

## Neurodharma 2

**Rick Hanson:** [00:00:00] On any given day, we have this profound

existential soul power to practice or not.

And you can't do anything about the past, but you can practice today. And as we practice in the ways that work for us, we grow, we change, we heal, we get happy, we progress, we can see that. And that's the invitation for everyone. Wherever you are, you can practice and you can practice one of these seven things and you can practice all of them at a beginning level, at an intermediate level and beyond.

That was dr. Rick Hanson on psychologists off the clock.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:43] 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:** [00:00:51] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:55] I'm Dr. Diana Hill, practicing in seaside Santa Barbara, California.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:00:58] From coast to coast, I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:01:05] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, director of the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:01:10] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Diana Hill:** [00:01:14] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

## Sponsor

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](http://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](http://offtheclockpsych.com). Hope to see you there.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:02:37] Diana, we're back again to introduce the second part of this two part series of Rick Hanson talking about his new book,

Neurodharma. And in our introduction today, I just wanted to ask you to tell our listeners about one or two of your favorite recants and practices that you use most regularly to cultivate your own centeredness or cultivate your own happiness.

**Diana Hill:** [00:02:59] I love his, he'll practice. I think that's the one that I teach the most to my clients and that I use the most, most. So heal is really savoring positive moments. And you have a positive moment. H you enrich it with the EEU, amplify it with the a and then you link it to maybe some more, more difficult moments.

That is really powerful, especially right now. And we just maybe need to find little glimpses of positive healing. Wholesome moments to take in and really download. I also really appreciate his, way that he describes, the Buddha Dharma and Sangha, which are the three refuges and Buddhism, and he brings them into a more modern day, the more modern day world.

So the Buddha being who are your teachers that you really find wise and that you can turn to right now? And I certainly find that helpful reading. Readings of people that I find inspiring. Uh, what are the teachings that they offer? That's the Dharma and then the Songa. What is your community? And I think that using those refuges, building those up in your own life can be incredibly helpful.

A place to turn to when things are really uncertain.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:04:08] Yeah, yeah. Now is a time when a lot of us are thinking about these larger existential issues. And in the second part, he really talks about some of those larger sort of, issues of like timelessness, of mortality, of, how we sort of see ourselves in the broader scope of the world.

And. What's so beautiful about the way that he presents it is it feels really accessible. And then he also gives you some on the ground things that you can do to manage some of the uncertainty, some of the anxiety and some of the sort of open questioning that I think is really facing all of us right now.

**Diana Hill:** [00:04:40] So I think as a podcast hosts, psychologist, moms, and just humans, we've been really hungry for who? Who is it that we can bring on the show that's going to be like, uh, a guide. For all of us, for us personally, and for all of you, and we've been so privileged to have this little series here, uh, Robin Waller talking on existentialism and her wisdom around that.

Rick Hanson, a couple of episodes, and then Paul Gilbert coming up and it feels like we're just getting a chance to hear from real leaders that are leading. They're really leading us through these difficult times. So take comfort in the words of Rick Hanson.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:05:23] let's move on to receiving now. Onus. So this is the importance of waking up into the present moment. So you had mentioned, and there certainly a lot of evidence to support this, that our brains are typically wired to be worrying about the future or ruminating about the past. I'm curious if you can speak a little bit about how missing the now diminishes our happiness and how we can work towards being more present in the now

**Rick Hanson:** [00:05:48] Oh, that's great. So on the one hand, it's a lot of research shows. The more people are caught up in mental time traveling, uh, the

future of the past. The more they tend to be distressed, discontent, and dysfunctional. Uh, on the other hand, as people come more and more into the present, their sense of wellbeing also tends to increase.

Now in the present, may well be experiences of pain, physical or emotional, that are challenging for a person that drive them into a kind of flight from the present into the future or the past. And, um, so I want to certainly acknowledge that. That card. On the other hand, as, uh, you know, John Cabot's Zinn's early work on mindfulness for chronic terrible and tractable pain shows in a funny kind of way when you actually come into the present and then fully.

