

Rick Hanson

Rick Hanson: [00:00:01] Modern science on this is summarize, I think, in this wonderful saying, I'm sure you know that neurons that fire together wire together. In other words, there's this movement from state to trait. The problem is most of our positive States, most of our beneficial, useful feelings, sensations, ideas, and tensions and so forth, wash right through the brain like water through a sieve. While our negative States are moments of irritation, strange stress, tension, sorrow, and loss get caught immediately. Because of the brain's so-called negativity bias. I say it's like Velcro for bad experiences, but Teflon for good ones. You're listening to dr Rick Hanson on psychologists off the clock.

Diana Hill: [00:00:53] We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:01] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado.

Diana Hill: [00:01:05] I'm Dr. Diana Hill, practicing in seaside Santa Barbara, California.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:01:09] From coast to coast, I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

Jill Stoddard: [00:01:15] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, director of the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:21] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: [00:01:24] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

hi, this is Diana here, and we have a real treat for you today. Dr Rick Hanson, who is a neuropsychologist that specializes in what's called self-directed neuroplasticity is on the show, and this is one that you're going to want to just really savor yourself and share with your loved ones.

Rick Hanson is. Just such an embodiment of what he teaches. I'm curious, I have Jill Stoddard here, and I'm curious, Jill, I think on the heels of your episode last week, B mighty, uh, what was, what was your reaction to this work by Rick Hanson?

Jill Stoddard: [00:02:08] I loved this episode so much. It was so incredibly heartwarming. And you know, I felt like I really took away some things that I could practice and apply immediately. Even while I was listening to the episode. And one of the things that really struck me is he said, and I might not be getting the quote exactly right, but he said something to the effect of, we miss opportunities to take in the good of the moment and grow those resources inside.

And he talks about using some of these. Practices to, um, turn up the recorder

and how, you know, positive and negative things get associated. And I think that typically the negative so often overshadows the positive and these practices that he's talking about are meant to. Kind of flip that switch around.

and I love the, HEAL practice that he does during the episode and it reminded me a lot of, Kelly Wilson sweet spot exercise, which is in be mighty and just a reminder that we have

the opportunity, you know, many, many times throughout the day to kind of show up and, and be present and take in the real positive, soothing, comforting aspects of the gifts around us.

Diana Hill: [00:03:21] I think one of the things that as practitioners might sort of notice is that he talks a lot about taking in the good, and is that. Is that act consistent in terms of if we're focusing on the good, what does that mean? Are we, you know, doing something that's getting rid of the bad. And I think that Rick Hanson really does offer in this episode the idea that it's not about getting rid of the bad, it's making a place for that.

But also, like you said, turning up the volume and placing our attention on where, where, where it would be helpful and values aligned for us in the moment.

Jill Stoddard: [00:03:56] Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's even a misconception technically, the definition of experiential avoidance is really, okay. Anything you do or don't do to change the way you feel or control your internal experiences. But that doesn't mean that all experiential avoidance is bad.

So doing a self compassion exercise like this, he'll practice, could technically be considered experiential avoidance. But if it doesn't come at a cost and it doesn't pull you away from your values. Then it's act consistent, and in fact, if practicing something soothing makes it more likely that you're able to engage and participate with the people you love or the things you care about, then it certainly seems act consistent to me.

Diana Hill: [00:04:38] So I'm curious, Jill, have you tried any of this out on yourself since listening? Cause I certainly have

Jill Stoddard: [00:04:45] I have. In fact, while I was listening to the episode, I happened to be walking into my garage to get on my treadmill, and I saw my two dogs sitting together. They have two dog beds, but they were sitting together on one dog bed, and I just. Thought it was lovely. You know what, why do it alone when you can do it together?

Right. And so while I was on my treadmill listening to the episode, I actually practiced one of Rick Hanson's gratitude practices that he was talking about.

And. at one point I did feel like I needed to close my eyes, so I just sort of held on tight and, and did that. but it really, it just filled me with so much warmth and gratitude and it was, you know, just kind of that an imagery exercise related to my dogs.

And I've been doing it ever since, with small things in, in small ways without closing my eyes or setting time aside or sitting on a cushion. But just really. You know, noticing the gorgeous ocean view outside my office when I walked to the bathroom, connecting with my puppies when they're snuggling up next to me, and really allowing that feeling of gratitude to, to wash over me.

And, um, it's been lovely.

Diana Hill: [00:05:59] Yeah. I love how he says in the episode that these inner resources of safety and satisfaction and connection, they aren't necessarily things that we have to go out and seek, but they're available to us all the time. We just don't. Pay attention to them or let them sink in. And when we take this different perspective, which is also very act, this idea of perspective taking self as context, we take a different perspective on our life, seeking out, looking for where do I feel connection right now?

Where do I feel safety right now? Where do I feel satisfaction right now? And what you were alluding to, Jill made me think of it was both a safety and a connection and maybe even a satisfaction moment of seeing your dogs. We can start to build those resources inside our own bodies. So I just love this episode there.

Like you mentioned, there is a practice. Smack in the middle of it. So if you're on a treadmill or you're driving or who knows where you are, you can either try it in your life, eyes open as you are and see what it's like. Or you can also kind of allow it to flow through and come back to it another time.

But he's such a treasure. Enjoy Rick Hanson. It's a real, real honor to have him on the show.

