

Neurodharma 1

Rick Hanson: [00:00:02] We're beginning to learn what's happening in people's brains, including your brain and my brain. when we feel really centered, really grounded, calm, clear, strong, loving, and happy. and we learn as well from the people who've made it their life's work to develop those qualities as traits. These seven qualities, which I'll name and we'll get into.

And then how you actually practice these ways of being and through practicing them strengthen and stabilize them.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:00:32] You're listening to rick hanson on psychologists off the clock

Diana Hill: [00:00:45] 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: [00:00:52] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado.

Diana Hill: [00:00:56] I'm Dr. Diana Hill, practicing in seaside Santa Barbara, California.

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

Jill Stoddard: [00:01:06] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, director of the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management.

Debbie Sorensen: [00:01:12] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

Diana Hill: [00:01:15] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

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Psychologists Off The Clock is so happy to be partnering with Praxis continuing education. They offer programming for mental health practitioners, and a lot of the areas that we discussed on the show and we're extra excited to announce a six week program with dr. Robyn Walser. That's going to be starting May 15th. That we highly recommend it's on treating trauma with act and dr. Walser, as you know, is such an expert in the field. We've had her on the show a number of times, and she is going to talk about how to use act principles like mindfulness and acceptance in your trauma treatment repertoire, how to discover the power of leveraging the therapeutic stance in trauma treatment. She'll review the current state of research on using act and trauma, and you'll learn to navigate client challenges that are specific to trauma. So check that out at praxiscet.net. You can also find it through our sponsorship page.

we're also really excited about Rick Hanson's new book and add his online programming that's associated with the book Neurodharma. You can check out Neurodharma that program through our sponsorship page, and there is a special coupon code for \$40 off if you go through us, so check that out at offtheclockpsych.com. Hope to see you there.

Yael and Diana Discuss Neurodharma **Yael Schonbrun:**

[00:02:40] Diana, I'm so happy to be here with you to introduce, two part series with Rick Hanson, introducing his new book that he's releasing this week, Neurodharma, new science, ancient wisdom, and seven practices of the highest happiness.

Rick Hanson has been a previous guest of ours, and I loved his episode with you where he talked about a lot of different elements of his work, but his new book is just. Chock full of all the, amazing practices or the science or the Buddhist wisdom that is so core to his work across the board. And I know that for you, this was really, a very impactful book, even though you've read so many of his books and have loved all of his work all along.

So what for you is so special about this particular book?

Diana Hill: [00:03:23] Well, I think Neurodharma is really a culmination of his life's work, right? So we're getting to read from a master who has spent many decades both studying Buddhism and applying it in his life, as well as studying neuroscience. And so he takes the most cutting edge concepts of neuroscience. Translate them in a way that are totally accessible and makes sense and then applies them to do to them.

So it's just, it's great. I mean, it's all some of all my favorite things in one spot. So of course I love it, the way that he breaks it down makes it so that you can go walk yourself through this program. And the program builds upon itself, both in the book and his online program of Neurodharma, which we've been promoting for a while cause we've both been using it.

And. In the, in the online program, he adds in meditations, he adds in handouts. He adds in, uh, talks by him so that you get these little lessons on practices, everything from how to study your mind, how to experience wholeness and connectedness, how to be in the now and they're really, uh, meaningful and transformative.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:04:30] he really does bring a lot of these complicated practices into a format that's just really accessible that you can use on a daily basis to build all sorts of. attributes, strengths, qualities of being that really can help you to live more contentedly.

if you go to our sponsorship page, you can find out more about his program and get a discount on Neurodharma. Now that we're all stuck at home, it's a really good time to take advantage of doing some of these kind of learning, activities from home. So we hope that you enjoy part, one of this two part series of Rick Hanson talking about his new book, Neurodharma.

dr Rick Hanson is a psychologist, senior fellow of the greater good science center at UC Berkeley, New York times bestselling author, host of the podcast being well originator of the wonderful online course, foundations of wellbeing. And we are proud to say a previous guest on psychologists off the clock. His body of work is impressive to say the least, and we are here to discuss his latest book, the just released Neurodharma, new science, ancient wisdom, and seven practices of the highest happiness. Welcome Dr. Hanson

Rick Hanson: [00:05:40] Oh, thank you. I'd call me Rick, and let me make sure I pronounce your name correctly. Yale. Wow.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:05:45] Yes, correct. Well, Rick, we are so happy to have you back your earlier interview with Diana, episode 122, uh, exploring the kinds

of practices that help transform the mind was captivating and we were so excited that you were willing to return and talk to us about your latest book. I wonder if you could start us off by describing what you are trying to accomplish in Neurodharma.

How does it build on your previous work?

Rick Hanson: [00:06:07] Yeah. Well, I was reflecting on that a little bit, preparing as it were for talking with you. And the first thing I want to say is that as a longtime psychologist and someone interested in human potential broadly, um, one thing that's striking about people is the range. And that's a common factor or common.

Saying, you know, a feature of our minds that's noted in psychology. In other words, there's a range from, for example, terrible clinical depressive despair, all the way out to peak experiences. It's the full range. And, uh, the mental health field has been particularly interested in moving from minus 10 to zero.

Historically focused on pathology. Increasingly, there's been an interest in moving above the waterline, above zero and to, you know, the ones and twos and threes of everyday wellbeing. And increasingly there's science about the upper reaches of the human potential range moving up toward eight, nine and 10 and so in that context, I did what people do when they want to understand how to do something better, study people who are really good at it.

And then do a kind of reverse engineering. So we now know a lot about what's going on in the brains of people when they're depressed or stressed or anxious. We're beginning to learn what's happening in people's brains, including your brain and my brain. Uh, when we feel really centered, really grounded, calm, clear, strong, loving, and happy.

What's happening now and what can we learn as well from the people who've made it their life's work to develop those qualities as traits. So they're increasingly stable, even as challenges grow. Uh, Richie Davidson, you may know, described the longterm contemplative people who meditate a lot and have a lot over their life as the Olympic athletes of mental training.

