

Taking in the Good Course:

Professional Training

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Questions about Key Points

What Shapes Your Course in Life?

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources

A network of glowing yellow neurons with a central neuron highlighted in green. The neurons are interconnected by a dense web of thin, yellow, fiber-like structures. The central neuron has a bright green nucleus and is surrounded by a network of yellow fibers. The background is dark, making the glowing neurons stand out.

Neurons that fire together,

wire together.

Self-Directed Neuroplasticity

We can use the mind

To change the brain

To change the mind for the better

To benefit ourselves and other beings.

*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.*

Inner Strengths Include

- **Capabilities** (e.g., mindfulness, insight, emotional intelligence, resilience, executive functions, impulse control)
- **Positive emotions** (e.g., gratitude, self-worth, love, self-compassion, secure attachment, gladness, awe, serenity)
- **Attitudes** (e.g., openness, determination, optimism, confidence, approach orientation, tolerance, self-respect)
- **Somatic inclinations** (e.g., vitality, relaxation, grit, helpfulness)
- **Virtues** (e.g., wisdom, patience, energy, generosity, restraint)

Growing Inner Strengths

Inner strengths are grown mainly from beneficial mental states that are turned into beneficial neural traits.

Change in neural structure and function (learning, memory) involves activation and installation.

We grow inner strengths by internalizing experiences of them and their related factors.

Without this installation – without turning passing mental states into enduring neural structure – there is no learning, no change in the brain.

Activation without installation is pleasant, but has no lasting value.

What fraction of your beneficial mental states ever become neural structure?

*The same research that proves therapy works
shows no improvement in outcomes
over the last 30 or so years.*

Scott Miller

HEAL by Taking in the Good

Activation

1. Have a beneficial experience.

Installation

2. Enrich it.
3. Absorb it.
4. Link it with negative material. [optional]

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

Aspects 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

Reflections So Far

Noticing and creating an experience are different.

There are lots of ways to create experiences.

Beneficial experiences are usually based on facts.

Recognizing good facts does not deny bad ones.

Good facts about yourself are facts like any other.

Negative Experiences In Context

- Negative about negative --> more negative
- Some inner strengths come only from negative experiences, e.g., knowing you' ll do the hard thing.
- But negative experiences have inherent costs, in discomfort and stress.
- Could an inner strength have been developed without the costs of negative experiences?
- Many negative experiences are pain with no gain.

The Brain's Negativity Bias

- As our ancestors evolved, avoiding “sticks” was more important for survival than getting “carrots.”
- Negative stimuli:
 - More attention and processing
 - Greater motivational focus: loss aversion
- Preferential encoding in implicit memory:
 - We learn faster from pain than pleasure.
 - Negative interactions: more impactful than positive
 - Easy to create learned helplessness, hard to undo
 - Rapid sensitization to negative through cortisol

Three Ways to Engage the Mind

- Three fundamental ways to engage the mind:
 - Be with it. Decrease negative. Increase positive.
 - The garden: Observe. Pull weeds. Plant flowers.
 - Let be. Let go. Let in.
- The three work together.
- A natural sequence: Be with something negative . . .
Release it . . . Replace it with something beneficial.
- Mindfulness is to be present in all three.

It's Good to Take in the Good

- Development of specific inner strengths
 - General - resilience, positive mood, feeling loved
 - “Antidote experiences” - Healing old wounds, filling the hole in the heart
- Implicit benefits:
 - Shows that there is still good in the world
 - Being active rather than passive
 - Treating yourself kindly, like you matter
 - Rights an unfair imbalance, given the negativity bias
 - Training of attention and executive functions
- Sensitizes brain to positive: like Velcro for good

Research on the HEAL Process

- With collaborators from the University of California, a 2013 study on the HEAL course, using a randomized waitlist control group design (46 subjects).
- Course participants, compared to the control group, reported more Contentment, Self-Esteem, Satisfaction with Life, Savoring, and Gratitude.
- After the course and at two month follow-up, pooled participants also reported more Love, Compassion, Self-Compassion, Mindfulness, Self-Control, Positive Rumination, Joy, Amusement, Awe, and Happiness, and less Anxiety and Depression.

The Responsive Mode Is Home Base

In the Green Zone, the body defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing, and recovering.

The mind defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

- **Peace** (the Avoiding system)
- **Contentment** (the Approaching system)
- **Love** (the Attaching system)

This is the brain in its homeostatic ***Responsive, minimal craving*** mode.

