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?

Shaping the Course of a Life

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources

Finding Resources

World

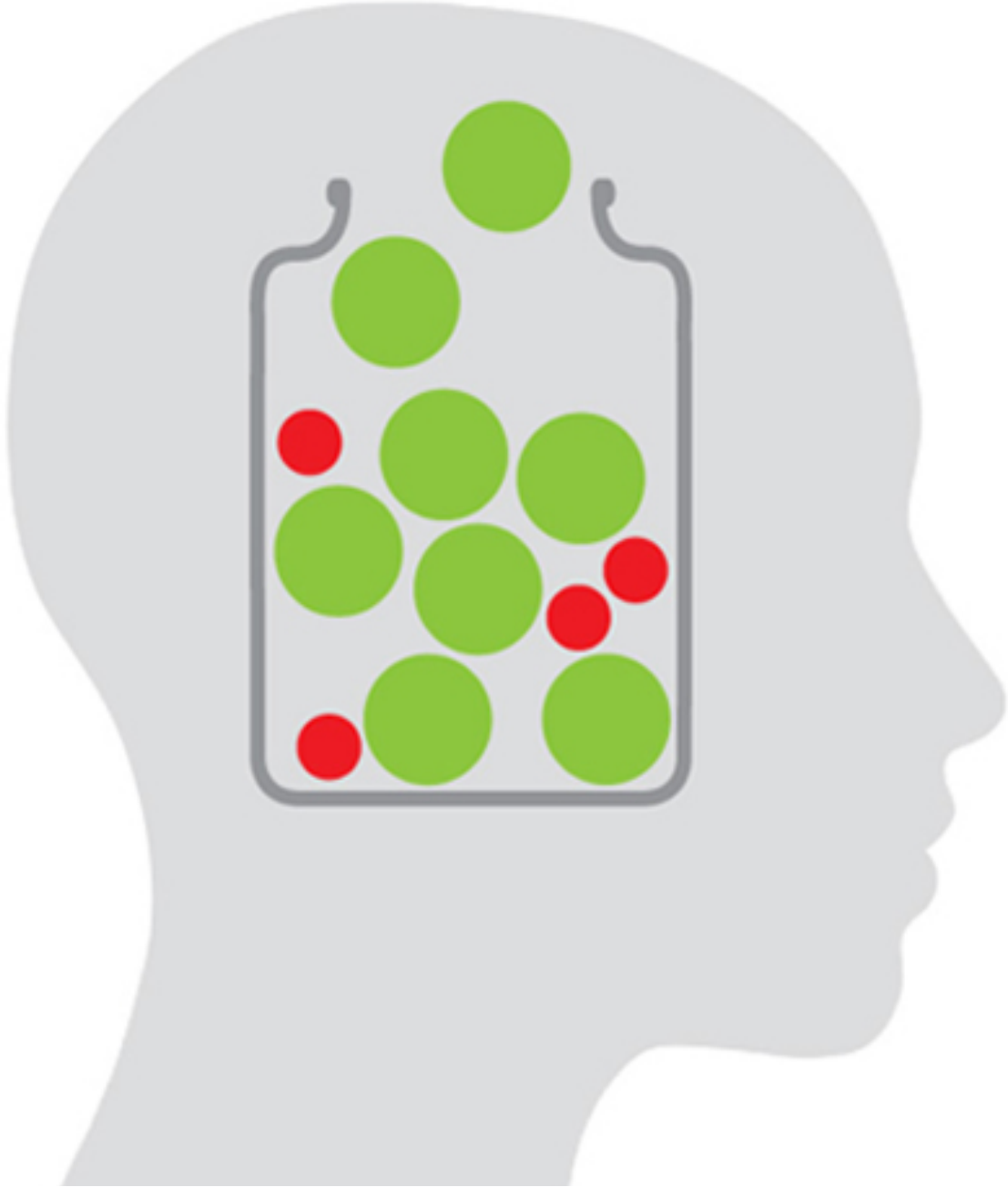
Body

Mind

Resources in Your Mind

- Understandings
- Capabilities
- Positive emotions
- Attitudes
- Motivations
- Virtues