So we can study them and increasingly start to plausibly. Understand what's going on inside the hardware, what's happening inside the coconut. You know, the three pounds of tofu, like tissue inside the head. What's happening in there when we are as strong, as happy, as loving and clear as we can ever be.

And so what I've done in my book is identified seven kind of core qualities, uh, that we all experienced one way or another, and are really developed in the process of what could be called awakening broadly across the world's traditions, including secular traditions. These seven qualities, which I'll name and we'll get into.

And then the book focuses. Yeah. Cause I'm a practical methods guy. Uh, on practices. How do you actually practice these ways of being and through practicing them strengthen and stabilize them. So increasingly that's who you are wherever you go.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:08:58] Yeah. Well, I love both that this book and your work more broadly speaking is really centered in ancient wisdom. And modern

science. I mean, it's such a cool integration of what people have been studying for thousands of years and what we've only more recently been able to explore in the laboratory. Um, and one thing that I think just strikes me because this book is so rich, both in the ancient philosophy and in the complexities of the modern science, what was it like for you to integrate these two divergent, broad and complicated literatures?

And how. Also, this is slightly separate question, but I'm curious, how surprised were you to find so many levels of convergence between ancient wisdom and modern science?

Rick Hanson: [00:09:44] Well a lot there. Um, so as a kind of metaphor, kind of drawing on my own background and rock climbing, being in the mountains and, uh, the opening paragraph, the book talks about an experience I've had in the mountains where a friend who's farther up the path may be a better climber, maybe someone who's more fit than I am.

Uh, there's a long list of people who are more fit than I am, I'm sure. But anyway, so my friend turns and when this really sweet gesture. Beckons me onward with a smile, maybe a cautionary note. Watch out for the eyes. There was a log there. You can do it. Quit loafing Hanson. Get up here, you know, something friendly. Boom, boom. Up the mountain. And in much the same way, I think of those who have gone as far as you can and human potential, um, saints, sages, teachers, and very ordinary people. No one has ever heard of.

Themselves farther up the mountain of awakening, turning with that same gesture of welcoming and invitation in and encouragement.

And so that's a very fundamental metaphor for me. As you approached the pinnacle of whatever is possible for human beings in this reality. Um, the paths converge and maybe someone began in a Jewish. Tradition. Maybe someone started with second or mindfulness. Maybe someone like myself is really trained in the original teachings of the Buddha.

Whatever your path might be, but as you get closer and closer and closer, people look more and more alike. So I want to be clear, there are many routes up the mountain of awakening. The one that I know well is a con is Buddhism, and particularly the Teravata and roots of Buddhism before it developed further.

And it's Tibetan Chinese Zen and pure land streams. So that's the one I'm teaching from. And I am drawing on the voice of the Buddha as best we know coming to us from 2,500 years ago and his contemporaries, and it's, it's a voice of awakening and it's also a voice of a penetrating and completely. I'll dare to say it.

Secular psychological analysis of the mind. There's very little metaphysics.

There's very little that supernatural, uh, in the original teachings of the Buddha. It's very direct, especially in a good translation. So to marry that most radical penetrating.

Understanding regulatory understanding of our own consciousness to marry that with the most granular, current cutting edge, cellular molecular, biochemical understanding of neuroscience is super cool.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:12:15] It's super cool.

Rick Hanson: [00:12:16] super cool and it's super useful. You have to be a little careful. And I tried to be careful. That's one reason why there are a million reference notes cause I had to carve out all kinds of topics and acknowledge all kinds of things. So I then I could kind of go down the road up the main line and the book itself, if you ignore the reference notes, it's actually a fairly readable, it's quite readable.

I think it's warm, it's accessible, it's encouraging. We keep going, but there's a so much kind of buried in the reference notes and. It was fun for me to be thorough about it. And, um, I'll confess something I've never confessed publicly, which is, I'm a West coast guy. I kinda grew up in California, although my cultural roots run through North Dakota in the Midwest.

That's kinda how I identify myself. And one thing I've noticed over the years is a certain prejudice from East coasters. I know you work at Brown present, company excluded, but

Yael Schonbrun: [00:13:10] I grew up in California. If it's a

Rick Hanson: [00:13:12] Oh, okay. Okay. Okay. We're on the same page then. That's great. Anyway, so there's kind of this prejudice that West coasters are, are lazy, you know, Naval gazing, hot tub people, you know, duh, duh, duh key theaters.

And I like the idea of the fact that honestly, no, a lot of good scholarships coming out of the West coast and a lot of good business technology, Tufts coming out of the West coast. So there's a part of me that really likes the feeling of, uh, I have the goods. Right? Our son played poker partly to put himself through college.

That's a whole other story. And there's

Yael Schonbrun: [00:13:46] Is that all right?

Rick Hanson: [00:13:46] got the nuts. You know, you've got an ACE in your hand. I mean, I just want to have the evidence. Right. And he was reassuring to bring that kind of, no, this really is solid. No, there really is a study for that. No, that really is what the Buddha said. So that was very reassuring for me too.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:14:02] Yeah. Well, and I love that the title Neurodharma stands for the truth of the mind, which is grounded in the truth of the body, and it's really proven by the modern science, even though it's steeped in the ancient wisdom. I think it's such a cool integration and it really does provide a lot of incentive to.

Suggest that these to try these practices out because there's a lot of evidence to show that they work right? And we want to do things at work. We want to support the things that work. And I think that's really what your larger body of work, as well as this more recent book really helps to do

Rick Hanson: [00:14:36] Yeah. And I think we have to be careful that we don't overclaim. On the other hand, we have to be careful that we don't under claim. And also, uh,

the context is different between doing bench science and the standards standards for vetting truth claims are really different from . What is appropriate to do with a client in the therapy office or when teaching a stress management program in a hospital or talking with people in a self-help framework about what could be plausible with low risk.

To try on your own to see if it's helpful for you. and I think sometimes people are afraid to connect the dots that are available to connect.

