Taking in the Good

For Lasting Peace, Contentment, and Love

Wake Up Festival
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Topics

- Grounding the mind in life
- Being on your own side
- Growing inner strengths
- The negativity bias
- Taking in the good
- The 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Noble Truths
- The fruit as the path
Grounding the Mind in Life
Common - and Fertile - Ground

Neuroscience

Psychology

Contemplative Practice
A Neuron

- Dendrite
- Soma (cell body)
- Nucleus
- Axon terminal button
- Axon
- Myelin sheath

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Mental activity entails underlying neural activity.
Key Brain Areas for Consciousness

(adapted from) M. T. Alkire et al., Science 322, 876-880 (2008)
Christian Nuns, Recalling a Profound Spiritual Experience

Beauregard, et al., *Neuroscience Letters*, 9/25/06
Repeated mental activity entails repeated neural activity.

Repeated neural activity builds neural structure.
Neurons that fire together, wire together.
Apart from the hypothetical influence of a transcendental X factor . . .

Awareness and unconsciousness, mindfulness and delusion, and happiness and suffering must be natural processes.

Mind is grounded in life.
We ask, “What is a thought?”

We don’t know,

yet we are thinking continually.

Venerable Tenzin Palmo
Being on Your Own Side
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 root of Buddhism is compassion,

and the root of compassion is compassion for oneself.

Pema Chodren
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
Growing Inner Strengths
Two wolves in the heart
### Example: Major Buddhist Inner Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindfulness</th>
<th>Compassion</th>
<th>View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Intention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>Altruistic joy</td>
<td>Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bliss</td>
<td>Virtue</td>
<td>Conviction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tranquility</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
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<td>Concentration</td>
<td></td>
<td>Patience</td>
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<td>Equanimity</td>
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Let’s Try It

Notice the experience already present in awareness that you are alright right now
- Have the experience – aware of breathing ongoing, the heart beating, your body’s aliveness.
- Enrich it.
- Absorb it.

Create the experience of gratitude
- Have the experience - bring to mind one or more things you feel grateful for or glad about.
- Enrich it.
- Absorb it.
Learning – changing neural structure and function – proceeds in 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 or related factors – activated states – that are installed as traits.
You become more compassionate by repeatedly installing experiences of compassion.

You become more grateful by repeatedly installing experiences of gratitude.

You become more mindful by repeatedly installing experiences of mindfulness.
Without this installation, there is no learning, no change in the brain.
Meanwhile your painful, harmful experiences are being rapidly converted into neural structure.
The Negativity Bias
Unpleasant Experiences In Context

- Life contains unavoidable unpleasant experiences. Resisting them just adds to the stress, upset, etc.

- Some inner strengths come only from unpleasant experiences, e.g., knowing you’ll do the hard thing.

- But unpleasant experiences have inherent costs, in their discomfort and stress.

- Many inner strengths could have been developed without the costs of unpleasant experiences.

- Most unpleasant 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
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias
The Negativity Bias
We can deliberately use the mind to change the brain for the better.
Taking in the Good
Learning to Take in the Good
Have a Good Experience
Enrich It
Absorb It
Link Positive and Negative Material
HEAL by Taking in the Good

1. **Have** a positive experience. Notice it or create it.

2. **Enrich** the experience through duration, intensity, multimodality, novelty, personal relevance.

3. **Absorb** the experience by intending and sensing that it is sinking into you as you sink into it.

4. **Link** positive and negative material. [optional]
Have It, Enjoy It
Let’s Try It Again

- **Notice** the experience already present in awareness of some kind of strength . . . focus, determination, vitality, endurance
  - Have the experience
  - Enrich it
  - Absorb it

- **Create** the experience of goals attained
  - Have the experience - bring to mind a time you finished something large or small . . . Open to a sense of completion, accomplishment, relief, success . . .
  - Enrich it
  - Absorb it
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
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tsu
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.
Combined Sample: Depression (BDI) & Anxiety (BAI)
The Role of Cultivation

Three fundamental ways to engage the mind:
- Be with it. Decrease negative. Increase positive.
- Let be. Let go. Let in.
- Mindfulness present in all three ways to engage mind

While “being with” is profound, it can be isolated and over-valued in some therapies or spiritual practices.

Skillful means for decreasing the negative and increasing the positive have developed over thousands of years. Why not use them?
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)
The 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Noble Truths
There is suffering.

When craving arises, so does suffering.

When craving passes away, so does suffering.

There is an eight-part path that both embodies and leads to the passing away of this craving.
Evolution of the Brain

The Triune Brain - (P. MacLean 1990)
Three Motivational and Self-Regulatory Systems

- **Avoid Harms:**
  - Predators, natural hazards, aggression, pain
  - Primary need, tends to trump all others

- **Approach Rewards:**
  - Food, shelter, mating, pleasure
  - Mammals: rich emotions and sustained pursuit

- **Attach to Others:**
  - Bonding, language, empathy, cooperation, love
  - Taps older Avoiding and Approaching networks

Each system can draw on the other two for its ends.
Craving Arising . . .

*When invaded by threat, loss, or rejection [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** (the Avoiding system)
- **Frustration** (the Approaching system)
- **Heartache** (the Attaching system)

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

When not invaded by threat, loss, or rejection [no 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 (the Avoiding system)
- Contentment (the Approaching system)
- Love (the Attaching system)

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

Or?

Reactive Mode

Responsive Mode
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.
The Fruit as the Path
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.
Coming Home

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 suggestions.

Key Papers - 1

See [www.RickHanson.net](http://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

**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