INNER STRENGTHS ARE BUILT FROM BRAIN STRUCTURE



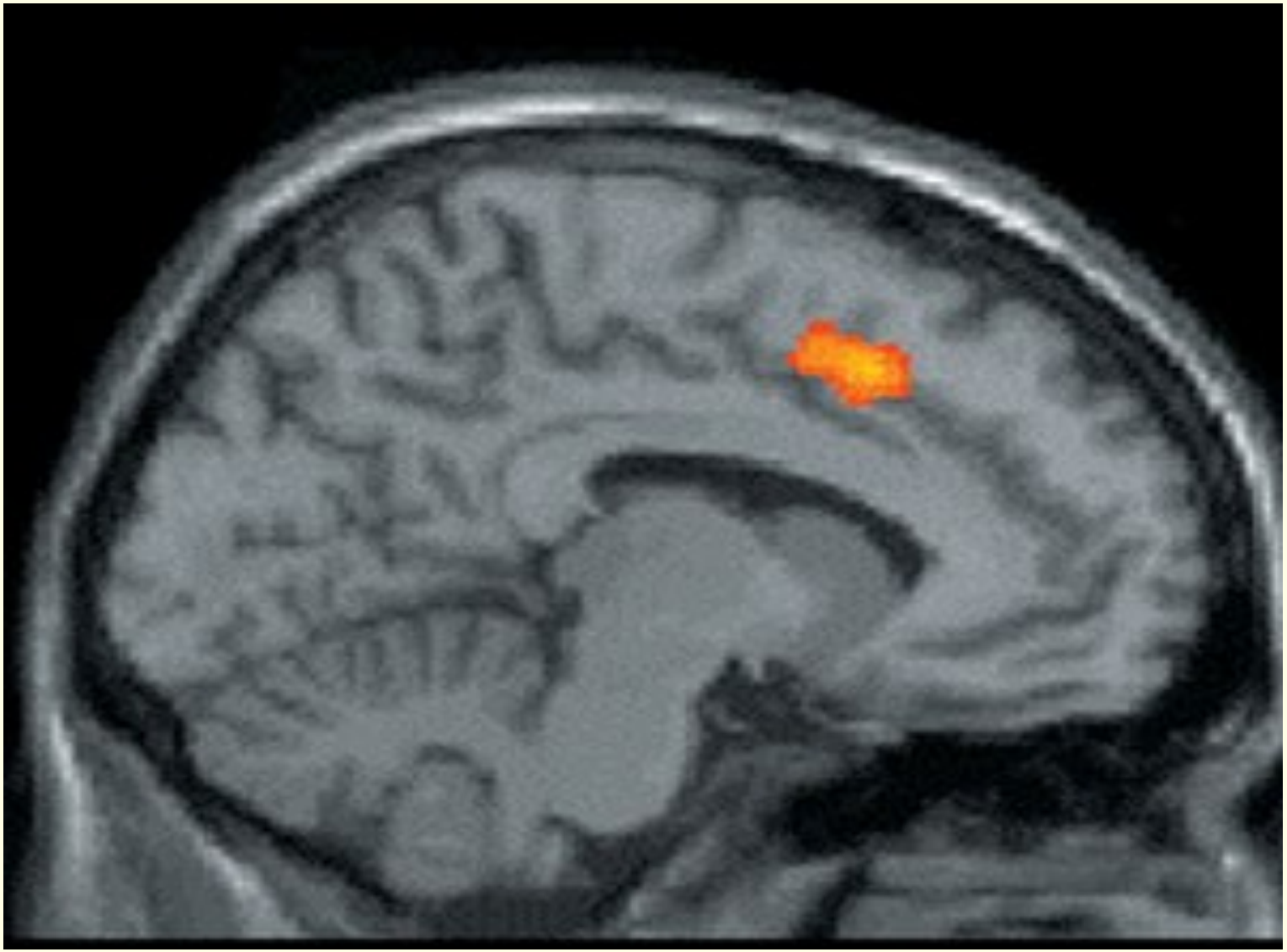
How do you get these inner strengths into your brain?

Two wolves in the heart

Self-Directed Neuroplasticity

Mental activity entails underlying neural activity.

