Green Zone Brain, Green Zone World:
Two Keys for the Human Tribe
In the 21st Century

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The Challenge
The Evolving Brain

Cortex
("primate/human")

Subcortex
("mammalian")

Brainstem
("reptilian")

Cerebellum
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias
Stone age brains in the 21st century
The Opportunity
Ardent, Diligent, Resolute, and Mindful
Mental activity entails underlying neural activity.
Repeated mental activity entails repeated neural activity.

Repeated neural activity builds neural structure.
Self-Focused (blue) vs Open Awareness (red) Conditions (following 8 weeks of MT)

We can use the mind to change the brain to change the mind to benefit ourselves and other beings.
Two Wolves in the Heart
Green Zone Brain, Red Zone Brain
Meeting Our Fundamental Needs

- **Safety**: Avoid Harms
- **Satisfaction**: Approach Rewards
- **Connection**: Attach to Others
When we feel basically **safe** – not disturbed by **threat** – the Avoiding system goes Responsive, with a sense of **peace**.

When we feel basically **satisfied** – not disturbed by **loss** – the Approaching system goes Responsive, with a sense of **contentment**.

When we feel basically **connected** – not disturbed by **rejection** – the Attaching system goes Responsive, with a sense of **love**.
The Responsive Mode is Home Base

In the **Responsive “green zone,”** the **body** defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing and recovering.

The **mind** defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

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

This is the brain in its homeostatic **Responsive**, **minimal craving** mode.
Needs Don’t Feel Met: **Reactive Mode**

- **When we feel unsafe** – disturbed by **threat** – the Avoiding system goes Reactive, with a sense of **fear**.
- **When we feel dissatisfied** – disturbed by **loss** – the Approaching system goes Reactive, with a sense of **frustration**.
- **When we feel disconnected** – disturbed by **rejection** – the Attaching system goes Reactive, with a sense of **heartache**.
The Reactive Mode is Leaving Home

In the **Reactive “red zone,”** the **body** fires up into the stress response: fight, flight, or freeze; outputs usually exceed inputs; long-term building projects are deferred.

The **mind** fires up into:

- **Avoiding**
  - **Fear**
- **Approaching**
  - **Frustration**
- **Attaching**
  - **Heartache**

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

Meeting your core needs brings you home to the Responsive “green zone.”

Taking in the good Responsive states grows Responsive traits. In a wonderful cycle, these traits promote good states – which can strengthen your Responsive traits.

Responsive states and traits help you stay Responsive when the world is flashing red.
Can you stay in the Green Zone when:

Things are pleasant?

Things are unpleasant?

Things are relational?
#1: When There Really Is Enough
For millions of years, our ancestors were routinely unable to meet their fundamental needs.

But in the last generation or so, it has become possible to assure that every human being has the conditions for a mainly “green zone” life.

How our species comes to terms with this possibility could be the defining story of the next few centuries.
Repeatedly taking in experiences of safety, satisfaction, and connection develops an increasingly unconditional core sense of fullness and balance, rather than deficit and disturbance.

For individuals, this is the foundation of resilient happiness.
For groups and countries, they could become less vulnerable to the classic manipulations of fear and anger, greed and possessiveness, and “us” against “them” conflicts.
#2: Healthy Governance Of the Human Tribe
During evolution
- mammal,
- primate,
- hominid,
- human,

the adaptive benefits of social capabilities were a primary driver of the development of the brain.
Until very recently, our human, hominid, and primate ancestors lived mostly in hunter-gatherer groups averaging about 30 adults – breeding mainly internally while competing with other groups for scarce resources.
As the brain tripled in volume over the past several million years, it’s said that the primary adaptation of hominid and human evolution is to group living.
Good teamwork, decision-making, leadership, conflict resolution, and distribution of resources – “governance” – was critically important to individual survival and to the survival of others who carried one’s genes.
We are adapted to optimal governance for the common good under three conditions in hunter-gatherer settings:

Common truth
Common welfare
Common justice
Under these conditions, competitions, conflicts, injustices, and harms still occur, but inequalities of wealth and power are constrained.
But since agriculture, etc. 
~ 10,000 years ago, 
the accumulation of surplusses enabled greater concentrations and thus inequalities of wealth and power.
These recent changes have undone the enabling conditions of healthy human governance.

With few exceptions, in city-states, empires, aristocracies, and modern industrial democracies:

Truth is not shared in common. Welfare is not shared in common. Justice is not shared in common.
What can we do?
The Beginning of a Few Suggestions

Highlight unshared, not common truth, welfare, and justice.

Protect common truth; foundational.

In groups – families, organizations, civil society – commit to the principles of common truth, welfare, justice; explore governance in light of these principles; call out violations of them.
The Global Commons

Knowledge is increasingly distributed and democratized – which could foster the same for wealth and power.

What might happen if groups of 20-50 people formed online across conventional boundaries, banding together to share resources for the personal and global good – and allying with other similar groups?
In the small bands of our ancestors, the many could speak up and stand up to the few.

These days our campfires look like Facebook, Twitter, blog posts, town hall meetings, and the public square.

Gathering around them, we can speak up and stand up for the truth, for the general welfare, and for justice.
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tzu