Into the present, not just kind of hovered around the edges of the present of the pain in your knee or the pain in your back or the loss of someone you love. But when you come really, really close to the ongoing dynamic. Emergence of the sensation or the emotion or the thoughts related to it when you come, come, I think of the, the experience to now is like a spring coming out from a mountain cleft, just coming into first contact with the air.

When you get really, really close to that first emergence of an experience into awareness, uh, it starts breaking up. It starts becoming foam Meer and fuzzier. You get really close to its impermanence and it becomes airier and much less painful. There is pain in it, but it doesn't preoccupy or invade you when you come really, really radically close to the present, even when you're dealing with the hardest things of all.

So that's contextual. And, um, it also, uh, I find remarkably.

Is that these, these circuits in the brain serve each other. So steadiness, lovingness and fullness, kind of cluster together neurologically and various ways, wholeness. Now notice and allness also in terms of their underlying neural substrates, the underlying neural correlates, if you will, of those experiences also cluster together.

So when you come into a sense of wholeness, that naturally tends to move you into the present. When you come into the sense of the present, the sense of me, myself, and I believe, heard and separated from everything diminishes. And there's more of an openness to everything. And in the book, as you know, like I go into, you know, useful detail about how that all works neurologically and. Still, meanwhile, people can experience it, you know, experientially. So when you come right into the present, uh, you get very close to what's called the alerting and orienting circuitry of the attention system in the brain. And when you're just being.

With what's new, something is happening, something is happening, something is happening.

Uh, you're just in the, what's happening before all kinds of fussing and feuding and preoccupying and resenting and worrying and obsessing can take hold because that, uh. Takes more time to process and do occur. And if you're ready at the emergent edge of everything, it's all happening so quickly and it's all changing so quickly that there's nothing to suffer.

Uh, you've got to cope. You've got to function, and you're more effective because you're right in the moment with what's happening instantly in the moment. But

you're not lost in thought worrying about everything. That's great.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:09:36] It's so cool. I'm just sort of sitting here thinking about how I'm kind of having one of those moments. I've been sitting here talking to, you know, the esteemed dr Rick Hanson, you know, which is such. A cool thing to be gaining your wisdom and talking to you about your powerful book. And I have a tendency to worry about how the podcast is going and if the audio is okay and whether I'm going to have to edit and if I sound okay, but if I'm just sort of in the moment listening and, and absorbing, it's such an opening experience and, and you can be more effective and responsive.

As opposed to, you know, where you can go if you're worrying about the future, remaining about some things. So it, you said, you know, five minutes ago

**Rick Hanson:** [00:10:19] Yeah, that's right. And, um, and again, learning from our teachers, uh, if, if I've got a teacher I respect and I want to, in my case. Be a better rock climber. Uh, let's say, um, and my teacher says, try this, you know, shift your knee out, which will bring your hip closer to the rock and it'll shift your center of gravity.

Give it a whirl. It's valuable to do that. I'm going to trust them. I'm going to, you know, want to see the evidence for it over time that I'm going to give it a try, especially if it doesn't sound too crazy. You much the same way all the grade teachers talk about the power of now. Be here now. The present moment is the only moment we have.

Um, there are some lovely quotes. I have a lot of quotations in the book that are really inspiring and the some

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:11:05] Can I share a quote from your wife that I loved? I love that you included a quote from your wife, but she, she wrote that. She said, after having read your book, if we don't have now, we don't have much. I mean, now is is so powerful. I love that.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:11:21] right. So I'm going to go after it. So in that spirit, then reverse engineering in the brain, in the hardware. What's happening when people are lost, uh, in time traveling, imagining a future, imagining a past compared to what's happening in the brain when they're right in the present moment.

And there's some very useful practical neurology about that. And one of the takeaways for people is to. Get a sense of what it's like to be alerted to something new. This is the most ancient aspect of the attention system because it's the most primitive. You don't need to know where something is or what it is or what to do about it.