With modesty and with respect for what's still a great mystery. And then on the basis of that is the Buddhist head. See for yourself, try it out and if it's beneficial, if some way of understanding your own mind, grounded in what's emerging about the hardware of the brain, if some understanding about your own mind draws you to do something when you're talking with your partner.

Who are remembering something upsetting from your childhood or meditating and going into the deeper end of the pool. If you try something out and it's useful. That's evidence. It's evidence from a first person perspective based on the operation of from a third person perspective of the underlying hardware, the body, but it's still evidentiary.

It's still useful information. Why not keep on going, and that's the spirit of encouragement. Again, like those people farther up the mountain, they say, Hey, come and join us.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:16:21] Yeah. Yeah. Well, and I think you're speaking to a larger tooth. They think I always come back to in my psychological practice as well as in my personal practice, which is, I think it can be useful to start with ancient wisdom and modern science, but you need to combine it with yourself knowledge.

And we're all, you know, very similar to one another, but we all also differ. And, and to have. Enough of a sense of self and, and a willingness to look at what works for you and what doesn't in the context of what we know from, you know, why is people who've come before us and from what's been tested in the laboratory.

And when you put those together, you have a strong foundation to work from to figure out how you do, you know, move away from depression and integrator happiness. For

Rick Hanson: [00:17:05] so two things here. First, as I mentioned to you before we began, I take vitamins and, um, I took a vitamin this morning that is lodged in my throat. And so it's been stuck there for about an hour. It's gradually going to dissolve.

I'm really okay. But the fundamental question is what's a person's state of being when they're challenged? Right. One of the key takeaways from this material, including the material that I explored in the book, is that these practices are not about what it feels like to be you.

When you're lying there in a hammock and you're getting Ivy chocolate and a Manny petty.

I've never had a Manny petty. I should get one. But anyway, uh, and everybody's whispering in your ear, that's easy. But what do you do when you've got a pill stuck in your throat or your back is killing you, or you're trying to get a toddler into a car seat, or

Yael Schonbrun: [00:17:55] having a fight with your partner.

Rick Hanson: [00:17:57] Yeah. Can you maintain what I call an unshakable core in the ground of your being around which other things are happening?

And I, and to me that's a reasonable aspiration and that's the fundamental

standard. You know, what's your resting state, uh, what's in the core of your being, even when you're challenged, what's the quality of feeling in the background of awareness and when you want to at will, can you drop into some pretty profound places.

Those are legitimate questions and they're with it. They're attainable. We can grow and develop in those ways. And to me, that's what we're talking about here. We're not talking about a walking around in a state of white light consciousness all the time, although that's pretty cool for at least an hour or two.

And then you kind of come back to normal reality. But I'm really talking about here. What's it like to be you when you're driving in traffic or doing the dishes, or as you said, arguing with your partner? That's the real test.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:18:52] Yeah. And so let's, let's sort of come back to what are some of those core qualities? So you dedicated this book to your many teachers, which I love. Um, teachers don't get enough credit in general. Um, but you described some core features of enlightened individuals who have been your teachers throughout your life.

So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what the teachers that you so admire have in common and why are these characteristics are useful for the rest of us? Normal, ordinary people who don't live in an ashram to cultivate.

Rick Hanson: [00:19:19] Well, that's great. Well, um, I, there are different ways I'm sure of sorting this out, but for me, there's seven qualities that are, that are undeniable, and they're essentially a cluster of quality. So first quality is steadiness of mind. There's this stability of presence of mindfulness. There's also a capacity to control attention, uh, pull it away from what's not useful, rested on what is and become deeply concentrated.

You know, including in non-ordinary States of meditative absorption, if that's of interest to a person steady of someone.

second. There's a warmth of heart. Compassion, kindness, lovingness at a friend who trained as a monk in Asia for nine plus years, asked him if he ever met anyone who was enlightened. And he said, well, in that tradition, there's much for testing, and they watch you for awhile, right, buddy?

And he laughed. He said, yeah, I definitely met some people who were considered to be extremely far along, if not. Fully cooked and he said they were always alike. They were always the same. I went, what do you mean? He said, well, no. Going to say were funny. Sometimes they were serious, but in this sense they were always the same.

If you were nice to them, they really loved you. If you were mean to them, they really loved you. In other words, their love was unshakeable. Now they might. Do something like tell you, you have to leave the monastery because you're growing marijuana in the jungle, and that's not cool as a monk in Thailand maybe, but they still really loved you and you were welcome to come back.

So a steadiness of warmth of heart. Third, a quality of equanimity in the waves of life.

Uh, stability of walking evenly as a, we're over uneven ground of the stability of peace, contentment and love, and an absence of craving. This goes to the Buddhist teaching about the second and third Noble truths of craving with

creating suffering and less craving, leading to happiness and wisdom. And so how do we actually do that? You know, particularly as a biological character who's designed to crave in order to live and survive. So fullness. I call that resting and fullness, and then, um, kind of speeding up here. The remaining four really move into the deep end of the pool. Um, there's a sense in these people that they are integrated in whole.

Deep self-acceptance. Nothing's left out. They're not lying about anything or denying anything. They're not racked with inner conflict and their consciousness has this nondual quality of awareness and its contents as one single field

Also a sense of being completely in the present, not obsessing about the future, not worrying about the past.

Receiving nowness right at the emergent edge of the moment. Um, before suffering has time to sink. It's rude. Sip right now.

Then we have, they report a sense of being one with everything. You know the joke about the Dalai Lama and the hotdog vendor make me one with everything, right? And so it's that oneness with everything.

Nondual awareness where you have a sense of just being a local expression in the vast tapestry of reality rather than a beleaguered, isolated, separate itself at war. With everything here too. Um, self-centeredness drops away. Self-referential processing drops away. Uh, there's a beautiful summary line from the grid.

Zen teacher Dogan in the 12 hundreds in Japan said to study. The way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to perceive oneself as all things. Whoa. So that's very cool.