The Reactive Mode Is Leaving Home

In the Red Zone, the body fires up into the stress response: fight, flight, or freeze; outputs exceed inputs; long-term building is deferred.

The mind fires up into:

- **Fear** (the Avoiding system)
- **Frustration** (the Approaching system)
- **Heartache** (the Attaching system)

This is the brain in its allostatic, ***Reactive, craving*** mode.

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.

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 pleased, 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

Coming Home

Peace

Contentment

Love

Reflections on Fear

- Fear is normal. Avoiding harms is fundamental.
- Much anxiety is unnecessary and unreasonable.
- We tend to overestimate threats and underestimate opportunities and resources.
- People can be afraid . . . to give up fear.
- Remember that you can give up unnecessary anxiety and still remain appropriately cautious, watchful, and strong.

Factors of Responsive Approaches

- Recognizing costs of Reactive mode
- Feeling strong, protected, alright, calm, relaxing
- Feeling grateful and glad about what you do have
- Recognizing how you've been successful with challenges
- Feeling cared about, encouraged, supported
- Having compassion, good will, love

Liking and Wanting

- Desire (positively or negatively valenced):
 - Liking: enjoying, preferring, valuing, “nice to have”
 - Wanting: pressure, tunnel vision, insisting, “must have,” addiction, craving; different from simple determination, passion, ambition, aspiration, commitment
 - You can like without wanting and want without liking.
- Liking without wanting: heaven; wanting without liking: hell.
- Dealing with the unpleasant, pleasant, heartfelt, and neutral on the basis of liking without tipping into wanting is the essence of the Responsive mode.

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
 - Then shift the compassion to yourself, perhaps with phrases like: “May I not suffer. May the pain of this moment pass.”

Cultivation Undoes Craving

- Taking in the good is an openness to positive experience while letting go – allowing the experience in and through you.
- Much suffering and harm comes from “craving” – resisting the unpleasant, grasping after the pleasant, and clinging to the heartfelt – a drive state based on deficit or disturbance of core needs – safety, satisfaction, connection – being met.
- By repeatedly internalizing the felt sense of core needs being met, we gradually reduce the sense of deficit or disturbance, and rest increasingly in a peace, happiness, and love that is independent of external conditions.
- With time, even the practice of cultivation falls away - like a raft that is no longer needed once we reach the farther shore.



Helping People with Blocks

Blocks to Any Inner Practice

- Distractibility
- Out of touch with experience
- Uncomfortable bringing attention inward
- Over-analyzing, pulling out of the experience

Blocks to Taking in the Good

- It's hard to receive, even a good experience
- Concern you'll lose your edge; fear you'll lower your guard
- Idea that feeling good is disloyal or unfair to those who suffer
- Belief you don't deserve to feel good
- Not wanting to risk disappointment
- As a woman, socialized to make others happy, not yourself
- As a man, socialized to be stoic and not care about feelings
- You've been punished for being energized or happy
- Good things in you have been dismissed
- Positive experiences associate to negative ones
- "What's the point in feeling good, bad things will still happen"
- Payoffs in not feeling good
- Not wanting to let others off the hook
- TG is craving that leads to suffering



Questions about 4th Step

Conditions for the Link Step

- Divided awareness; holding two things at once
- Not hijacked by the negative; if it happens, drop negative
- Positive material remains 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 of the psyche)

→ Throughout, the positive material remains more prominent in awareness.

Skills with the 4th Step

- Be on your own side; you want the positive to win. Perhaps imagine inner allies with you.
- Be resourceful. It's OK to be creative, even playful.
- If the negative gets too strong, drop it; return to positive.
- Get a sense of receiving the positive into the negative.
- End with just the positive.
- Start with positive or negative material.

Key Antidote Experiences

Avoiding Harms

- Strength, efficacy --> Weakness, helplessness, pessimism
- Safety, security --> Alarm, anxiety
- Compassion for oneself and others --> Resentment, anger

Approaching Rewards

- Satisfaction, fulfillment --> Frustration, disappointment
- Gladness, gratitude --> Sadness, discontentment, “blues”

Attaching to Others

- Attunement, inclusion --> Not seen, rejected, left out
- Recognition, acknowledgement --> Inadequacy, shame
- Friendship, love --> Abandonment, feeling unloved or unlovable



Technical Details about 4th Step

Using Memory Mechanisms To Help Heal Painful Experiences

- The machinery of memory:
 - When explicit or implicit memory is re-activated, it is re-built from schematic elements, not retrieved *in toto*.
 - When attention moves on, elements of the memory get re-consolidated.
- The open processes of memory activation and consolidation create a window of opportunity for shaping your internal world.
- Activated memory tends to associate with other things in awareness (e.g., thoughts, sensations), esp. if they are prominent and lasting.
- When memory goes back into storage, it takes associations with it.
- You can imbue implicit and explicit memory with positive associations.