You're just tracking that something has changed. Something has happened. Tune in to this very fundamental kind of primal animal quality of something new, something new, something new, and it helps to do this, to let go of the need to know. Or conceptualize or figure out or control to just just relax, you know, surrender a little bit and know what it feels like to be alerted.

To the next new thing. And with practice you become more and more able to do that. And as you get closer and closer to the subject of now to the new, the new, the new noun is receiving as a feeling of receiving us. Why use that word receiving a receiving noun? Us. As you do that also, you get closer and closer to the object of now.

To the emergence of new time in the expansion of the four dimensional space, time universe that we have. And in effect, as you come into the subject of now, you get closer and closer to the moment of creation continuously.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:13:11] Yeah. Which kind of brings us to the power of opening into intervening in this allocentric view that we are all a part of something much greater than ourselves.

In fact, we're all just start us to, right. Which I love that you make reference to that, you know, our brains are so self referential.

But there's also these interconnected parts of our brain that can help us recognize that there is this sense of allness. So I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how we can build on that, how and how that helps us to experience more happiness.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:13:44] Yeah. Um, in everyday life, certainly the more that people feel separated. Lonely, disconnect, get disconnected. Um, the more they feel that, uh, they're living in a kind of barren, hostile universe that's not supportive, well, suffering dis distress and mental health issues increase. On the other hand, the more that people feel that they're supported by the universe in some ways, that they're part of nature.

Let's say a research shows that the more that people have a. A sense of being part of nature. Uh, being part of a larger whole, that wellbeing tends to increase. And speaking of these teachers and practitioners who are a little farther up the path, they all talk about how, uh, there is a growing sense in them of being kind of more permeable or porous.

To reality, less defended against it, less braced stressfully against it, and more of kind of awestruck gratitude at, as Dogan said, perceiving themselves as all things operating locally. So it's in that frame of valuing. The qualities of opening into allness that I've inquired into. Okay. What's the state of the art?

What's the current research that, uh, seems to underlie our support? Both really remarkable, non-ordinary classic experiences. Uh, the sense of self just dropping out in the world, shining forth in radiant perfection that probably about a third of the people worldwide who are surveyed report having had those full.

Enchilada experiences. I've had a lot of, uh, smaller, milder versions of those experiences. And, uh, as a point of practice, for me, what most matters over time is becoming increasingly porous and, and foamy and, and accessible, uh, while also certainly appreciating the power of these million dollar moments or these super fireworks experiences.

There's pretty good science about what is happening in the brain. During these major league fireworks, non dual experiences, self transcended experiences. Uh, and a little shout out here, I just had the pleasure of interviewing David Bricey, Aiden, who's getting his PhD in the next few months at pan, uh, who has written some wonderful major papers on self transcendent experiences.

So there's good science about it. And also there's science about in everyday life, what happens when the sense of egocentrism. And taking things personally gradually starts to diminish. And there is more of that everyday sense of just being a beautifully connected with everything, with a sense of awe and gratitude as well.

That's really great stuff. And, um, I could. Maybe for people listening. I'll give you

a couple of quick hacks. One of them was really interesting, so

visually, so the brain naturally oscillates between what's called an egocentric, self-referential, perceptual perspective. It doesn't mean selfish, it just means in reference to this particular body, this particular point of view, and then that alternates, especially visually with what's called an allocentric perspective, taking things as a whole.

What kind of an impersonal view, what's this? What's the jungle as it is? That's how will center right around me. And then egocentric is, you know what's right in front of me and what do I want to do about it? All right, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. This is a natural way to help animals do well back in the stone age or in Jurassic park.

So there's this natural rhythm. We can strengthen that allocentric capacity plausibly in a variety of ways. One is to, um, extend the visual field out toward the horizon. Because as we and other animals extend our sight out toward the horizon that naturally, uh, brings online more and more of that allocentric frame of reference.