If you're like us, you're going to want to learn more from dr Rick Hanson after listening to this episode. And one way to do that is by taking part in his year long program called the foundations of wellbeing program. He's offering a special promo code for psychologists off the clock. Listeners, you can enter off the clock 40.

To receive \$40 off the program. So just go to our show notes. Click on the uh, affiliate link that we have down there to the program where you can go to our website and enter again off the clock 40 to receive \$40 off that wonderful program.

Diana Hill: [00:07:47] rick Hanson is a psychologist senior fellow of the greater good science center at UC Berkeley a New York times bestselling author His books are available in 28 languages and include resilient hardwire wiring happiness Buddha's brain just one thing and mother nurture and he's coming out with a new book in spring that we'll be looking forward to He edits the wise brain bulletin and has numerous audio programs assume a commodity graduate of UCLA and founder of the wellspring Institute for neuroscience and contemplative wisdom He's been an invited speaker at Oxford Stanford Harvard and taught in meditation centers worldwide His work has been featured in BBC CBS and NPR and the offers just one thing newsletter a free newsletter for over 135 subscribers including my mom She often sends sends them to me, her favorites.

Now we're at 150,000 150,000 okay. Awesome. And he has an online program called the foundations of wellbeing being, and it's a year long program in positive neuroplasticity that will put some links to in our show notes. It It sounds like a fascinating program to really could apply these skills in your life. He enjoys rock climbing and taking breaks from emails, and he has two children, adult children with his wife. Welcome Dr. Hansen. It's such a honor to have you on the show.

Rick Hanson: [00:09:01] Well. Hello Dr. Hill. And, uh, feel free to call me Rick, please.

Diana Hill: [00:09:06] Okay, great. I first learned about you actually a number of years ago. I couldn't, I was at my neighbor's house and she's a Buddhist practicing Buddhist and I couldn't sleep. And I went to her bookshelf and was looking through all the books and I pulled out just one thing because it seemed like in the middle of the night, that would be a good idea, something simple. And it was so, uh, I think for me, encouraging. And there was this sense of heart that you brought to it, and also practicality. And that's what I see throughout your whole body of work is this sense of heart, this encouraging heart, and also practicality, but then these roots in science. So I'm really excited to talk about some of the, some of the ideas that you've, that you brought out in that book, but the whole body of work that you've offered us over time.

Rick Hanson: [00:09:56] Well, Diana, I'm extremely touched actually, that you have really. Garden and shared back to me in such a sweet way. Uh, it's kind of the heart of the matter, you know, uh, art, practicality and, and science.

Diana Hill: [00:10:14] Yeah

Rick Hanson: [00:10:15] that's pretty great. So I'm touched, I'm really touched, honestly. Thank you.

Diana Hill: [00:10:18] I think the heart part is a place to start because you're, you're really rooted in Buddhist traditions in your own contemplative practice.

And, it's

this unique thing about you, which is can tell that you have this history with the work. work And can you talk a little bit about where some of some of the roots of your work come from

Rick Hanson: [00:10:42] well, thank you. Well, I think like a lot of people, there were things that I . Felt and knew when I was a little kid that I could not put into words. And I think that's actually a really useful resource and refuge for people to go back to. The things that they knew in their bones were true, even if they couldn't articulate them as a four year old or a 14 year old.

Uh, and even if they were being denied or even perhaps shamed by other people around them, they were like, these things we know are true. And I knew. One thing for sure. When I was a really little kid, which was that there was a lot of unnecessary unhappiness. There was a lot of unnecessary coralling bickering, fussing, worrying, hassling.

Strain and so forth. I grew up in a very decent environment. Middle class, suburban Los Angeles, intact family, loving, decent parents, instill. I was observing what, 2,500 years ago that Buddha talked about as suffering, really, uh, unsatisfactoriness training, tension, subtle, medium or horrible. And then little later in my childhood, uh, in my teens actually, uh, it kind of at a

Deep pit of worry in despair. And when I was right about 15, I suddenly realized that no matter how bad the past had been, or even the present, I could always learn a little and grow a little from here. And that's seemed incredibly helpful. It reminds me of the kind of proverb that the future is the undiscovered country.

There's that sense of possibility. So that kind of set me on my wife. I was thoroughly confused, you know, I didn't know exactly what to do. I've tried different things. Uh, and then I stumbled into the, um, world of, um, human potential humanistic psychology in college. And then that led me into, the contemplative traditions, which, as you well know, occur worldwide, including in

secular, mainly in spiritual settings.

And they also include a course in addition to the great. Religious traditions, the indigenous people, traditions, the first people around the world. Uh, so contemplative practice, you know, is not exotic or esoteric. We've all been contemplative, just standing by the seashore, looking up at the stars, or your child is born and suddenly you go, Whoa, this is it.

So that kind of set me on my way and to kind of summarize a lot of stuff, I began meditating in 1974. Well, Buddhism has been the closest tradition for me, particularly the roots of it. Uh, teachings of the Buddha, which are highly psychological. They are not terribly metaphysical in most cases. They're very direct, and they're not freighted with a lot of cultural baggage.

Uh, and in a good translation, they're extremely penetrating. And the Buddha calls us to do our own practice. I think that a good translation of his last words as best we know, were things fall apart, tread the path with care. Right? That's deeply penetrating. It's also encouraging. and like coach Buddha says, you got to do your own work.