Ardent, Diligent, Resolute, and Mindful

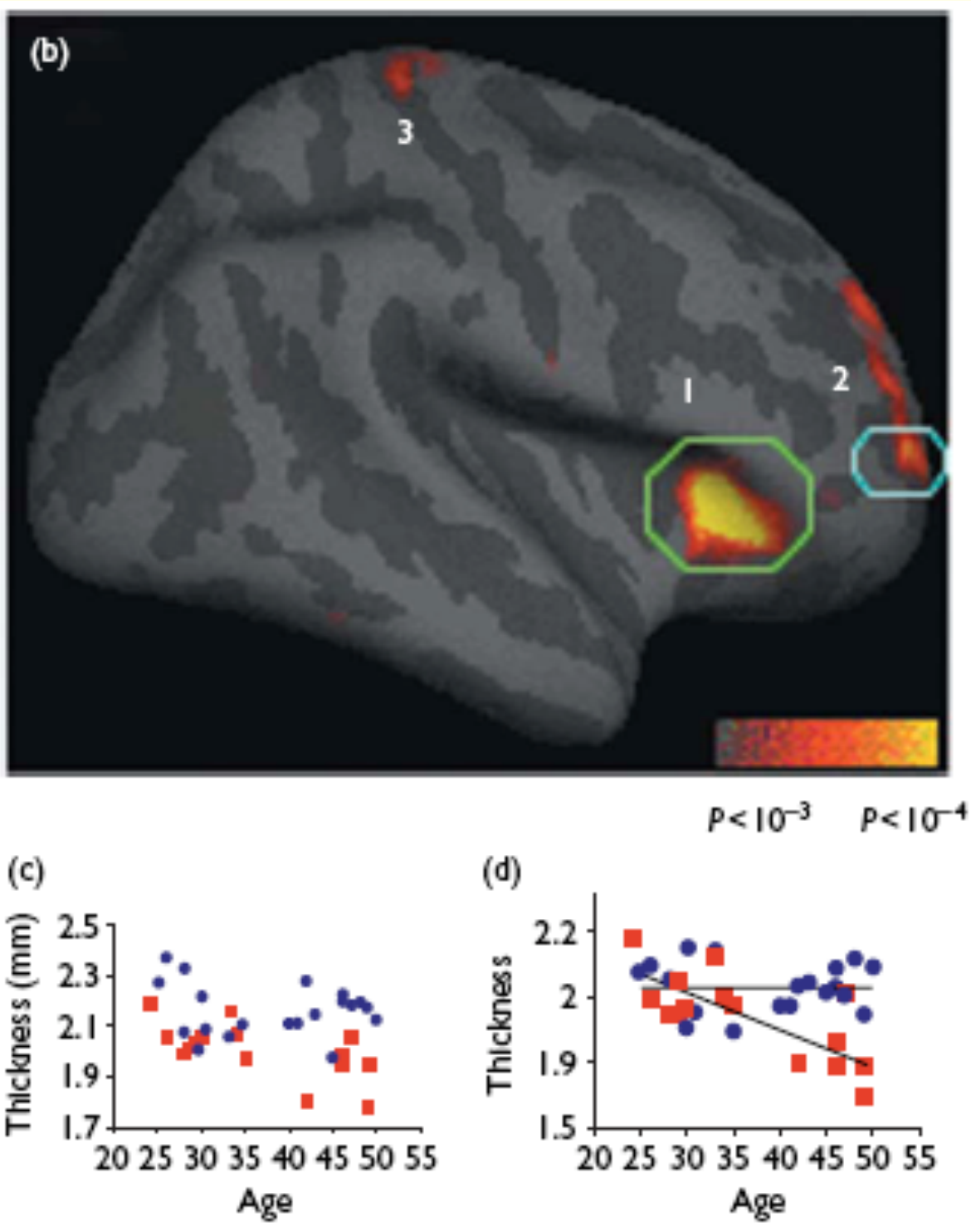


Repeated mental activity entails repeated neural activity.

Repeated neural activity builds neural structure.

Neurons that fire together,
wire together.

Lazar, et al. 2005. Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *Neuroreport*, 16, 1893-1897.



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.

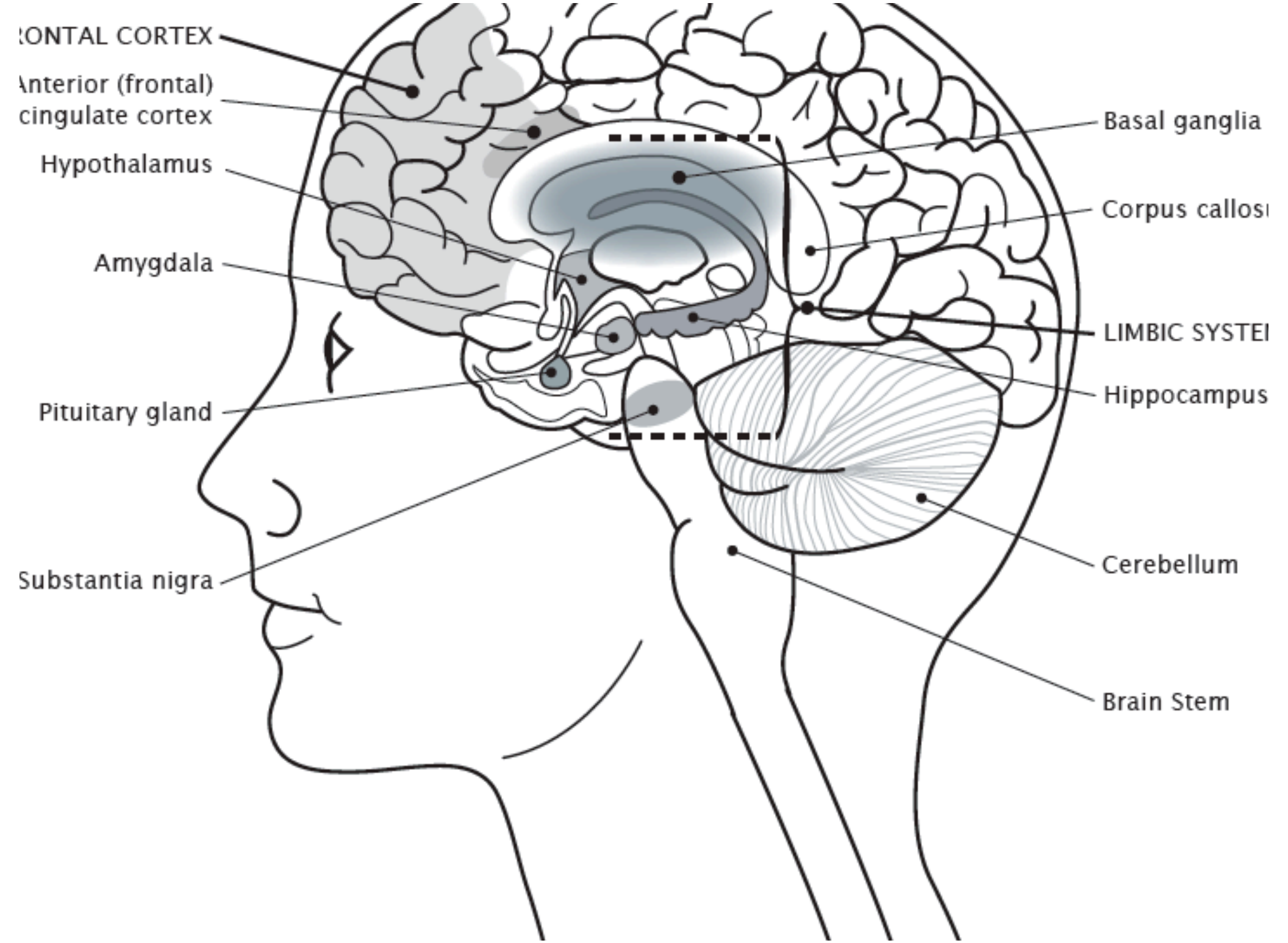
Meanwhile,
painful, harmful experiences
are being rapidly converted
into neural structure.