Cause we're seeing things as a big picture hole. All right. On the other hand, if you bring your gaze close to your body and you can do this, it's easy. When you're bringing it close to your body, naturally there's an increase of kind of self-centeredness or self, not in a negative sense, but you know, like the, the point of view, this, the feeling of, I.

Tends to increase as the gaze comes closer cause that's natural, you know, friend or foe, uh, in the wild, you know, things are much more personally relevant. The closer they get, whereas the farther away they are, the more we have time to kind of take in the big picture and see what's really going on. All right, that's great.

So if you're getting all obsessed about something or contracted, look out toward the walls or even the upper corners of the room you're in.

Right? Or when you're walking down the street, you know, see what happens when you try to get a feeling of the visual hole, the wider hole you're going to lighten up about, you know, me and myself and I.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:18:58] That's a quilt practice. Yeah. If you're outside, take a look at the horizon.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:19:02] yeah. Right there. How do you do that? And maybe another one just really fast that I find also really interesting. And these, these intertwine with each other. In terms of opening into allness for me is where I explore this fundamental question of is there a self and what do we mean by that question?

What do we mean by the word self? And this is deep territory. Is there a self, right? What do we mean self and what's, um.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:19:29] I love that you weren't afraid to ask that question. And it's a really fascinating exploration for those of you who, um, you know, pick up the book and have a chance to get into it.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:19:39] Oh yeah. And, and, and how to balance the importance of taking in healthy narcissistic supplies. How do we balance the usefulness of

taking in, being mirrored and seem like children? We want our children to take in healthy, narcissistic supplies because that's necessary for healthy development. So how do we appreciate that and how as adults, as I have had to do, can we gradually fill the hole in our heart leftover by from what was missing? And. Terms of what was internalized as a kid. How as adults can we take in these healthy social supplies without getting attached to them? How can we fill ourselves up from the inside out so we're less and less preoccupied with getting social supplies from the outside them? How can you do all that. Wisely without feeding a presumption that there's some brick, like an entity inside pulling the levers and pushing the dials and driving the show. And you know, that's a really interesting territory, really interesting territory, including neurologically lamb. And one of the, um, very useful things about neuroscience is that it shows that in the brain

when people are having a strong sense of self. Maybe they're picking out their picture from a group of pictures, or maybe they're stating their view about a morally charged topic, like capital punishment, say, or abortion, or they are, um, describing themselves, you know, am I a generally happy person? Am I a generally grumpy person, let's say when they're doing those things,

activations occur throughout the entire brain.

There's no place in the brain where the self is located

and this ordinary sense we have of being unified as a self. It's actually not the case in both our experience and in our neurology. It's not unified. It's compounded. It's too widely distributed. Also, the sense that we have of being enduring, I'm kind of always the same.

Well, actually you can just observe in your experience that the sense of self increases. There are different sub-personalities that tug at us that pull us in different directions where, you know, there's a dynamism to it. There's not this, uh, stability. To the apparent self and the same in the brain. These activations are very dynamic.

They have, they flowed or transmitters come and it goes, circuitry lights up, it quiets. Down, comes, it goes and last. Um, the sense we have of being independent, you know, it's sort of, I can decide what I really think about it. Well, again, in your experience, you could see how jostled and tugged you are by all kinds of things over the course of your day and in the brain.

These various activations are caused by all kinds of factors. They're dependently occurring, they're dependently arising or originating to use that kind of terminology from Buddhism. So the net of it is that in both.

Our own psychology or an experience, and in the underlying hardware, we see that these three fundamental qualities that we conventionally presume define the self, that it's unified and during an independent are not to be found.

you into this wonderful feeling of being a person who has rights and needs and responsibilities. A person, a much more distributed, flowing like a symphony rather than a solo instrument. As you move through your day and when you start having more and more of that feeling of things, Oh, you lighten up. It takes stuff less personally. You're, you're less. Resistant or Stoney, when the world comes at you, you're more like a cloud, you know, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune fall through rather than having something solid to land on. Um, that's great. And you just, like you said at the beginning, you start being increasingly clear that what you know.