Right? And that has really drawn me in a lot of ways. And then in the last 20 years, as modern neuroscientist, Arctic has developed really usable, actionable knowledge. Now the intersection of neuroscience, um, and clinical psychology. And. Contemplative wisdom is really fertile with insights and tools. So that's kind of where I work.

Uh, you know, what a fancy term. I would say I do applied neuro Dharma for a living. I don't think that's ever going to be a book title, but that's a lot of what I do. It's like that intersection, you know, intersections, are, are ripe with, with, with opportunity. So to sum it all up, I wrote Buddha's brain about 12 years ago, it got published about 10 and a half years ago.

And, I find that it's wonderful to feel that we have the chance today to bring together, in a way this historically unprecedented. We have immediate access to the wisdom of the great teachers of the world. We don't have to walk for six months to some monastery. We have immediate access to tremendous scientific knowledge, and we have the wonderful centuries old century old, easily tradition of clinical psychology that's very applied and practical.

And when you bring those together, wow, sparks fly, and you can really help a lot of people.

Diana Hill: [00:15:08] Really a lot of your work is, uh, focusing on building internal resources. And I think what's unique about your application of neuroscience is your ability to describe to us how. We can actually change our brain by changing, but through our experience, uh, something that you called experience dependent neuroplasticity.

Can you describe that to us? How, how, how our mind can, what you say, sculpt our brain.

Rick Hanson: [00:15:39] Great. Well, that phrase, experience dependent neuroplasticity is not my own, first of all. I mean, it's, it's a term that's used and it's a fancy way of saying, learning. In a nutshell. In other words, we're both parents. We've watched our kids learn to walk instead of crawl. We've watched them ride a bicycle.

You know, in my case with adult kids, we've watched them learn how to navigate

tricky relationships with peers. Uh, as, as adults ourselves. We may learn how to be more patient. We learn how to let go of, uh, needless worries. We grow, we heal, we change. And, for any kind of healing or growing or durable change to occur, there must be a lasting change in the body, particularly in its nervous system, headquartered in its brain.

So we'll speak about neuroplastic change in the brain, which is of course. Embedded in larger systems and out into life altogether. It's not to be brain centric, but it is to appreciate that the final common pathway of the causes flowing through us to make this moment of consciousness, this moment of hearing, this moment of feeling, this moment of suffering or loving and enjoying, that final common pathway runs right between our ears.

So that. Modern science on this is summarize, I think, in this wonderful saying, I'm sure you know that neurons that fire together wire together. In other words, there's this movement from state to trait. The problem is most of our positive States, most of our beneficial, useful feelings, sensations, ideas, and tensions and so forth, wash right through the brain like water through a sieve.

While our negative States are moments of irritation, strange stress, tension, sorrow, and loss get caught immediately. Because of the brain's so-called negativity bias. I say it's like Velcro for bad experiences, but Teflon for good ones to kind of summarize a lot of stuff. And that negativity bias helped our ancestors live to see the sunrise back in the stone age or on the Serengeti Plains, or you know, 65 four.

A hundred million years ago, let's say, back in Jurassic park. But today, the negativity bias flattens the growth curve of people moving through therapy or, or trying to heal and grow in other ways. And it flattens the growth curve for people in general. So, um, what I'm really, really interested in is empowering individuals to take charge of the brain change process from the inside out.

The brain is continually being changed by media, by other people, by the pain in our back, by, you know, the arising material from that's unresolved from our childhood. It's being continually changed. The only question is, is it being changed for the better and who's doing the changing? And so I've gotten very interested in the researched based or otherwise plausible internal mental factors. Then in other words, things we can do ourselves. In how we engage our experiences that are beneficial to help them sink in, to increase their conversion rate from mental state to narrowly based trait multiple times a day. And what that. Is, is very hopeful because it is empowering and it's forward leaning.

It's also very practical because you see the results immediately and, it's a way to steepen the growth curves, the healing curves, the transformation curves of people as they move through life. And I think that's the X factor. It's the superpower of superpowers learning self-directed neuroplasticity as Jeffrey Schwartz put it, because it's the strength that grows, the other strengths we need for the long and twisty road of life.

Diana Hill: [00:19:29] what you described so well as this practice of really absorbing a and T and taking in the good as opposed to the absorbing and taking the bad, which our mind, our brain brain automatically does. when I walk into my living room, I see. The hand prints of my kids on the couch or the mess of, of my life as opposed to really taking in the sweetness of having young children or or

the sweetness of the art that they created before they put the hand print on on the couch.

Right. And so it's , really a mind shift. and I think about you and how. You've been practicing this for so many years yourself, and how much it really shows up and how you, you. Right. And it seems that you approach the world. Have you noticed a change in yourself from doing this work over time?

Rick Hanson: [00:20:16] yeah. Well, that's kind of, maybe it's part of my known negativity bias. I mean, I noticed my foibles, and my wee activity, you know, it's still present in the mind. Uh, but I think that, yeah, I mean. I think two parts, you know, I'm, I'm. A lot of my personal culture runs through North Dakota, where my father grew up on a ranch born in 1918 and so I'm sort of reflexively modest, so you're watching me squirm a little here.

But, uh, I think in all honesty, yeah, I'm so much happier than I used to be. I feel so much more resilient. I, I drop stuff so much faster than I used to. And I say this. Not particularly out of crediting by itself, but the point is hopefulness. It's like if we do the work. We grow over time. And, the rate of change depends on a lot of factors, including a privilege.