And then the seventh quality, this is the, this is the potentially controversial one because it gets into what may well lie beyond ordinary reality.

Now if people want to stay inside the frame of ordinary reality, the natural frame, so-called, or if people are committed to a stance, which is their right of atheism or agnosticism, that's fine, but there's a lot of language in the early teachings of the Buddha and definitely a lot that's found in the other traditions of the world that does point to some possibility beyond ordinary reality.

So I engage this material, not from the standpoint of trying to persuade anyone. I tried to really mark the distinctions that are present here and yet be also respectful of the fact that for many people, they can't imagine deep practice without reference to the transcendental. And what might that be?

The Buddhi is language that was very spare, uh, like the unconditioned, the deathless, the unchanging, uh, a way of thinking about those is that.

He pointed out that conditioned phenomena, in other words, the conditioned stream of consciousness, one thing leading to another, like a bunch of dominoes falling or conditioned physical reality dating all the way back to the big bang.

It's always changing, and so it's an unstable, unreliable basis for the most sublime. Enduring happiness. So he looked for what was less and less conditioned or fabricated or constructed. And a way to understand this, um, is in

terms of, uh,

you know, a sense of what is unconditioned in our own consciousness in the sense that awareness is unconditioned.

Cause it can represent anything moving through it or more deeply, Whoa, what might lie beyond the veil, right? And, and what, and that which is unconditioned. And if it's unconditioned, it's unchanging. Therefore timeless, therefore eternal and perhaps, uh, with always a quality of unconditioned possibility.

Always just prior to this moment of conditioned actuality. Whoa, very cool stuff. And the, the net of that is for people who are very far along, um, you just feel like there's a light shining through them that's not entirely their own. Like there's a feeling in them, they kind of talk about it where they just feel rested in timelessness while time passes through.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:25:28] Yeah.

Rick Hanson: [00:25:29] how can we get that ourselves? And I can see in your face right now you have a feeling for this, and that's one of the key takeaways. Even the things that sound kind of exotic, we all have a feeling for that. We all know what it's like one time or another to be very loving, very balanced, and equanimity to feel wide open and undefended in the moment.

Connected with everything, maybe with some sense of awe or mystery or vastness or timelessness. We all have a feeling for this, and then the question is, can you live there? Increasingly, can you be established in these ways of being progressively over time, which inside ordinary reality must involve lasting changes in your brain, rested in your body altogether?

Yael Schonbrun: [00:26:18] Yeah. Yeah. So let's, let's maybe start by talking a little bit about the neurological basis for why it's hard, why those. Conditions aren't just naturally inherent in our brain. And one of the things that I wanted to mention is that as I was reading your book, I was also reading a beautiful memoir. It's called wild games by Adrian Rodier, and there was this line that stuck out to me because of your book.

The quote is, why is it that an insult stays with you forever? Whereas love and praise passes through you like water through a sieve. Can you talk a little bit about why suffering sticks and how knowing about the basis of our suffering can help us work with the neuroplasticity of our minds?

Rick Hanson: [00:27:00] Oh, you're getting out. One of the most useful ideas from neuroscience, the negativity bias of the brain. It's this fundamental quality it has that's shaped by evolution because it helps creatures live to see the sunrise in the wild. It's this fundamental tendency to scan for bad news. Over-focus upon it, overreact to it, and fast track that whole package into emotional memory and then gradually become sensitized to the negative over time through the activity of the stress hormone cortisol.

That's the summary of the negativity bias. And I say it's like having a brain that's Velcro for bad experiences, but Teflon for good ones. And so you're exactly right. Um, we, I used a metaphor myself that positive experiences pass through us like water through a sieve while negative ones get routinely caught.

And for me, the takeaway from that is to, um.

Draw upon emotionally painful experiences like anxiety or frustration or loneliness or inadequacy or guilt or shame. Use them. Don't let them use you. If we fight with them, if we suppress them, they just gets stronger. What you resist persists in the same but second, don't feed and follow them.

Don't. Ally with the inner attackers inside your own mind. Quit feeding the beast. Pull out of running laps around the rumination track, digging a little deeper each time you go around it. Don't feed them. And in particular, focus on growing flowers in the garden of your mind, not just obsessing about the way it's, and shift attention as much as you can when it's appropriate to what's authentically beneficial and good, and then slow down.

For a breath or longer, feel it in your body. Focus on what's rewarding about it to actually hardwire the somatic emotional

attitude and all interpersonal, et cetera. Residues of that good experience of feeling heard or feeling connected, which you're giving me a lot of that here. Um, to really, really, really let that sink in.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:29:07] Yeah. I mean, you write, and I love this quote, but the brain takes its shape from what you rest your attention on. Through having a sense again and again of steadiness, lovingness, fullness, wholeness, newness on this and timelessness. You'll be weaving together these qualities into your own nervous system, and that's really what Neurodharma, your book guides us to do, is to be more skillful in what we rest our attention on and how we rest our attention on it.

But what I love about your work is that it doesn't. Deny the fact that we're going to have difficult experiences, pain, that our mind is going to want to pay attention to some of the negative information that comes in, or some of the dangers or some of the craving that's hardwired into us. And we can't pretend that away, nor can we delete it.

But what we can do is build these practices that balance it in ways that help us to experience more happiness, more, more wholeness, more peace.

Rick Hanson: [00:30:00] Yeah, that's totally true. And these, you know, I, I am still on the, I'm working my way up the mountain, you know, I still have a ways to go. I can still see people up the mountain of awakening who are farther along than I am. And, and I like that cause it gives me something to aspire to and be inspired by.

And, uh, these. Qualities that get cultivated are, you could say at the essence of mental health,

right? And especially the first three that developing the steadiness of mind, emotional self regulation, impulse control, executive function, lifting mood, finding compassion for yourselves, finding compassion for others, and establishing a fundamental equanimity as you rest in a feeling of fullness already.