Rationally, conceptually is really, really true that you really are just a local expression of the whole universe. And, uh, as you said, we are breathing Stardust. We are breathing oxygen built in the heart of an exploding star billions of years ago. Uh,

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:24:11] Yeah, it is great. I just, to sort of summarize it, you have this quote in your book from tech, not hon that I loved. Which is we inter are as practitioners, we see that we are a part of and not separate from the soil, the forests, the rivers, and the sky. And I love that. It's it. There's something so beautiful about that finding, yeah, of course.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:24:38] two brief things, um, in that quote I really touched, he brought it up. And for me, tech on is a model, uh, of beings. I happen to know not well personally, but I know of, uh, who is a model of about as far as long as you can get. And, um. So, and who knows? He might say there are levels of realization that are baby a step or too far there, but he's pretty far along. So I just want to honor him and also speak to,

two points. One related to this notion of inner being.

Which he's very eloquent about. As part of our practice. We do it for the sake of others and we bring them with us in our heart as we practice on our own. And it's an important point to call out and to be motivated for the sake of others in our practice is an important and beautiful thing and to feel that even in this moment, you are practicing with others literally around the world and also inside you are the.

Residues. You know, the traces left behind by the people that as Mr. Rogers put it at his Emmy award, a ceremony 20 years ago. Pete beings who have loved you into being, people who've loved you into being there with you. And that's, that's a very important aspect of practice. The second related thing is that the implications of personal practice scale up.

Politically, and culturally and socially. In other words, as individuals have more of a sense of inner being with other humans and also as individuals have more of a sense of inner being with nature broadly. That leads us into. Policy and, um, public policy and that actions at the public level and in the public sphere that are more oriented around cooperation rather than aggression and more oriented around a sustainable relationship with the natural world rather than, uh, dumping a hundred million tons a day of carbon dioxide into the air through human activity.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:26:47] Right? So these practices can have a really

profound effect on our world and a very concrete way.

Reading your book was a really odd, inspiring experience for me. I love this kind of content, and again, the marriage of the ancient Eastern philosophy with the modern science, just really an awakens a part of me that I think hungers for like this bigger truth. Um, and one of the things that I'll say too that I was going to mention in the finding timelessness is.

A recent experience that I had of losing my father. And it's something I've talked about on the podcast before, but this idea that everything is impermanent, which kind of runs throughout, you know, all the different practices. Um, and, and sort of how we can approach that with gratitude and openness and, and how we can manage the sorrow that can come with it, I think is, you're writing on that is just very powerful for me.

So I really appreciate that.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:27:43] well, I'm glad for that, and I do hope you include this bit in our conversation in the podcast, uh, because you, you are demonstrating a way of relating to this material that's really important. And we all have a sense of it.

It might sound exotic at first, or we might say, Oh, that's too kind of. out there, esoteric new age or something or other that actually we, this is our endowment as human beings, to be in the present, connected with everything, you know, with a whole and open heart, steadily, calmly, you know, functioning every day.

This is our endowment. We're able to do it. And you're, you're demonstrating that you're not just thinking about it, you're feeling it. And, uh, which, uh, shows that we. Can feel these things. Uh, we might need to slow down for a minute or two to kind of drop him, but when we drop him, it really is available to us and then we develop it over time from there.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:28:39] Well, and it's, it's great that you offer these very concrete accessible practices to be able to do it. Cause I do think it can feel so big and daunting

**Rick Hanson:** [00:28:46] that's true. The book super experiential. I went back and I sort of rereading Buddha's brain to my wife, which is really interesting. So I, I wrote that book about 12 years ago and I'm, I'm quite happy with it. It still is good. It's still okay. And, uh, I noticed how, um, in this book, neuro Dharma, there are many more experiential practices.