You know, there's been a lot of privilege in my life that I haven't had to struggle with certain things, and, and I've been afforded opportunities through other means, and I think it's really important to call that out, right? Uh, it's a lot easier to practice psychological growth if you're not worried about your job every day.

Or having no job at all, or how to feed your own kids so you know, or you're dealing with, you know, forms of prejudice and discrimination routinely every day telling them, acknowledge that. But the larger point is absolutely true. Uh, we inherit the results of our own practice, and that's both incredibly hopeful.

No one can stop you from practicing inside your own mind. And no one could do it for you. So yeah. Thank you for saying that, by the way.

Diana Hill: [00:22:07] Could you teach us one of the practices I really like the heel practice, H E a L that that you offer in, um, in resilient. And I imagine you offer it in other places too. It seems like a good practice to start with.

Rick Hanson: [00:22:21] well in a quick nutshell, , heal is an acronym. H. E a. L the describes a fundamental process, of the internalization of beneficial experiences to grow psychological resources.

Like grit, gratitude, compassion, and happiness, right? It's easy to lose sight of the fact that what we're talking about is developing ourselves to have resilient wellbeing. Over time in a very down to earth kind of way. So how do we actually do it? How do we actually become a little happier, a little stronger, a little more loving, a little wiser at the end of the day compared to where we were when we woke up in the morning, or at least at the end of the week or the month or the year compared to where we started.

How do we actually do that? That gets at the fundamental process of brain change, which occurs in two stages really simply. Neurons that fire together wire together, we start with an experience, a state that we must convert into some kind of lasting change of neural structure or function. That's the fundamental process of learning, and people routinely forget the second stage.

Including therapists and counselors such as myself, and that's the stage where we turn a passing experience into something of lasting value, hardwired into our

own bodies that we can take with us wherever we go. Even when everything falls apart around us, we have these inner qualities of wisdom and love and, and endurance and, and deep wellbeing.

Woven into the fabric of our own nature, and that's a wonderful thing. So heel stands for have have a beneficial experience in the first place, usually because you already have one. I'm looking over your shoulder and sr, I think sun with a skateboard and it looks like such a cool guy having a good time.

Palm trees in the background. I'm feeling happy just seeing him. All right, I'm already, it's already occurring. I can just noticing that. Or I could deliberately create an experience. I could deliberately call up a memory of my own children when they were young, . You know, you can create a beneficial experience. Great. Now you have that experience and uh, the E and the a of, the heel acronym stands for enrich and absorb. We help the experience be big and last by enriching it. We keep those neurons firing together to increase this, which increases their wiring.

And then we also absorb it into our body. We have a sense of it sinking in and we in effect, turn up the receptivity of the memory making machinery in our own brain. But definitely implicit memory for sensations and feelings and, and social emotional learning. In other words. So we, we turn up the recorder, we, we help the recorder be more sensitive.

Through focusing on things like the rewards and the experience. So we absorb it more efficiently. And that's the essence of the process. And I'll take us through it in a moment. Experientially. And then linking is the optional step in the fundamental process of growth in which if we choose, if it's appropriate, we associate positive and negative together.

We're aware of two things at once. So for example, in the foreground of awareness, we could have a sense of feeling respected and seen and appreciated, let's say, by you right now and off to the side. Our memories from being a really young, shy kid going through school. I skipped a grade and I have a late birthday and I was kind of nervous and anxious and withdrawn little Ricky off in a corner that no one is seeing.

And we're including or wanting to play with, let's say. And so by association, that positive material can associate with that negative material gradually soothing and using and even replacing it. That's the fundamental process. And, um, anyone can do it. We all do it. I didn't invent this process. I've.

Organize it and applied it a lot and really grounded it in science. But this is natural to us. We just don't do it very deliberately and we miss opportunities dozens of times a day to take in a little bit of the good of the moment and grow various resources inside. So if you want to try it right now, I'll give, you know, in a minute, you can have a sense of this.

, so if you're listening, and you know, Diana, you could do it with me. an easy one is to think of things you feel grateful for. Really simple and help the idea of these things become a feeling. Okay. Even admits a difficult life, even with pain and sorrow and loss, they're consulted be things we're grateful for.

No, including grateful for having a good heart, already. Grateful for the kindness of others, grateful for the gift of life.

Okay. And then once you're starting to have that experience of gratitude. And I'll

say less. He'll look at quieter now. Stay with it.

If it fades, just come back to it for a few breaths.

Feel it in your body.

there could be other feelings like gladness or. Relief,
softening
and in addition to this kind of enriching, you can have a sense of absorbing
gratitude into yourself, kind of sinking into your body. Maybe like a warmth or a
happiness spreading inside you.

I think you're receiving it into yourself.

Well, being aware of what feels good about it. Giving over to it.

letting yourself develop a little more trade to gratitude. The attitude of gratitude.

And then if you want, no need, but if you want to experiment with this while
remaining focused on gratitude and the foreground of awareness, maybe off to
the side could be a sense of discontent, sense of. Hm. Driven nose, stressful
striving,
and you might have a sense of the gratitude somehow making contact or that
discontent or frustration. I'm trying to suppress it. Simply easing it like gratitude,
like a soothing, sinking into places inside that have felt.