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.


ONTAL CORTEX
nterior (frontal)
cingulate cortex
Hypothalamus
Amygdala
Pituitary gland
Substantia nigra
Basal ganglia
Corpus callos
LIMBIC SYSTE
Hippocampus
Cerebellum
Brain Stem

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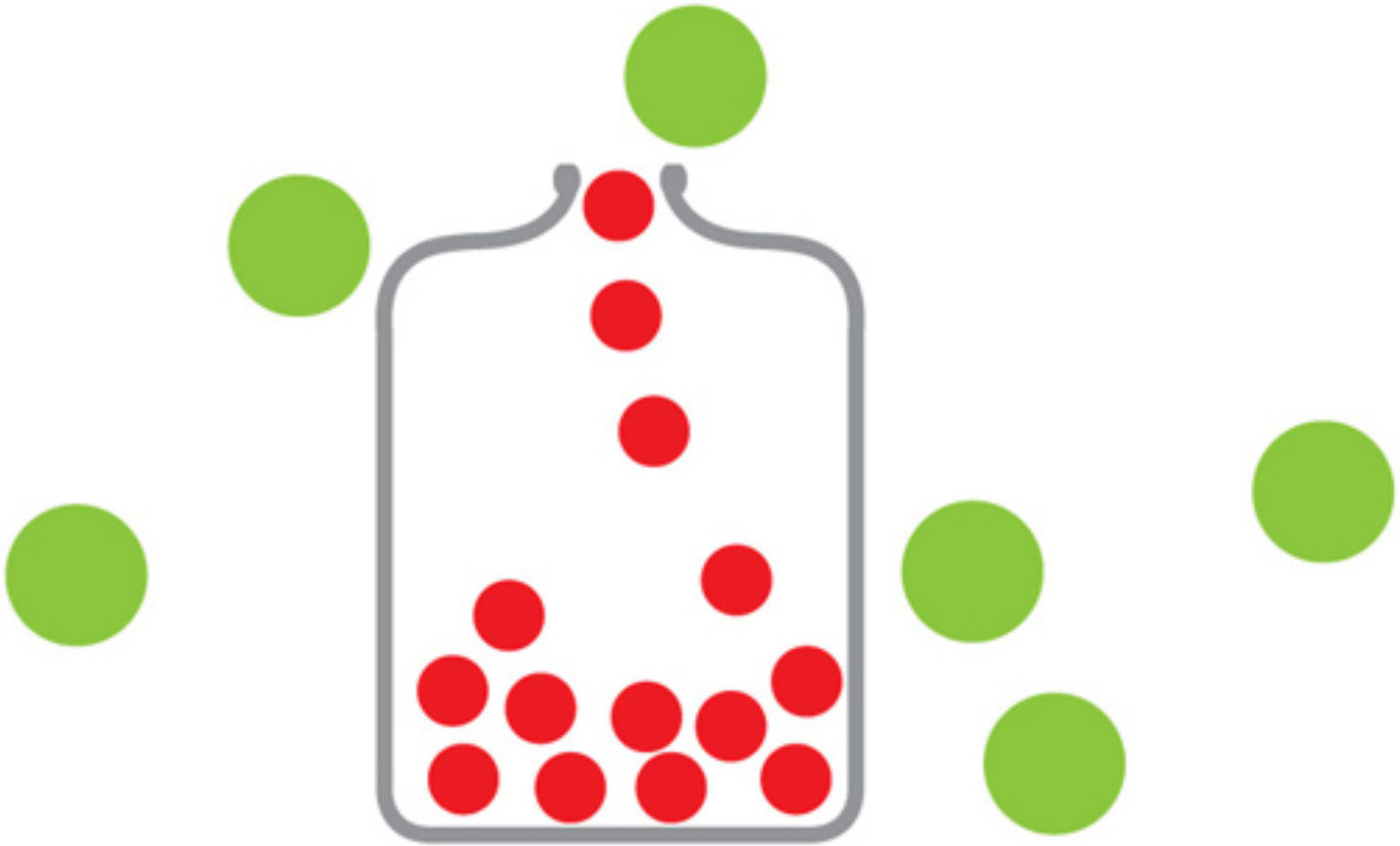
The brain is good
at learning from
bad experiences
but bad at learning from good ones.