The Fourth Step of TG

- When you are having a positive experience:
 - Sense the experience sinking down into old pain and deficits, and soothing and replacing them.
- When you are having a negative experience:
 - Bring to mind a positive experience that is its antidote.
- Have the positive experience be prominent while the negative experience is small and in the background.
- You're not resisting negative experiences or getting attached to positive ones. You're being kind to yourself and cultivating resources in your mind.

TIG4 Capabilities, Resources, Skills

■ Capabilities:

- Dividing attention
- Sustaining awareness of the negative material without getting sucked in (and even retraumatized)

■ Resources:

- Self-compassion
- Internalized sense of affiliation

■ Skills:

- Internalizing “antidotes”
- Accessing “the tip of the root”

Neuropsychology of TG4

- Extinction, through pairing a negative experience with a powerful positive one.
- Reinforces maintaining PFC-H activation and control during A-SNS arousal, so PFC-H is not swamped or hijacked
- Reinforcement of self-directed regulation of negative experiences; enhances sense of efficacy
- Dampens secondary associations to negative material; that reduces negative experiences and behavior, which also reduces vicious cycles
- Reduces defenses around negative material; thus more amenable to therapeutic help, and to insight

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



Useful Extra Material

Cultivating Inner Resources

- Inner resources develop via pleasant and painful experiences, modeling, conceptualization, and practice.
- **Pleasant experiences** are a particularly powerful factor, e.g.:
 - Nurture child development
 - Encourage exploration and skill development
 - Help us endure the unpleasant and convert it to resources
 - Motivate us to continue learning
 - Initiate and sustain the Responsive mode
 - One can value pleasant experiences without craving them.
- The final common pathway of all these processes is the *installation* of the resource in neural structure.

Benefits of Positive Emotions

- Many benefits of positive emotions are a proxy for many of the benefits of TG.
- Emotions organize the brain as a whole, so positive ones have far-reaching results, including:
 - Promote exploratory, “approach” behaviors
 - Lift mood; increase optimism, resilience
 - Counteract trauma
 - Reduce cortisol distinct from the benefits of simply having less negative affect
 - Strengthen immune and protect cardiovascular systems
 - Overall: “broaden and build”
 - Create positive cycles

TG and the Stress Response

- Activates and thereby strengthens general, top-down PFC-hippocampal (PFC-H) capabilities, which become enhanced resources for coping
- Generally desensitizes amygdaloid-sympathetic nervous system (A-SNS) networks
- Internalizes specific regulatory resources, which strengthens PFC-H and inhibits A-SNS (e.g., feeling soothed or encouraged)

Cultivation Undoes Craving

- Taking in the good is an openness to positive experience while letting go – allowing the experience in and through you.
- Much suffering and harm comes from “craving” – resisting the unpleasant, grasping after the pleasant, and clinging to the heartfelt – a drive state based on deficit or disturbance of core needs – safety, satisfaction, connection – being met.
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Guidelines for Using TG with Others

Resources for Taking in the Good

- Intention; willing to feel good
- Identified target experience
- Openness to the experience; embodiment
- Mindfulness of the steps of TIG to sustain them
- Working through obstructions

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 TG in Therapy

These considerations for therapists

will be useful for nearly anyone using TG with others.

Implicit TG in Therapy

- Drawing attention to good facts
- Encouraging a positive response to a good fact
- Drawing attention to key aspects of an experience
- Slowing the client down; not moving on
- Linking rewards to desired thoughts and actions
- Doing TG oneself

Explicit TG in Therapy

- Teaching the method
 - Background helps about brain, negativity bias
 - Emphasizing facts and mild experiences
 - Surfacing obstructions
- Doing TG with client(s) during a session
 - To reinforce a key resource state
 - To link rewards to desired thoughts or actions
- Encouraging TG between sessions
 - Naming occasions
 - Identifying key positive facts and experiences

Promoting Client Motivation

- During therapy and between sessions, TG:
 - Key resource experiences
 - When learning from therapy works well
 - When realistic views of you, the world, etc. come true
 - Good qualities in yourself
 - New insights
- Can be formalized in daily reflections, journaling
- Try appropriate risks of “dreaded experiences,” notice the (usually) good results, and then take these in.