Frustrated,

and then returning only to gratitude, letting go of anything negative and resting in
a sense of grateful contentment. Enoughness, you can still have goals. You can
still wish for more. You can still dream big dreams, but with a sense of fullness
already.

And that's that.

Diana Hill: [00:30:39] Thank you. that was lovely. And it's an experience that I've,
I've done through brooding some of your work, and I
think

the interesting part is that

end point where you start to link it to some of the negative, and for me, I find
the
negative shows up earlier on before I start start linking it,

it creates, starts to creep in.

And

I

was actually last night I was back to not sleeping again. And I couldn't sleep

because it was really windy and I was worried about my orchid plant flying, falling over outside. I put it outside and I was worried about my mom cause she was alone with my dad's traveling. And then I was worried about nuclear war

and as I'm falling falling asleep.

All of them seemed equally. Scary cause that's where my mind was. And I think about doing this type of practice right now and it's day time. And I'm with Rick Hanson, I can go to , my heart is open. I go to gratitude. Like Like that's, that's close at hand. but what about in the middle of the night or when it's really hard.

Rick Hanson: [00:31:46] Yeah.

Well that's excellent. Um, couple of points. First before I'd speak to what you raised, I just want to comment that most of the times. When we take in the good quote unquote, we're doing it in the flow of life over the course of a breath or to

the practice I did with you was more formal and it was only three minutes long maybe about, um, that's really long.

Uh, and you can even do it longer if you want, but most of the time it's quick and it's informal. It's in the flow. Second point, before I answer your question, many of the experiences we internalize are not flashy. It's not about seeing the most gorgeous sunrise of your life. It's about a moment of gritty determination or an insight into other people, or a commitment to sobriety or to exercise or to being patient with your kids.

These are the kinds of experiences as well that we take in because these are the kinds of resources we want to grow. It's not just about, um, you know, smelling the roses. Not that there's anything wrong with that. Okay. So that said, in the middle of the night

Diana Hill: [00:32:54] I was going to say, it reminds me, , you can go to the gym and exercise for an hour, but really we can also move. We can walk to the mailbox, we can walk our dog, and it's those small movements throughout our day that actually, that creates the patterning of movement and blood flow in our body.

And it's really really seems that practices like taking in the good are a lot like that. It's, it's the, the turning over and over and over again toward it that, helps build that resource.

Rick Hanson: [00:33:19] Yeah,

exactly right. , there's this beautiful proverb. I'll just repeat it right now. 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. And I believe in that. I believe in drops

Diana Hill: [00:33:43] yeah

Rick Hanson: [00:33:44] at a time that's kind of out of reach, except for those million dollar moments.

But drop by, drop synapse by synapse, we really can take in the good. So to your specific question, a couple things, how one is, you're, you're right. There's, what do we do in the moment. When the oatmeal starts to fly or we wake up and we're worrying, we can't sleep. So first of all, how we have trained and practiced.

Off the field is what we draw upon when we're on the field and things are falling

apart. So, you know, that's an important point in general. we draw upon what we've developed over time that said, in that moment, what a person could do, uh, let's say when they're feeling anxious, and you're, you're bringing a really great point up is to look for resources, inner resources that are matched to the issue. And the issue has to do with an unmet need. There are three major needs for safety, satisfaction, and connection. they tend to blur together. Sure. But you can tease them apart. Anxiety is a flag of an unmet need for safety.

Right. It also, in your particular case, it was a two for one, because it was a concern about loved ones, uh, your mother and your and so forth, and your beloved orchids and the world altogether

and our planet.

So there you are so great. So what do we do then? We can, so, and it's interesting that if you started doing a gratitude practice, which addresses our need for satisfaction, it would not have been very helpful. It might've been distracting, but it wasn't on point because it didn't address the sense of danger and threat

Diana Hill: [00:35:23] Oh, that's that's so good. Yes,

Rick Hanson: [00:35:25] so we need to find resources that are matched.

It's like if you're have a flat tire, you can put gas in the tank, but it's not going to solve your problem. Right? You need a resource that's matched to that thing. So in the moment, there are some major, uh, familiar resources for dealing with anxiety. And the more that we've developed these inner strengths, these traits inside ourselves, the more successful we'll be when we draw upon them.

That said, I'll just go through a few. One is to relax the body. Oh, that's very fundamental. To be able to relax the body at will a long exhalations are really helpful because you probably know the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system is engaged with exhaling and that parasympathetic branch is calming and soothing.

So long, exhalations that can help to relax the body. It can also help to bring up, frankly, a sense of personal strength. in other words, anxiety is about a mismatch between resources and challenges. So by bringing up a feeling of grit, determination, fortitude in oneself, I can deal with this. You know, that that is really helpful.

You know, just to kind of know there's a core strength in me that it's, that also calms anxiety. Another, of course, is to make a good plan and a plan that does not overestimate threats or underestimate resources. action, binds anxiety, good planning, binds anxiety. That's another thing to do. Not to obsess about it, but to know to yourself, what will I do about the orchid?

Well, I could get up and move it. Or poor orchid. Worst case, I'll replace it. Uh, or you know, nuclear war. Well, I live in LA. Not a lot. I can do about that. So do I want to move? No. Okay. I'm just going to live with this uncertainty. Yeah. And that's my plan. There are many things in life we don't know about, and that could take us out that are more likely to than a nuclear war, which I personally, I think is insane that, uh, the U S and Russia had the capacity to destroy the Northern hemisphere of our own planet.