Of contentment already. Enoughness already as you continue to dream big dreams dare greatly as Bernay Brown puts out. I mean, this is really useful in everyday life.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:30:59] Yeah. So let's talk about some of the practices that go along with, um, let's start with studying the mind. So first, how would you

describe what it means to have a steady mind? And then maybe we can talk about some of the practical things that one can do to start developing a steadier mind.

Rick Hanson: [00:31:18] Well, what's not a steady mind is the normal. Person

Yael Schonbrun: [00:31:22] The monkey mind right.

Rick Hanson: [00:31:24] Yeah. Well, research shows, if you ping people, uh, randomly throughout a day, 50% of the time on average, their mind is wandering. They're not in the present. And, um, there's a lot of research that shows that as mind wandering increases, so typically does negative effect.

Negative emotion, worry, anxiety, depression, irritation, resentment, and self criticism and so forth. So a steady mind is not a destructive mind. And also it's a mind that's not suck them and, uh, caught up and trapped by preoccupations of one kind or another because a steady mind is one that can be moved away from. All that and a steady mine is very useful because attention is the front end of the process of neuroplastic change. I think of it as like a vacuum cleaner with a light on it. Attention it's sex. What ERs upon into the brain, particularly if what you're paying attention to is negative. So that steadiness of mind along with those qualities of stable mindfulness.

You know, realtime mindfulness. It's easy to be mindful over the course of half of a breath.

How about staying completely present for four breaths in a row

and then 10. Lot of people. That's a serious challenge, and then do 10 tens in a row. That's a steady mind. And, um, in the meditative traditions as well, the notion of steadiness of mind is that it's kind of like a laser that gives you penetrating insight, liberating insight.

Into your own mind because as your mind steadies as you train, you become more and more able to discern, subtler and subtler events, more and more fleeting events in your own consciousness. Your granularity of mindfulness increases and you start getting closer and closer to the clock rate of the nervous system.

In other words, if you've got neurons that are firing five to 50 times a second, if the, uh, neural substrates of working memory in the upper outer frontal regions of the cortex, um, the, uh, are being updated four to six times a second, you can have. Five mental events a second. If you're particularly attentive, you're getting closer and closer because your mind gets study or in study or to what your brain is actually doing, which then gives you much more detailed, granular facts, emotional insight into your own being, and you feel more and more at home in yourself and finishing through this training of setting.

This of mine.

He started getting access to some non-ordinary States of consciousness, deep forms of access, concentration in the Buddhist tradition, the so-called jhanas, these four non-ordinary States of consciousness, they're described psychologically. Not spiritually or metaphysically, but they're having experienced that myself.

They're not ordinary. He were no longer in Kansas. His not the huge, you know, and, uh, and yet they are our human endowment. We are able to access them. And in these deep States of concentration, uh, there's a lot of purification that goes on. A lot of tendencies are released. You have a real sense of what's possible.

Um, and you get a lot of insights. You know, into your own, in your own mind. So let's just studying this in mind, and that's the only, the first of the seventh

Yael Schonbrun: [00:34:43] that's just the first one. Yeah. I love that, and I think it really does speak to why mindfulness and meditation is so powerful for changing. How we experience life, because if we do gain greater insight and we do create that pause and understanding what's happening inside of us before we respond to the outside world, then we're less likely to do things that are misaligned with our values or that are destructive for ourselves or for those that we care about.

And I think that practice of meditation and mindfulness really is explained. It's sort of, you're in reading your work, you understand. Why it's other age. It really is empowering.

Rick Hanson: [00:35:22] Yeah. And there's so much research now that's really neat about how mindfulness and meditation have lasting changes in the brain. In the book, I do a quick summary of that, uh, with a lot of reference notes and so forth, but it really gives us confidence that what we practice grows stronger as my friend, the psychologist Shauna Shapiro put said, what you practice grows stronger, and that's true.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:35:45] Yeah. Yeah. One thing that I'll also mentioned that I liked in your, in I think it was in this section, is that you, you described that you know, for many of us different kinds of meditation might. Hold our attention more effectively as we gain this skill. So this idea of just like watching the breath for hours at a time may not work for some of us who have what you call a Jack rabbit mind.

And you may need to choose something that's the object of attention that's a bit more a, um, holding of your attention and to find what works. And in other words, that not everything works for everybody, but you need to find. The kinds of practice that help you build that muscle of studying the mind

Rick Hanson: [00:36:27] a wonderful and important point to make. It's really okay to focus on something like gratitude or love or the feeling of your whole body, or to pray or to meditate, if you will, while you walk. You want it. You're training yourself, there's an element of training and it's okay. It's a little bit like a workout in a way.

So you want there to be a little bit of challenge to it, but there shouldn't be so much challenge that it's frustrating. You're narrating, uh, you know, we want to be drawn to our practices.

Yeah.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:37:00] Yeah. Okay. So the next practice is warming the heart, which refers to building minds and hearts that are imbued with compassion and kindness. And I wonder if you can talk a little bit about the neurological basis for the importance of compassion. Why is it so important to build. This I this idea of compassion, kindness, and sort of connectedness to others.

Rick Hanson: [00:37:24] Lots in that. Um, let's see. Compassion. I is a response typically to suffering. So it kind of presupposes suffering. Kindness could be a response to suffering, but it doesn't presuppose it. Compassion has this quality of tenderness and sympathy and all, and wanting to help kindness more as a sense of, Hey, I, I hope you'll be happy.

There's a friendliness Senate and they kind of blur together, but it's useful to start to tease apart these elements. Uh.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:37:53] for clarifying.

Rick Hanson: [00:37:54] Uh, neurologically. Um, one of the useful things to understand is that as warm hearted does increases both as compassion element and it's kindness. Element love broadly lovingness.

Broadly. Uh, one thing that happens is that naturally oxytocin activity increases in the brain, and this neurochemical hormone is called a hormone where it operates outside the nervous system, um, has, there are receptors for this neurochemical in both the prefrontal cortex, spine, the forehead, and in the amygdala, the alarm bell of the brain.