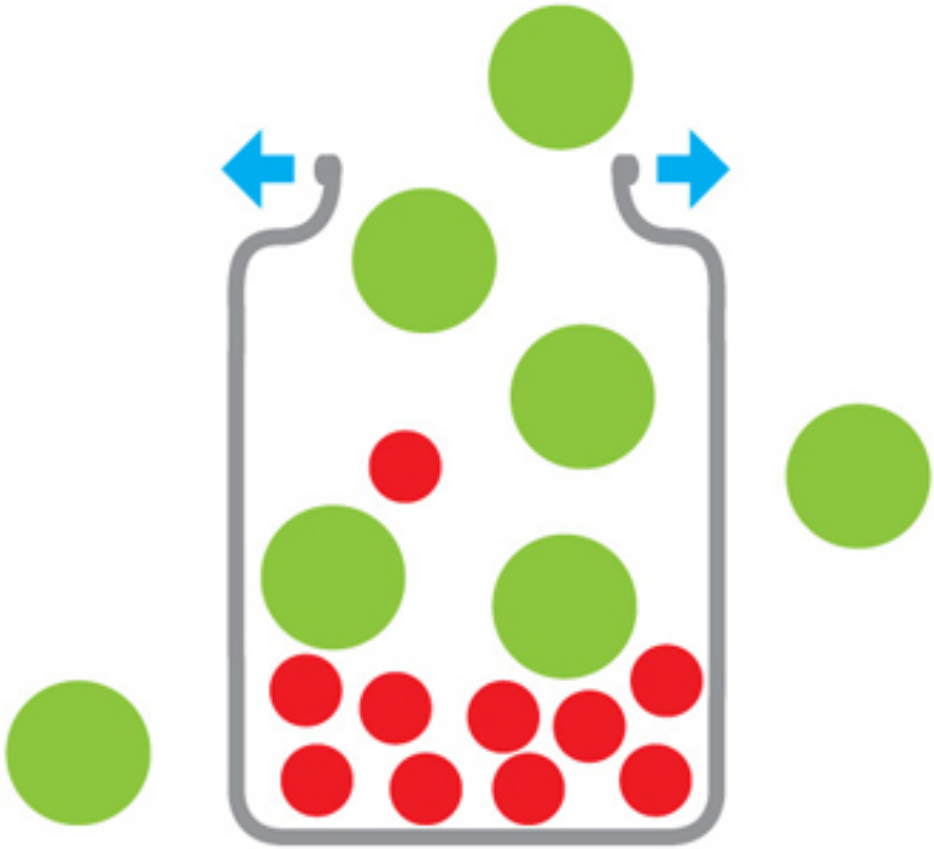
Even though learning from
good experiences
is the primary way
to grow resources for well-being.

Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good



The Negativity Bias

Taking in the Good

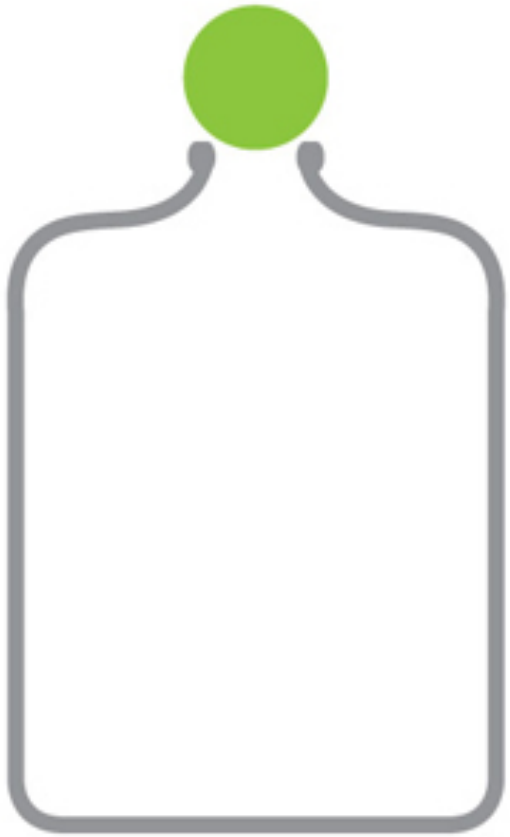


Learning to Take in the Good

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.