2 billion people at the time. Totally insane. And . Ranting about it myself. It's not gonna change that. So, you know, dah, dah. So you make a plan. Another classic resource for your case, especially as a two for one, is bring to mind the feeling of being cared about and included. That you have allies with you that's really soothing because feeling love flowing in or out in all its forms is a profound signal of safety as well as satisfaction and connection.

love is the multivitamin. It's the ultimate medicine, , because it addresses all of our needs. So you clearly have such a warm heart being in touch with your own heart, flowing out. And feeling cared about by others flowing in. That's also enormously soothing. And then last, I'll just leave you with this one.

what's one of the most powerful practices? I know, and it's continually under our notes. Most of the time we are actually basically all right, right now and now we're okay. Anxieties about the future. Anticipatory anxiety, right? And in this moment. The body's basically, okay. There's an ongoing, this of living, the great gift of consciousness is continuing of all the remarkable causes and conditions that had to come together to form your moment of consciousness.

Diana, at three in the morning, it's extraordinary, even on the worst day of your life. Right? It's extraordinary. Uh, and in most moments, you're basically all right. Now, some moments were not. This whole thread we're exploring is never about falsifying what's true and in fact, by focusing on what is good and beneficial and wholesome and useful, it increases our capacity to deal with what's bad.

Right? And this is not about turning away from the bad. This is about growing strengths inside to face it squarely and to really bear it and deal with it. All right. so, okay, so that's what I would suggest. And given if I dare say this, and you can edit it out, if you like what you've said, you know, these are the kinds of resources that a person could flag to grow over time.

, resources that address anxiety, let's say, over time. Uh, including, concerned about others. In my own case, as I've said, I was a shy, scared kid whose parents were really bad at empathy while also being very loving and decent. So it was a kind of an odd childhood, and I didn't have issues, particularly with satisfaction or safety.

I, you know, grew up in a. Lower middle class environment, not with poverty. You know, we had TV dinners, money was tight, but it wasn't horrible. Uh, but wow, my needs for connection, we're not mad. So those are the resources I wish that I went after with intention beginning in my late teens when I went to college.

And then after that I kept taking in the good of social supplies again and again and again, cause that's where my hole in the heart was. But other people have different issues. Uh, I think of it as like, you know, if you have scurvy, you need vitamin C, iron pills are great, but they're not going to do the trick.

So what's your vitamin C? You know, what's your key in a resource to grow these days inside yourself? And then every day you can look for opportunities to feel it and then kind of marinate in it a breath at a time to gradually weave it into the fabric of your own nervous system.

Diana Hill: [00:40:52] It's so interesting because what I ended up doing, and I think it's because of some of these practices over time. Was, I ended up just breathing to my, my husband was sleeping next to me and in that breathing to his breathing, and I think his breathing was kind of slow and long because it is when

you, when you sleep.

And it was exactly that. It was, how can I find safety? But right here inside this, this little space, and connection. and I was even thinking about this morning with. This feeling of connection to people like you, to people like Paul Gilbert to people like Tara Brock that are, you know, I don't know you personally, but I feel really connected to your work and your offering and what.

What you have to offer on the planet, which is the anecdote to the, to the fears of the nuclear war, and in some ways that, that that is the action, right? right The action is for us to share your voice with people. And if we can see with our threat systems and our own little. Beds, , that may help Sue the threat system of our planet, what happens in a global way it's just a big macro example of what happens in our own little beings of the time.

We live in threat and fear, and otherness.

Rick Hanson: [00:42:11] a deep point. And um, that's sweet. How you sooth yourself there though, you know, good practice and you're telling me, right when we feel that our needs are not met, when we feel there's a shortage of safety, satisfaction and connection, when we feel gripped by fear and anger, greed, and. Just, you know, frustration or loneliness, resentment, vengeance, and grievance, right?

We are very tough critters and we do horrible things as human beings. On the other hand, when people have an internalized sense of inner peace and contentment and love. When they've developed that over time. You can see it in the example of people like Dr. Martin Luther King jr, or people at the, I think clearly the Dalai Lama today, or, uh, frankly in my view, you could see it in Barack Obama.

Uh, certainly Michelle Obama, people who are dealing with adversity and yet in the core of their being, they don't let hatred invade their heart. , my own hope is that somehow as the material conditions in the world improve as they, as they dramatically have in our own lifetime, certainly in my lifetime, they've improved dramatically for most people in the world.

Although we have a long, long way to go as these material conditions improve. That's not enough. Because you can see in people with great wealth and power , there's still this core, knowing in the heart that is endlessly hungry for narcissistic supplies and experiences of dominance.

so we need to internalize. Experiences of wellbeing again and again and again. And as we do that, you just notice that in a lot of research supports this, that as we fill up our own cup inside, people become, as you were alluding to, become our pro-social, we become more altruistic, we become more reasonable.

if we have to be strong and defend ourselves against some form of attack, whether it's inside a family or a couple, or an organization or a country, we can still be strong. But without being poisoned by, uh, you know, the sense of grievance and vengeance that as social Hunter gatherers, we're very vulnerable to.

Diana Hill: [00:44:26] And how does this relate to parenting? Cause you're a parent now with two adult children children and you have a podcast with your son, which would would be a dream for me to have that kind of a relationship with my son someday. That he would want to just be in the same room with me. You

get to work with your son, which is amazing, and he's, uh, he's delightful.

