness itself is untroubled

**Approaching Rewards**
- Feeling basically full, the enoughness in this moment as it is
- Feeling pleasured, glad, grateful, satisfied
- Therapeutic, spiritual, or existential realizations

**Attaching to Others**
- Feeling basically connected
- Feeling included, seen, liked, appreciated, loved
- Feeling compassionate, kind, generous, loving
# Resources for Avoiding Harms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weakness</td>
<td>Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freezing, immobilization</td>
<td>Action, venting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflated threats</td>
<td>Accurate appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alarm</td>
<td>Protection, calming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>Relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry, fear</td>
<td>Feeling alright now, making a plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritation, anger</td>
<td>Big picture, peace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feeling alright now, making a plan, Big picture, peace
**Resources for Approaching Rewards**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What I don’t have</td>
<td>What I do have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity</td>
<td>Enoughness, fullness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointed, sad</td>
<td>Gratitude, gladness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration, failure</td>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bored, numb</td>
<td>Pleasure, excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Loved and loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving up</td>
<td>Aspire, lived by good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivenness</td>
<td>Already satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## RESOURCES FOR ATTACHING TO OTHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left out, excluded</td>
<td>Belonging, wanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequacy, shame</td>
<td>Appreciated, respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignored, unseen</td>
<td>Receiving empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>Friendship, caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to others and oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Recognize it hurts you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envy, jealousy</td>
<td>Self-compassion, take action, good will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling stifled</td>
<td>Skillful assertiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self-Compassion

- Compassion is the wish beings not suffer, with warm-hearted concern. Compassion is sincere even if we can’t make things better.

- Self-compassion simply applies this to oneself.

- To encourage self-compassion:
  - Get the sense of being cared about.
  - Bring to mind beings you care about. Find compassion for them.
  - Shift the compassion to yourself.
“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
Peace

Contentment

Love
Think not lightly of good, saying, "It will not come to me."

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

Likewise, the wise one, gathering it little by little, fills oneself with good.

Dhammapada 9.122
Suggested Books

See www.RickHanson.net for other great books.

Key Papers - 1

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 - 3


Key Papers - 4


Where to Find Rick Hanson Online

Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence

www.rickhanson.net/hardwiringhappiness

Personal website: www.rickhanson.net

Wellspring Institute: www.wisebrain.org

youtube.com/drrhanson

facebook.com/rickhansonphd