



Kristina Jensen

JUST ONE THING

This Christmas, Santa brought me a goodly number of self-help books which have been waiting patiently for me on my bedside table. I'm not sure what Santa's point is, but who am I to argue with the Big Guy?

It is now late spring and I decided that I better begin my literary journey to self-improvement if I want to retain my hard-earned position on Santa's 'Nice' list and avoid a demotion to the dreaded 'Naughty' list.

SANTA KNOWS BEST

On top of the pile rested Dr. Rick Hanson's pint-sized paperback, *just one thing: developing a Buddha brain one simple practice at a time*. Canadians remember Rick Hanson. He is one of Canada's favourite sons; the Man in Motion who travelled around the world in his wheelchair to raise awareness and funds for research for survivors of spinal cord injuries.

He's a salt-of-the-earth guy who, rather than wallow in self-pity after a debilitating accident that left him a paraplegic, went on to marry his physiotherapist, have a vibrant young family, become a respected neuropsychologist, councillor, and founder of the Wellspring Institute and a research foundation that bears his name. Younger folks will best remember him as the wheelchair athlete who ignited the flame that signalled the start of the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympics Winter Games.

It would be unpatriotic of me to switch out Santa's choice. To be honest, the book's diminutive size also attracted me. This one would be a breeze, an afternoon read; I could make up for lost time. ...Wanting to learn what a Buddha brain was, I started reading, and reading, and reading...

NEUROPSYCHOLOGY MEETS COMPASSIONATE WISDOM

The book is divided into five sections starting with BE GOOD TO YOURSELF. My interest piqued. This aligned perfectly with my newly discovered personal philosophy. I recently came to the revelation that we are much nicer to others than we are to ourselves and I had vowed to become a valued friend – to myself.

Right out of the starting gate, Hanson lays down his game plan. He invites us to use our minds to challenge our brain; to regularly practice simple techniques that will lead us to tranquility. How simple can it be: Shed bad habits and adopt positive ones? But

what distinguishes Hanson's book from the myriad of others is that he provides the missing ingredient – THE HOW! How to relax, how to curtail negative self-talk, how to recognize the lizard brain's motivation.

The section 'ENJOY LIFE' follows. Be glad, grateful, remember to smile, take a break, Build Strengths; Engage the World; Be at Peace; Say 'Yes'. I found it hard to argue with his arguments. Imagine being encouraged to say yes to what pleases us is not being hedonistic. There is something quite liberating in casting off this baggage that we have been carrying around out of guilt for generations.

DON'T OVERLOOK AN ORCHID WHILE SEARCHING FOR A ROSE

In Part Three we are urged to BUILD STRENGTHS. How much energy, time and money do we channel into 'correcting' our weaknesses while overlooking our God-given strengths? When is the last time you brushed off a compliment with an 'Oh, that's nothing'. But the beauty in this book is that you soon realize we all do this: we are trained by society to feel not worthy so that we can go shopping for the cure. Investing the same amount of energy into developing our individual strengths will reap bigger dividends rather than chasing after what we don't have.

Part Four, ENGAGE THE WORLD was personally the most healing. Be Curious; Enjoy Your Hands: Don't Know - yes you read that right. Don't Know. It is perfectly acceptable in polite society to respond to a hard question with an honest answer 'I don't know.' At last, freedom from the heavy burden of being expected to be the all-knowing, all seeing one. That my friend was my personal – just one thing.

PEACE & LOVE IS NOT JUST FOR HIPPIES

Part Five puts a nice bow on it all with: BE AT PEACE. Hanson's words becomes the calm hand on our shoulder. 'Notice You're Alright Right Now' trains us to experience the now – remember the feeling of security that will help us to ward off irrational fear, stand steadfast in turbulent times while the winds of change howl around us. He tells us NOT to throw darts, avoid over-reacting to life's little challenges; to honour our temperament. We are not all made of the same mold. Extrovert, introvert, turtle, hare, we are what we are. The section: Fill your Heart, recognizes that some us have been existing on a diet of thin soup for much of our

lives for a variety of reasons. It could have been dished out by our parents, partners, and bosses but we have the right as adults to seek to cure what ails us. A chart offers helpful tips – again the magical ingredient - HOW.

SCIENCE RULES

Hanson backs up his compelling arguments with science, which is most reassuring. We are not freaks of nature, rather we are merely homosapiens hardwired for survival eons ago by evolutionary forces. The flight or fight instinct that so many of us battle within our super-charged daily routines overflowing with Strategic Operating Reviews, Deficit Reduction Action Plans, sky-rocking fuel prices, shrinking down time: are normal reactions to extraordinary stressors.

Using the kindness of a parent, Hanson encourages us to be daring enough to be ourselves, to take the time to savour the good – and not overlook life's small wonders, appreciate what is good in us, to extend compassion to ourselves, relax, slow down, get more sleep, befriend our bodies and nourish

and feed our brains; a high-performance machine that needs regular maintenance. Some of us take better care of our cars than we do of ourselves!

Mom was right- take your vitamins for Vitamins B-12, B-6, D, and DHA will help to ward off depression, weakened immune systems and dementia: quasi societal-plagues of the modern age.

THANKS SANTA

It quickly became clear to me that this little book had grown into a trusted friend, one that would accompany me for years and years as I tackled what Life has in store for me.

Hanson's beautiful guide to developing a brain that Buddha would be proud of encourages each of us along the road of life, by coaching us to take baby steps along the path to enlightenment, rather than the quick fix, unattainable or unsustainable giant steps towards perfection. That is not the goal.

Just one thing, if we can change just one thing we win. **That's doable - right?**



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