Forrest hanson it's such a fun podcast to listen to. how did you do it? How did you foster these resources as a parent? what are some ideas that we could use for those of us that are parenting?

Rick Hanson: [00:44:56] well, no parent is a perfect parent. you know, my kids would be able to be able to tell you times I lost my temper. Um, I was overly stressed. I was, I won battles, but lost the war. To use that metaphor. And on the other hand, I really tried to learn along the way and keep in mind from the moment our kids were born, really, that there was a being behind those eyes. I think that's, you know, my own background, you may know a is in developmental psychology. Early childhood, spent a lot of time in schools and preschools. My dissertation was on 15 month olds and I have a deep feeling for children and if we want to, you know, we have a moral obligation to children and if we want to fulfill that obligation, the best possible way is to support mothers. You know, if the humans faces, made the welfare of mothers, the number one public policy priority, we would change the world in a generation. It would be completely transformational. So, uh, you know, that's kind of my own background and interest about that. And in terms of, takeaways, I would say, I think. Taking the long view is really important. It's so easy to get caught up in, uh, getting the kid to eat their vegetables tonight or pass this math test in fourth grade and we can easily lose sight of the big picture, you know, negative experiences. Barbara Fredrickson's research shows tend to foreclose. A perception.

We tend to look only at what's immediately in front of us, saturated with self-referential processing. A lot of me, myself, and I, so number one, take the long view. The bottom line is who's your kid going to be when he or she are? There are 25. Well, that's the view. What you know, well, who's that BM? And to keep that prize in front of your eyes.

That would be my first suggestion. Second, super. Take care of your own welfare, your own wellbeing, especially mothers, frankly, who do the bulk of bearing and rearing in the culture. the village it takes to raise a child. It's more like a ghost town these days. It's, it's really weird. It's useful to keep in mind that.

The social structure of childbearing in the developed world is completely aberrant in terms of the Hunter gatherer template. And so it's really important for parents to resource themselves internally as much as they can, physical health, their relationship. That's really important. Take care of your own wellbeing.

And I think the last thing I would just suggest I would say two mistakes I made were either. To act from anger. It's natural to feel angry, period. And certainly as a parent, You know, kids are annoying. It's like that taboo to mentioned t

Diana Hill: [00:47:39] Chronic irritation. Yes.

Rick Hanson: [00:47:41] they're also incredible. They're wonderful.

They're sweet. They'll lift your heart, you know, but they're annoying sometimes. So it's easy to get caught in anger. My mistakes began with anger often. I mean, rather than not so much anger is natural. Uh, but to act from it, to speak from it. It's problematic. Uh, so it doesn't mean we can't be firm and clear.

We can't acknowledge how we feel. But to act or speak from anger is usually a problem. and the other thing, my other category of mistakes was I didn't speak

from my heart often enough.

I didn't slow it down, drop my guard, get real, get vulnerable, and say, Hey, I just kind of say, this is how it is for me right now.

I'm not criticizing you. I'm not. Getting, this is not a policy conversation about what we ought to do. Maybe we'll get to that, but I just kind of say, this is what it's like to be me right here, right now, and I want you to know it. Um, I wish I had done that more. So those are the things I would say.

Diana Hill: [00:48:41] That's wonderful. And I think would I have noticed is that as children grow up, they like mid twenties early thirties they start to parent their parents too. There's this like could of like flip that happens where all this wisdom starts to come the other direction. So that, I imagine imagine you're experiencing that now with your adult children.

what are you learning from them?

Rick Hanson: [00:49:02] Oh, wow. That's a great question. Um, wow. I'm learning that we did. Okay.

And one of the worst feelings to AV as a human, I think is to, whether it's Eve, especially at three in the morning, is to feel like you messed up as a parent.

and so one thing I'm learning from them is too, is we did okay. Uh, another thing I'm learning from them actually is to really appreciate how intense it is to be a parent.

Like we're going back and watching videos that I shot when they were, you know, 25 years old that I burned a DVD. So we're now watching them when the kids are like five or eight or nine, or, you know, nine months old and they're bowled over by all the. Crowd, we dealt with all the trips. We took, all the things we packed, just the grind of daily life.

I've kind of learned to appreciate that. And then I think maybe last, uh, I've learned definitely about technology in different ways for my kids. It's great. And, um,

I think I've kinda learned. What's the most important thing? You know, there's a saying. The most important thing is to remember the most important thing, and I think the most important thing is to rest in the feeling between you and me.

The I vow feeling.

Whoever the vow is, and to, rest in that sense of your child as a vow or your maid is that thou or frankly the stranger passing you on the street as a Dow. And, I have a little saying the all beings. That's a standard I'm aiming for. I don't do it every minute of every second of every day, let's say, but, every second of every minute.

But to me, that's an aspiration. So one of the takeaways from my own kids, I think, is to help me really appreciate that the most important thing is not getting the dishes done or the homework completed. It's to re re remain rested in that feeling of I endow with the other person.

Diana Hill: [00:51:12] That's beautiful. So we can rest in that relationship with other, and I think you also talk about resting in that relationship with ourselves.

you've had a very prolific. Career. And there was something that you said in your new year's episode with forest that stuck with me, which was that you were contemplating this idea of laying it all down.

Rick Hanson: [00:51:36] Yeah.