TG and Trauma

- General considerations:
 - People vary in their resources and their traumas.
 - Often the major action is with “failed protectors.”
 - Cautions for awareness of internal states, including positive
 - Respect “yellow lights” and the client’s pace.
- The first three steps of TIG are generally safe. Use them to build resources for tackling the trauma directly.
- As indicated, use the fourth step of TIG to address the peripheral features and themes of the trauma.
- With care, use the fourth step to get at the heart of the trauma.

First of all, do no harm.

Doing TG with a Couple

- Basic steps (often informal):
 - Attention to a good fact
 - Evoking and sustaining a good experience
 - Managing obstructions
 - Awareness of the impact on one's partner
 - Debriefing, often from both partners
- Pitfalls to avoid:
 - Seeming to side with one person
 - Unwittingly helping a person overlook real issues
 - Letting the other partner pile on

In Couples, Benefits of TG

- “Installs” key resources that support interactions (e.g., self-soothing, recognition of the other person’s good intentions)
- Dampens vicious cycles
- Helps partner feel seen, credited for sincere efforts
- Increases the sense of the good that is present
- Reduces clinginess, pursuing, reproach that partner withdraws from

For an individual grappling with relationship issues, what's the negative material, what's an antidote experience, and how might you link them?

For each member of a couple, what's the negative material, what's an antidote experience, and how might you link them?



Using TG with Children

TG and Children

- All kids benefit from TG.
- Particular benefits for mistreated, anxious, spirited/“ADHD,” or LD children
- Adaptations:
 - Brief
 - Concrete
 - Natural occasions (e.g., bedtimes)



Taking in and Mindfulness

The Place for Wise Effort

- *Being with* is primary, but it's incomplete:
 - As a state, it is not peace, happiness, love, or wisdom.
 - As a factor, it needs virtue, wisdom, compassion, etc.
- Wise Effort needs Wise Mindfulness - and Wise Mindfulness needs Wise Effort.
 - We must be mindful of efforts for them to be skillful.
 - We must make efforts, even subtle, to remain mindful.
- There may be practical reasons not to engage effort during mindfulness training (e.g., open/choiceless awareness, self-critical students), but mindfulness and effort are not in principle at odds with each other.⁶⁵



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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)

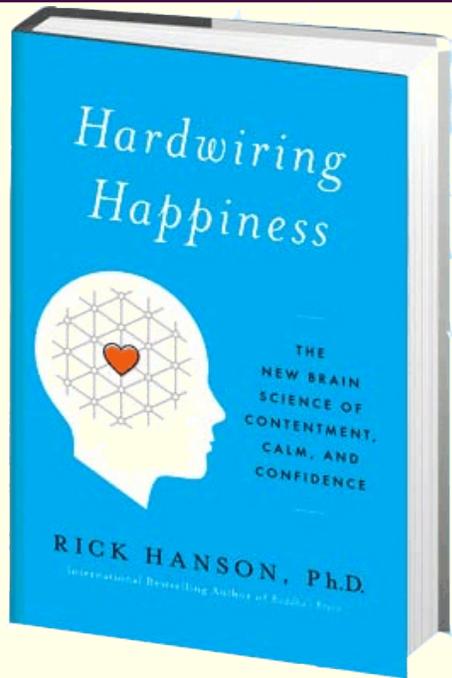
Cultivating Resources for Mindfulness

- Mindfulness arises and persists due to causes - factors - activated and *installed* in the brain.
- Both outside and during practice, installation could be enhanced by taking in experiences of factors such as:
 - Intention
 - Relaxation, reducing vigilance
 - Self-compassion; self-acceptance; distress tolerance
- Taking in mindfulness benefits could increase motivation.
- These methods could be especially useful for those who drop out of mindfulness training or don't persist with it.

Synergies of TG and Mindfulness

- Improved mindfulness enhances TG.
- TG increases factors of mindfulness (e.g., self-acceptance, self-compassion, distress tolerance).
- TG heightens learning from mindfulness:
 - The sense of stable presence itself
 - Peace of realizing that experiences come and go
- TG could heighten motivation for mindfulness – especially for those who drop out of mindfulness training or don't persist with it.

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



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