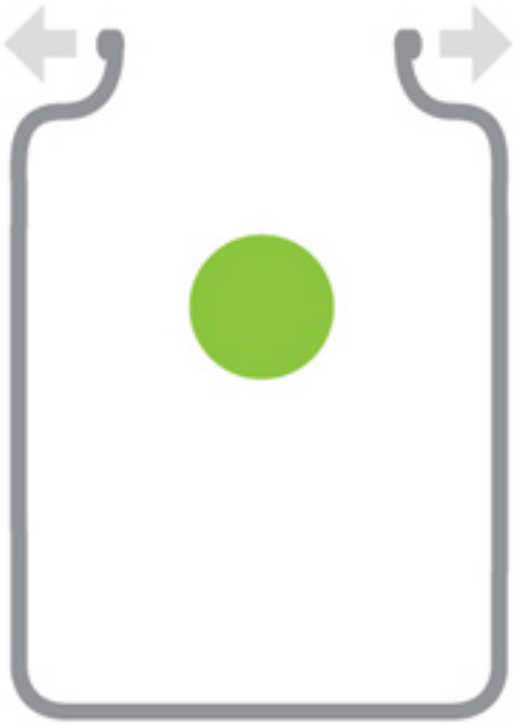
How to Create A Beneficial Experience

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

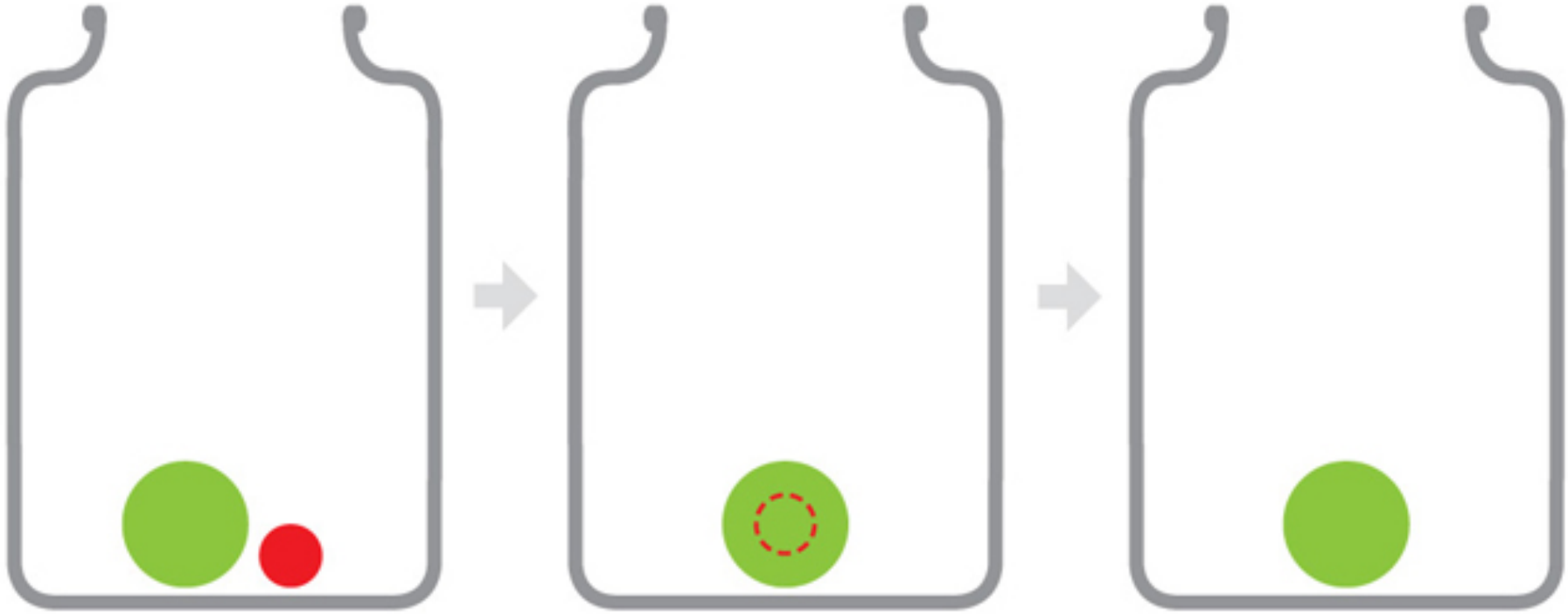
How to Absorb an Experience

- 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

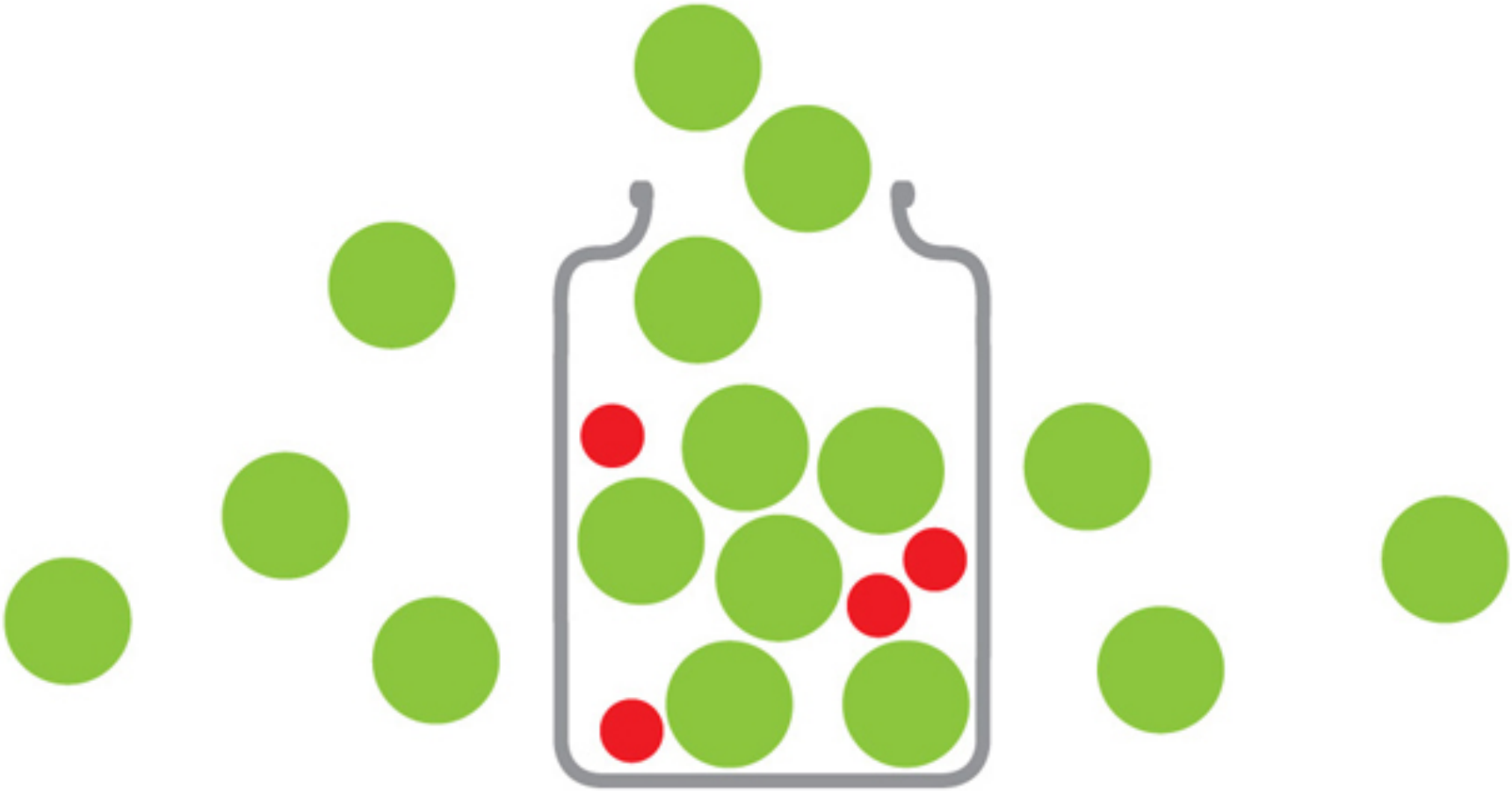
HEAL Yourself

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.