It really is a book of practice, cause I think that's the real test deep down inside.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:29:10] Right. Cause if we're talking about cultivating something, we need to be doing something, not just sort of up in our minds, but that's sort of really taking action, sort of doing something with our bodies to build, you know, these neurological pathways and these affective experiences and these kinds of relationships that are healthier and more satisfying and rewarding. So I love that.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:29:31] that's great.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:29:32] So, um, so let's turn to talking about finding timelessness. Another very deep and sort of hugely. Question that you ask, which is, you know, what is time? You admit the time is an undeniable, the hard thing to define, but I love how you described that. We're always living on the razor edge

edge of the front edge of now.

As soon as we arrive in new now emerges. It's, it is really inspiring and really gets to the heart of the idea that everything we experience is impermanent.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:30:03] Yeah. Experience experiences, radically impermanent, no doubt about it. There's certain features of the physical universe that seem to have more stability to them, like the actual speed of light, although even that might be changing over time as the universe. Increases its rate of expansion, which it seems to have done, you know, over the last several billion years for still utterly mysterious reasons.

Uh, but on the whole, yes, impermanence is one of the great facts, uh, including the radical impermanence of our own experience just right under noses. Does that, uh, let me talk about timelessness in three different ways, and I want to use the. Term unconditioned, which is a little controversial in some quarters.

I'm fine with other ways of framing that word, like unfair barricaded or unconstructed. But I like the notion of unconditioned because it seems to apply both to, uh, the conditioned stream of consciousness and the conditioned unfolding of the material universe. All right. So the Buddhist said that conditioned reality is an unreliable basis for the highest happiness.

And so we should look for what is unconditioned and in his own account of his own awakening and in these descriptions that are found again and again in the surviving written record of his teachings. Um, there is a movement toward what he called unconditioned. In some radically distinct, meaningfully distinct way from ordinary reality.

Uh, related terminology is Nirvana. Nibhaana. That's the Buddhist tradition. And then outside of that tradition, um, you have then as people, uh, traditions around the world, which are very important to respect and call out and appreciate us contemplative traditions. Then you have the so called major religions, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and others.

And in them as well, is appointing to, uh, what lies beyond ordinary reality. So what are they talking about? You know, if we're going to go after the pinnacle of human possibility, this is included. All right? What are they talking about and how can we explore it without falling into the pitfalls of religious belief and controversy?

And, um, I also think it's important to not fall into the pitfall of dogmatic atheism. Because a genuinely scientific attitude is agnostic because the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence as the saying, how's it in science? And there are many things that are clearly true that science cannot prove, such as if you, let's say, love your children.

No scientists in the world can prove that. And yet it's undeniably a fact. And you know, it's true. So, uh, how do you know, part of the fun is to explore that territory. So in terms of exploring it, to cut to the chase here, I think there are three ways we can understand this really important word.

Unconditioned. One way we can understand it is in typical everyday experience, we can disengage. From our conditioned habit patterns, neurotic habit patterns that are problematic. We can disengage from, from those conditioned patterns and rest increasingly in, so we disengage from what's conditioned and we rest increasingly in what is effectively unconditioned, which is the field of awareness.

Imagine a piece of blank paper.

Yes, the piece of paper is conditioned. It was made as manufactured. It comes from trees, blah, blah, blah. Um, and yet that piece of paper can represent an infinite variety of words, symbols, images, and so forth. So it's effectively unconditioned as a field of possibility, unconditioned possibility in which condition forms can occur.

Awareness is like that. Awareness is a field of effectively unconditioned possibility that can represent an infinite variety of experiences or a kind of field in which an infinite variety of experiences can occur. So the first, simplest, most available way to relate to unconditioned is, as I said, to disengage from conditioned habit patterns and abide increasingly in unconditioned awareness.

That's great. That's no small thing. I don't think that's what the Buddha was pointing to. I think he had bigger fish to fry. Sorry for the current numbers. Metaphor. Bigger, you know, tell food is skewer than, anyway, the second way to understand, I'm conditioned, uh, is.

A extraordinary experience within ordinary reality in which, uh, in deep meditative training and the process of this as well described and many, many people report having gone through these steps, certainly in the Buddhist tradition, and you see similar kind of sorts of things in other deep contemplative traditions where people move.