Technically, as you know, there are two of them. So, uh, in both the, uh, amygdala and in the prefrontal cortex as oxytocin activity increases related to increased feelings of compassion or kindness, um, that has a calming and soothing effect. It reduces anxiety because the receptors, for example, for oxytocin in the amygdala are inhibitory.

They function like brakes distinct from the gas pedal of excitatory neuro chemical activity. And so, uh, and you can notice it as you feel a receiving of lovingness or if you feel an expressing of lovingness, you tend to feel stronger and calmer, less fearful, and more resourced internally to cope with life.

And in part, through the mechanisms that I've just alluded to here.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:39:24] Yeah. Yeah. It's an amazing thing. I mean, the research on this is so fascinating that when people are, um, put through like pain trials, but they're connected physically or even through photographic documents to people that they love, their experience of pain is mitigated. It's, it's incredible. And from a happiness standpoint, we know that being connected to those, we love.

Increases our positive effect. And so it's it. So to build practices that, really engage our compassion muscle and to get more fast style with it is, is really something that can help us build more happiness.

Rick Hanson: [00:39:59] Really true. And one thing, one thing about that just briefly is that we understandably, and people often feel wounded related to not receiving enough lovingness. Coming toward them in various forms. Inclusion, empathy, appreciation, liking, loving, flowing in, and understandably, they seek it from the outside in, and that's totally appropriate as a therapist, I'm on their side to try to help them find that and so forth.

That said, the world is often slow in coming and, uh, meanwhile though we have always the capacity unilaterally. To gradually nourish and feed and strengthen and express, loving us from the inside out, flowing out into the world and wonderfully as that quality, those qualities of compassion and kindness, friendliness, happiness for others.

Seeing the being behind the eyes. I'm not walking down the street wishing ill to

other people as we feel those things. We feel better ourselves, and it's great to know that we have the power to tap into the power of loving those, even if the world is slow to come.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:41:10] Yeah. And we can also offer it to ourselves. I mean, I love the work of Kristin Neff and Chris Garman. We've had Chris grimmer on the show before. And um, as you know, I was connected to you through Susan Pollock, who does self-compassion for parents. But being able to direct compassion towards ourselves is such an empowering idea that we can send it out into the world we can offer to ourselves and then we can get more skillful at getting it from other people as well.

I'm curious for you, what's your favorite compassion exercise or exercise to build on compassion for yourself?

Rick Hanson: [00:41:39] Wow. Um, I, I do this in different ways than I even, I started doing it a while ago when I was about to give a talk, and it's actually a real . Laboratory demonstration, what I just said. So I try to feel the person behind the eyes. Like, I'm doing it with you right now. And, uh, and I do it many, many times a day.

I tried to, including with people who are strangers on the street or even adversaries. That's really interesting to work with what's called the difficult person or the person who is challenging for you. Uh, and so first to slow down for the extra three, four seconds to feel, to get a sense of the person behind the eyes behind.

Right behind a certain, you know, ethnicity, just to being on the eyes. Who is that? Who are you broadly, not presuming an entity in there, but it's more like the process, you know, the, the being ness, find the eyes, tune into that, including, and then open to the suffering, the difficulty, the strained wariness, the burden. Uh, you and I are, I don't know you well. I know myself well. I'm really quite privileged. I'm quite . Fortunate, I can. Sure you have had some good fortune yourself. And still, we all, we're weary, we're tired, we're aging, we're concerned about others. Um, and we can Intuit that in other people. So contact to being behind the eyes, Intuit the pain and to it the suffering without trying to presume or feel superior anyway, but in a very real sense.

And then I'll locate the fundamental feeling of, of caring. We're wishing well, even knowing that I can't do anything about it, or it wouldn't be appropriate for me to do anything about it, but still, I have a, a caring, warm, supportive feeling for you. Uh, you, whoever you are, including Yale right now. And, uh, so that's the fundamental practice I do.

Um, I do it formally sometimes, uh, in meditative ways. You know, we're, for example, people will, will say things to themselves like. Picking a certain person, may you be safe, may you be happy and so on. But a lot of it for me is about the feeling of it and becoming kind of wall to wall, you know, day to day.

And what I noticed when I started doing that before giving a talk, I'd be. Looking at the audience before I went up on stage while my heart was pounding and I would just get a feeling for the people in the room. Uh, just look around half a dozen faces and just get a sense of contacting them as beings and instantly my own anxiety would reduce and I would be drawn into being of help to them.

Or get out of my head over there with them and then Kaboom, cause that's what

I'm supposed to be doing, right. I'm supposed to be there for them, not me, but my anxious self-conscious preoccupations and be over there with them and then boom, I felt better. And of course it would be easier to go to the talk and I would feel a lot less anxious inside.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:44:42] That's really cool. I love, I love all those examples and they left sort of have that relates to being of service to others in a public speaking forum, which is so anxiety for hooking for so many people. It's a really nice practice. Okay. How about resting in fullness, which is a practice that encourages us to develop a sense of peacefulness, contentment, and enoughness.

One thing that I think is really important to note, and you, you mentioned this earlier, is that craving and wanting more is built into our neurology. And so this idea of resting and fullness sort of runs counter to that natural biology that we all live with. And in one sense we don't want to let go of it cause we need to know when we're hungry.

We need to sort of know when to pursue things. And so you offer a pretty nuanced view of, of wanting and, and fullness. And I wonder if you could speak a little bit to that. It isn't black and white as one might assume as one might wish, I guess.

Rick Hanson: [00:45:39] is one of the most interesting topics of all, and it's right at the heart of Buddhism, for example, for those who care about that sort of thing. Because in the four noble truths, we have the truth of suffering. It's not that life is suffering, is that there is suffering a second, the source of so much of our suffering in a word.

Craving, and I'm going to get to that word a minute. Then we have the third noble truth that follows, which says there is a possible end to that craving and therefore to the suffering and the harm that ensues. And then there's a fourth noble truth. There's a path of practice. It's very grounded and very specific and has nothing to do with faith.