Witness. Pull weeds. Plant flowers.

Let be. Let go. Let in.

Mindfulness is present in all three.

"Being with" is primary – but not enough.

We also need "wise effort."

SPIRIT ROCK MEDITATION CENTER

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

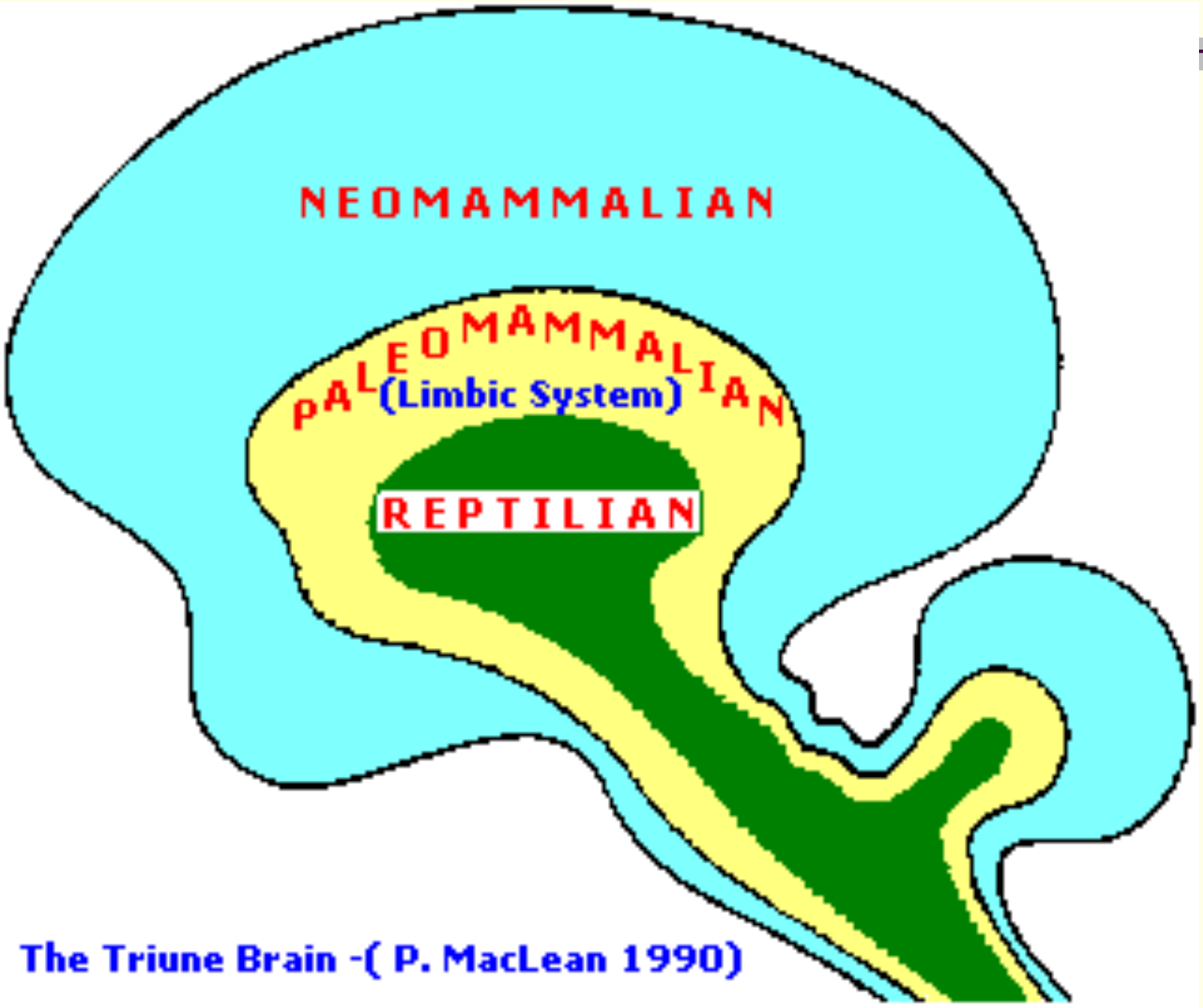
- Doing it implicitly
- Teaching it and then leaving it up to the person
- Doing it explicitly with the person
- Asking the person to do it on his or her own

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



Meeting Three Core Needs

Need	Signal	Strategy
Safety	Unpleasant	Avoiding
Satisfaction	Pleasant	Approaching
Connection	Heartfelt	Attaching

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.