Diana Hill: [00:51:38] And I wonder what that means in terms of your relationship with you. Like what is, what is happening within you at this point in your career? What, what, what you're considering in terms of what matters to you right now in the next steps for you?

Rick Hanson: [00:51:55] well being quite real about it. From about six years old.

I was a very self aware kid, whatever the mysterious causes and conditions of that don't know. But, um, clearly by the time I was six, I had this very clear sense that it was on me to make my own life and that I needed to do that. And rescue was not coming.

And day by day, step by step, I really needed to . Build something. And so I feel like I've had a plan for 50 plus years one way or another. Not always a good plan, but I've had a plan. So I've had a checklist. I've had stuff to do. I've been on task, you know, for a long, long, long, long time. And I feel like my inner being is like a very.

A agreeable, dutiful horse that's been plugging away uphill for 50 plus years. And it's increasingly telling me, yo, dude, it's time for some pasture, you know? And. Well, so I feel in myself is his sense of late stage career. You know, it's a developmental process, right? I've been near masters and develop my second developmental psychology, and then there's a life stage process and a like, you're in kind of early middle career.

I'm in. Late middle career or early late career, uh, if you will. things are different at different stages developmentally. And so for myself, there's this movement in my heart that is interestingly anti the current of my professional circumstances, which are more successful than ever. So it's a really interesting thing, which I think of as wonderfully.

Counterintuitive to walk away. And I've actually thought from time to time about writing a book about people who just walk away, walk away from SAS, you know that it's not so much walking away from disaster. We understand walk away from the train wreck, but what do you do when you're really quite successful or you've achieved a lot and you just go, this is really cool and now I'm going to do something different.

It's like we don't have a cultural script for that. It's almost culturally disobedient, you know, civil disobedience, cultural disobedience. And so therefore it intrigues me. It amuses me, you know, to explore this more and more myself. And maybe I'm talking about it in loftier language than it really deserves, but what that kind of looks like for me is dialing back and saying no, and knowing that there's a saying in the doubted Jane, that one who knows that enough is enough.

Always has enough. it's the know that you've had enough. You've, you've done it, you did it. Now, there are other callings. Uh, there's a model, and I think India,

apparently that life has sort of three stages. Student, householder and renunciate. I've been, uh, strong householder, including. Work, and there's a movement in me increasingly to the third stage of life, including more time for more formal spiritual practice. So that's kind of what's cooking, but fear not a, I have another book or two and me, I think, uh, my wife laughs at my notion of retirement. Um, it's only to do a book a year, honey, don't worry. But otherwise, we're just going to let the rest go. Uh, so that's, and it feels, it feels wonderful. Um, and. The other thing though, going to fears of nuclear war and other things, we literally don't know if the next moment will come for us. It will come for the universe. The earth will keep twirling around the sun, but we don't know if it will come for us. So you know, it's, there's this beautiful practice, I think, of being gobsmacked with gratitude for this moment, while completely letting go of it. Into the mystery of the next one before it arises, and to live in that space, in that razor thin moment of now continuously. So really great practice.

Diana Hill: [00:56:02] Thank you, Dr. Hanson. Rick, I I like I've been in that razor thin moment of space with you for the last 50 minutes.

Just completely present. And, uh, and I hope that you do take, if it's not a big walkaway, I hope you take moments to walk away.

Rick Hanson: [00:56:19] Yeah.

Diana Hill: [00:56:20] Just like the little moments that you shared with us. I want to walk away too.

But we get to do that in the here and now. Lots of times, it's an honor. It's a delight have you on the show and I so strongly recommend your collaboration with forest. I love your podcast now that you're not in the middle of the night with me. You're on my runs now, which I appreciate too.

I bet her state of mind usually when I'm running and, and then also for folks that want to spend a year with you. what would it be like if you did these practices for a whole year? Can you imagine how your brain would change and your relationships and your life? we could all use a sabbatical with, Rick Hanson for a year.

Check out the online program and we'll, we'll link to that in, in our show notes and we get to hear again from you in the near future with when you AI interviews you all about neuro Dharma, your next book that's coming out.

Rick Hanson: [00:57:15] Well, thank you. And that that practice for a year is, the program is about an hour a week. Uh, the most important practice is the one you'll do consistently and about an hour a week is what people will do. And if you do that though, at the end of the year, you really, really grow a lot in a systematic way.

So thanks for mentioning that to people. And we love to scholarship people in. We're quite happy for people to pay the reasonable price for the online program. It's incredibly full of resources and if financial need is an issue, one of the functions of this program is to be able to make it available for people in financial

need here in America as well as around the world.

Diana Hill: [00:57:55] I know a lot of people are mental health providers that listen to this podcast, and there is a 20 hour continuing education, education for mental health providers too. So that's the best part is you get to do your continuing education, but it's really personal development, best part of being a therapist.

it Okay Well thank you It's it's been a delight to have you on and we look forward to hearing more from you

Rick Hanson: [00:58:16] Oh a complete pleasure Diana and I am to get to know you more over time I would really look forward to that

Diana Hill: [00:58:22] Hi everybody. It was so great to listen to Dr. Hanson today, Rick Hanson, and for those of you that are interested in doing that online year long program, remember that you can access it through our affiliate link at the bottom of this episode in the show notes or through our website. Off the clock, psyched.com and don't forget when you do.

So to enter the promo code,

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Diana Hill: [00:58:49]

and you'll get \$40 off his year long program. Take care.

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