It's all about personal practice, the cultivation of wise intentions, wise, view wise, speech wise, mindfulness and so forth. And so for me, the fulcrum of Buddhist practice certainly is the transition from the second to the third noble truth, from more craving to less craving. What could that possibly mean?

So bear with me slightly. Um, from a neuropsychological standpoint, craving is a drive state grounded in a sense of deficit or disturbance in the meeting of an important need. That's the crux of it. So if we ground, uh, the Dharma in nature in life. If we're interested in craving, we have to think about what do we need and how do we manage our needs and how do we experience a sufficiency of needs being met in a changing, often challenging world.

Really at the crux, right? And nobody has really explored that, which is so interesting. Nobody, I am deeply interested in this. Nobody has really brought to bear the tools of evolutionary neurobiology, you know, in the ways in which craving has been shaped by evolution and the ways in which the management of our needs has been shaped by evolution, especially in the last couple million years in the evolution of our capacity, uh, and our needs for relationships.

Uh, various kinds. Right? So it's really interesting and a couple of distinctions are useful, um, between wanting in the problematic sense of drivenness, pressure,

contraction, insistence, uh, addiction at the extreme. Uh, and distinct from that, I'll just call it. Ordinary, uh, kind of coping aspiration, uh, a sense of liking without wanting or preferring or undertaking something rather than feeling really contracted around it.

And so the point is. We can meet our needs, let's say for safety or satisfaction or connection. The three big, the big three met through avoiding arms for safety, approaching rewards for satisfaction, and attaching to others for connection. These are fundamental ideas in psychology and biology. Um, I've kind of organized it in this way, but this is not exotic or you know, something I just sort of made up.

All right, so the point is, even when your need for safety is challenged. You can feel a sense of calm strength in the core of your being. Maybe around the edges. You're kind of nervous about that big truck driving next to you in the rain, but you're a good driver. You know what you're doing. Even if your kids are in the back seat and you're going to move past that truck, you're watchful, you're attentive, but you're not panicking.

You're not flooded with anxiety. You're not, uh, in a high state of distress. Just because there's a need for safety that's challenged doesn't mean we need to get stressed and fearful and angry about it. Similarly, if we have our needs for satisfaction, we can pursue goals. We can do emails, we can work, but without feeling contracted about it or being hyper attached to the outcome, distinct from being caught up in drivenness or being gripped by frustration or disappointment or addiction to problematic pleasures.

And the same with. Relationships. Right? Um, we can navigate tricky conversations without having resentment or hate invader mind. We can deal politically with them with whom we have grievances, say, or, or we feel misunderstood or mistreated by, but we don't have to hate. Yeah. And we don't have to pathologize them or denigrate them.

And we can be in touch with the ways in which we are an us broadly in that we all love our children. We all, you know. We'd rather keep going than die, especially on a decent day. And that will not be our faith. And that's true for everyone. And, um, so we can grow in these ways. So this territory, uh, to make it really practical, I'll be super fast here cause I know I'm just rattling on.

Um, how do you rest in peace, contentment and love rather than fear, frustration and hurt? All right? How do you arrest in the green zone of balanced equanimity as you do with the challenges of life? Three things. One, get out of the red zone as fast as you can. If you gotta run into that burning building to grab your kid's Teddy bear.

I've been there. Um, you okay? Rev up. Adrenaline, cortisol. If you have to fight off an attacker or you have to deal with someone at work, you know, who's being really aggressive and inappropriate socially, uh, do what you need to do. Okay. But get out of the red zone as fast as you can. Second, uh, cultivate psychological resources of various kinds, and also do what you can in your environment so that you can meet your needs you know, successfully.

In other words, be your needs. Grow psychological resources. Develop emotional intelligence, develop social intelligence, uh, go see you as a therapist to improve your, you know, relationships of various kinds. Uh, become more skillful, become

stronger, become wiser, become more determined, become more committed to your exercise or your sobriety, you know, develop these things so that you can meet your needs more effectively.

Great. And third, really, really key. When your needs feel mad enough. Yum, yum, yum. Bring a big spoon. Take it and let it sink, can savor it. Taking the good, let it really sink in. You know when you feel safe enough, when you feel calm and you feel strong. Marinade in that experience. When you achieve little goals a hundred times a day, pause for a breath.

Two or half a breath that leaves that you finished that email or you got the dishes done or you finished a cycle of some kind of task oriented thing, let it sink in. And also, uh, when you feel caring or cared about, love flowing in or love flowing out, slow down, let it sink in. So then increasingly synapse by synapse.

Plausibly, we are hardwiring the residues of needful film into the marrow of our being. And so therefore, increasingly we feel in the core of our being, um, fundamentally at peace, fundamentally contented and fundamentally loved and loving, no matter what's going on around us. And that is a very legitimate goal. Uh, to develop, and I'm still working on the upper edges of can I absolutely rest in that place, uh, in when people are being really crummy, you know, or, uh, can I rest in that place when I get caught by some residue from my own childhood? You know, that's a growing edge for a person, but we can really, really, really develop in this way and resilient wellbeing in the core.

Is probably the defining characteristic of mental health and it's something we can develop over time.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:53:29] Yeah. And I love the suggestions to this pause in it and savor it. And one of the things that I try to do more and more, and I tried to do it out loud with my kids, cause I think it's a great thing to model. I have young children, um, is, is just narrating it. Like right now, you know, we're all at peace and we're all feeling loved and we're all so lucky to be safe and together and healthy and, you know, whatever it is that you can be grateful for.

Take a moment and, and explicitly engage in that savoring in whatever way works for you. But, um, you know, I do think that sometimes narrating and it's just this very sort of easy, simple thing that you can do and it's a nice thing to do with other people cause then you get to share it.

Rick Hanson: [00:54:09] yeah, yeah, that's right. I bet you're a stunner as a mom.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:54:15] I have some moments that go better than others as we all do, but. But I do appreciate, um, what being a mom has taught me in terms of, of happiness. Cause I think that it really causes you to reflect. And. Want to pass on, you know, better, healthier strategies, maybe then we, we grew up with it. So the next practice is being wholeness, which you talk about is accepting yourself fully and feeling whole as a person.