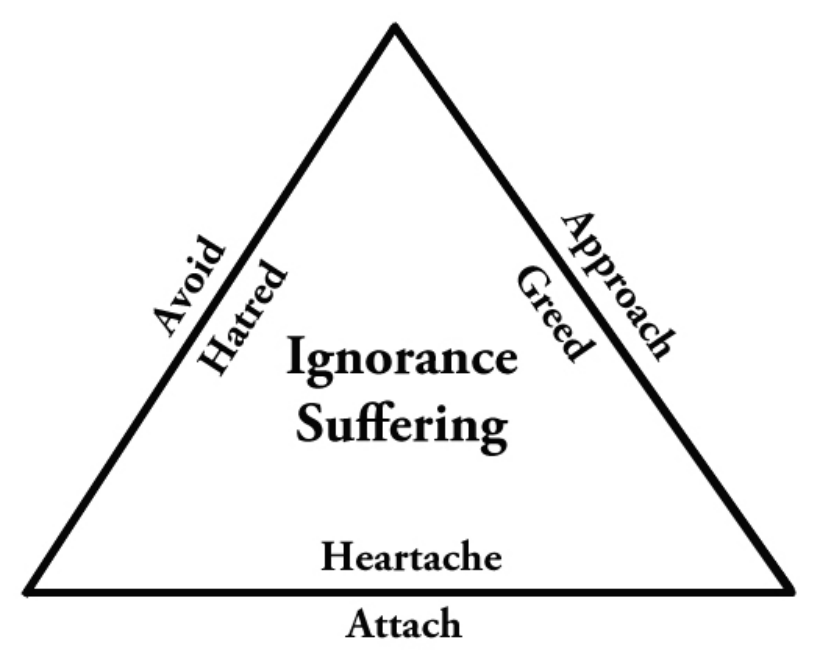
The mind defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

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

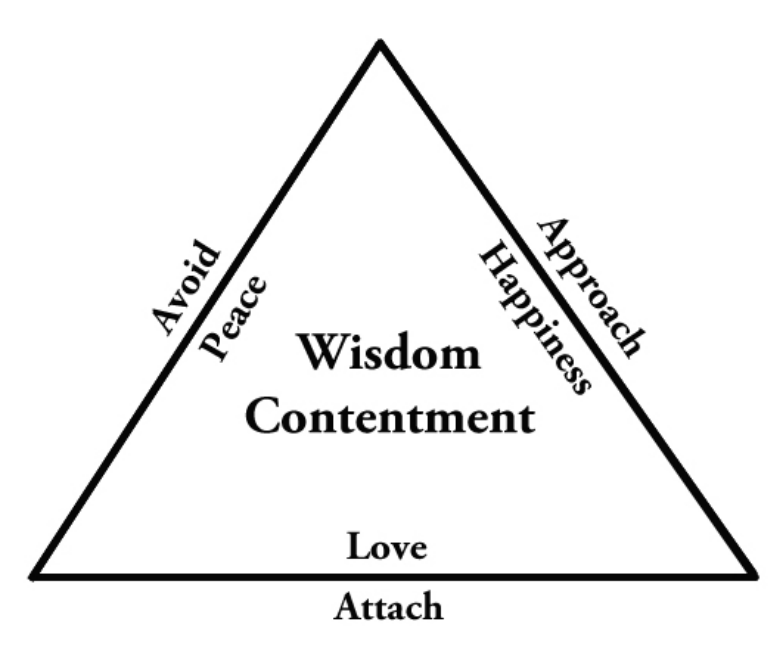
The brain in homeostatic, ***Responsive,***

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.

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

Challenge	Resource
Weakness	Strength
Helplessness	Agency
Freezing, immobilization	Action, venting
Inflated threats	Accurate appraisal
Alarm	Protection, calming
Tension	Relaxation
Worry, fear	Feeling alright now, making a plan
Irritation, anger	Big picture, peace

RESOURCES FOR APPROACHING REWARDS

Challenge	Resource
What I don't have	What I do have
Scarcity	Enoughness, fullness
Disappointed, sad	Gratitude, gladness
Frustration, failure	Accomplishment
Bored, numb	Pleasure, excitement
Grief	Loved and loving
Giving up	Aspire, lived by good
Drivenness	Already satisfied

RESOURCES FOR ATTACHING TO OTHERS

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

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.

- Austin, J. 2009. *Selfless Insight*. MIT Press.
- Begley. S. 2007. *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*. Ballantine.
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Key Papers - 1

See www.RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.

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Key Papers - 3

- Lazar, S., Kerr, C., Wasserman, R., Gray, J., Greve, D., Treadway, M., McGarvey, M., Quinn, B., Dusek, J., Benson, H., Rauch, S., Moore, C., & Fischl, B. 2005. Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *Neuroreport*, 16:1893-1897.

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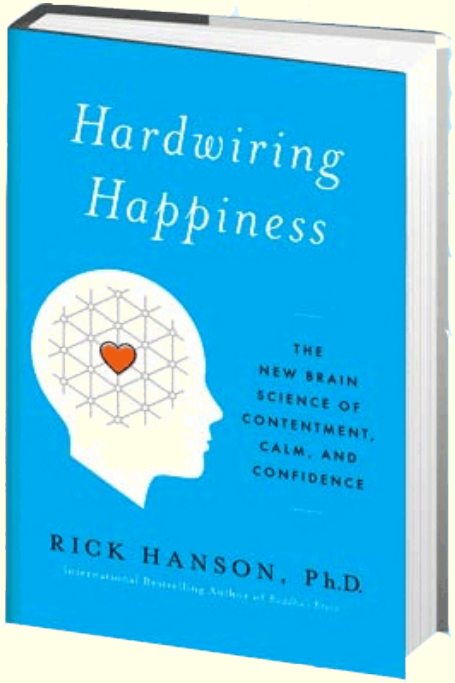
Where to Find Rick Hanson Online



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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