Positive Neuroplasticity: Mindfulness, Cultivation, and the End of Craving

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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?
Shaping the Course of a Life

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources
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.
Mindfulness Is Not Enough
The education of attention would be the education *par excellence*.

William James
Without installation, there is no learning, no change in the brain.
We’re good at activation but bad at installation.

This is the fundamental weakness in most patient education, human resources training, psychotherapy, coaching, and mindfulness training.
The same research that proves therapy works shows no improvement in outcomes over the last 30 or so years.

Scott Miller
Meanwhile, painful, harmful experiences are being rapidly converted into neural structure.
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.
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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.
The Negativity Bias
Developing Your Brain
Learning to Take in the Good
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.
The Buddha’s Drive Theory of Suffering
A Telling of the Four Noble Truths

There is suffering.

When craving arises, so does suffering.

When craving passes away, so does suffering.

There is a path that embodies and leads to the passing away of this craving and suffering.
What causes craving?

What ends these causes?
The Evolving Brain

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Unpleasant</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>Approaching</td>
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<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 . . .

Or?

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.
In the deepest forms of insight, we see that things change so quickly that we can't hold onto anything, and eventually the mind lets go of clinging.

Letting go brings equanimity. The greater the letting go, the deeper the equanimity.

[W]e work to expand the range of life experiences in which we are free.

U Pandita
Know the mind.

Shape the mind.

Free the mind.
From the 2nd to the 3rd Noble Truth
Mental Resources for Challenges

Safety – Grit, protection, relaxation, feeling alright right now, peace

Satisfaction – Gratitude, gladness, accomplishment, contentment

Connection – Belonging, appreciation, friendship, compassion, love
Pet the Lizard
Feed the Mouse
Hug the Monkey
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.

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.


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
Stärken Sie Ihr Selbstvertrauen und finden Sie inneren Frieden.


In Selbstgesteuerte Neuroplastizität stellt uns der bekannte Neuropsychologe Rick Hanson die praktischen Übungen und Meditationen vor, die es uns ermöglichen, das Glückspotential unseres Gehirns voll und ganz zu entfalten.