So this is a little bit related to the idea of resting and fullness. I wonder how you distinguish between these two

Rick Hanson: [00:54:48] Mmm. Um, so much of the time we feel divided internally. Right? It's kind of like one part of us is troubling with another part of us. And what is it like to feel completely integrated as a whole, being a completely self accepting While managing ourselves, we can accept the fact that, let's say in

my case, I have a strong tendency toward getting overly driven toward a goal. You know, I'm going to go after that goal and I'm determined to a fault, and I can accept that tendency in myself while simultaneously, uh, regulating it. Or I can accept the tendency in me, you know, to get irritated sometimes and a flare and it'd be kinda hot tempered. Not so good, but I can regulate it still.

Okay. So we have those qualities. Another thing that happens is that, and you can do it right now, and those good signs for those, when you start to get a sense of things as a whole. Let's say your body as a whole, like people listening right now can get a sense of their body as a whole. I'm doing it right now.

Maybe you are too, including perhaps the sensations of breathing throughout the entire body. All known continuously as a single experience. We do this routinely with vision. We see imagery as a whole in which there are many parts in much the same way. We can sense as a whole in which there are many individuals sensations.

Uh, and also we can get a sense of the whole volume of a room or the whole context of a situation. As soon as you start to do that, you just notice you come much more into the present. Your mind gets calmer. There's less sense of self and you're coming more and more into a stability of mindfulness. And that's because when we move into that sense of things as a whole, we start engaging networks on the sides of the brain, especially the right hemisphere room for most people, because that's the hemisphere of the cortex that is involved with gestalt processing.

Taking things as a whole. The left hemisphere in most people right-handed people, uh, is useful for sequential processing. That's why language evolved in the left hemisphere, because language comprehension and production is sequential. You have to move things in order. So, um, as a kind of wonderful hack in your own brain, when you're getting stressed, try to get a sense of things as a whole and you'll notice that you'll start feeling better.

You know. Be less preoccupied and definitely less caught up in the default mode network in the back of the midline of the cortex, contrasted with the sides, the lateral or, uh, sides of the, of the brain. When the midline cortex gets active, we tend to be focused on task oriented doing, that's when the front of the midline cortex gets activated or we space out in ruminating.

Uh, that's when the default mode. Network toward the back of the midline and spreading to the sides gets activated. And it's also where there's a lot of mental time traveling. Into the future or the past. So we're not in the present moment and there's a lot of self thing. There's a lot of self-preoccupation and midline activation.

You might notice that when you go more into the sense of things as a whole, um, you have a more impersonal sense or a sense of everything as it is rather than, you know, from me or what about me. the other really, really interesting thing is that it's experientially available to us at any moment. You can do it now.

It's a little tricky if you're not used to it, but then you can establish it. You start to realize that the fact of the experiential matter always is that there's only mind is a whole or consciousness as a whole. I use the word mind to include emotion, sensation, the totality of consciousness. Okay?

Uh, and if you just kind of relax a little bit. And be you as a whole. You, in the

broadest sense, be this moment of experience as a whole with awareness included. Has a sense maybe of edgeless Snus you know, kind of, okay. Boom. As soon as you're in the hole, suffering drops out. Cause the structural feature of suffering is always part struggling with parts. Conflict of one kind or another. I want the cookie. I can't get the cookie parts struggling with parts, and it's available to us to go into this sense of the total mind is a hole in a nondual sense. In other words, everything is a single unified in this moment of experience.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:59:50] I love it. I had mentioned to you before we started the recording that I am working on a book on working Parenthood. And what I talk about is sort of the way that we often think about work and Parenthood as being at war with one another, conflicting with one another. And what I think is so cool is to start thinking about it more as complementing one another and contributing to like a whole full self and a whole full life.

And what's so fun about integrating ancient Eastern philosophy is that you look at sort of yin and yang. And the forces of yin and yang do press upon each other, but they contribute to this whole that is richer and fuller and more integrated as a result of those complimentary parts. there is this natural way that our mind. Creates divisions, good and bad, me versus you. But if we can do the kinds of practices that you're recommending, we can step more into that wholeness and fullness and, and not only feel more at peace, but also really feel that enrichment from the two sides of whatever it is that we're conflicted over, which I think is just so empowering and such a cool experience.

Rick Hanson: [01:00:59] Oh, that's really great that you're talking about that because we, we can of course, find these qualities of wholeness, uh, systemically, you know, in a couple or in a family or in a life altogether. And, uh, I was just thinking as you were speaking that in a very down to earth way, you know, I'd to kind of bottom line and as.

Separation and, um, division increases as an experience for a person, so to suffering and harm. On the other hand, as connection and integration. Increases as an experience for a person. So does wellbeing and functioning and service to others. It's kind of straight forward and maybe last on this one. Uh, with all these practices, what I love about them too is that you can get just a little taste of them and you can take it all the way to full enlightenment.

In regards to that one particular thing and the wholeness practice, which starts moving now more and more into subtler States of being a is an illustration of that. Uh, it's a wonderful meditative method and you can do it when you're not meditating, just in general as you take a breath. Try to get a sense of your body as a whole, and I think some people will find that easier than others, especially if they're already more whole body, like a yoga teacher say, or a dancer or someone who's in nature a lot.

I think that also tends to foster experiences a homeless food fairly soon. You can try it in the sense of your body as a whole, and it's an instant resource and refuge when you're dealing with challenges. It's very practical, and then over time you start going out in the mind as a whole. Like the way I'm talking about a, your consciousness as a whole, which is not metaphysical, it's not supernatural, it's just that's your experience as a whole.

Whew. Suffering and worry just falls away because in mind as a whole, there's no

problem.

Mine is a whole, is never a problem. It may contain pain and may contain sorrow, but we don't add suffering to it.

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