Out of ordinary experience saying they start losing sensory awareness of what's happening around them. They're still awake internally. They're so conscious. Their minds are getting incredibly quiet. Ordinary thought. Verbal thought has fallen away a long time already. Uh, any kind of desires falling away, any sense of upset is falling away.

Deep feeling of stability, peacefulness, a kind of profound happiness and bliss that is also very subtle is occurring. And then more and more radical. In territory that in the Buddhist tradition has language like not neither perception nor non perception,

and then cessation, the cessation, ordinary consciousness,

and then the return from that radically non-ordinary experience and in the return from Nirvana.

Or Nirvana and cessation, you start to observe the constructing of the mind process, but in a very deep, profound way. Uh, and then the gradual return to ordinary functioning. I have not been on that journey myself. I've known a number of people who have, who are ordinary. They have jobs, they pay taxes, they have mortgages, you know, they have kids, they're real people.

They've gone through those trainings. And they've come back to talk about it. And, um, with practice, those trainings and that process of entering cessation and Nirvana and the return gives you a radically disenchanted view. Of the ordinary mind you're engaging at, but you're holding it so much more likely, so much more

loosely.

And, uh, with repetition, those experiences of cessation and Iyana, which again, I've known people who've done those trainings in depth, um, just change your life forever, okay? But we're still inside ordinary reality. Right? And, um.

Then the question becomes. The third way to understand unconditioned or unconditionality or the unconditioned, and here's where I use the word transcendental.

What could be genuinely distinct from ordinary reality, not just supernatural. That's the territory of ESP or ghosts or reincarnation. You know, whatever's true about that. Is whatever's true about that, but the ultimate, the ultimate reality, the ultimate nature, the ultimate ground, if it's distinct from ordinary reality is genuinely transcendental.

So then the question becomes when we are having experiences in which conditioned mental activity drops out, if only for an instance. It's like a pinprick through the veil of the shrouds us, uh, inside ordinary reality and obscures the transcendental. But when that veil is pierced, one little pinprick at a time, one little hole in the veil at a time, a little Ray of light starts shining through.

And with repetition, that shroud becomes more and more afraid, more and more porous, more and more lazy. And you start having. More and more sense of accessibility or availability or permeability to what could be genuinely transcendental. That's a remarkable practice. And in my view, the Buddha was pointing to them genuinely a transcendental unconditioned and in other great wisdom tradition.

So there are roots of the mountain of awakening. They're much more explicit about it. The Buddha was very spare in his language. He really just talked about the fundamental attribute of the potential. Transcendental has unconditioned possibility that he described with your negation, the deathless, the unchanging, other people attribute qualities of consciousness to the transcendental.

A kind of infinite consciousness, some attribute, qualities of benevolence. Love these words fall apart, but they pointed in that direction. Uh, I'm not trying to in the book, preach those things at all. I'm mostly focused on the unconditioned field of possibility cause that's closest to the Buddhist tradition.

On the other hand, from the standpoint of diversity.

And inclusiveness. I want to include and respect people who come from traditions that do attribute those qualities to the transcendental of consciousness and love, and maybe some other things as well. So anyway, so that's the territory. And then how I get at it in real reality, uh, is through ways of exploring what could be like the transcendental.

And that distinction between is and like is really important. So a piece of paper is like the potentially transcendently unconditioned in the sense that it can represent anything, uh, the sense of the next moment as ripe with possibility. Uh, the proverb that the future is the undiscovered country.

That's like the potential transcendental stillness, a sense of stillness, the unmoving and changing around which, or through which change passes. We can

get a sense of that as well. Deep silence, deep. Quiet, uh, in our own experience that is like the potentially transcendental and these things that are like the potentially transcendental, um, are valuable in their own right.

Stillness, spaciousness, possibility. Um, those are really great to tune into on our own. And, um, I myself am okay with people who, some of whom are my major teachers, and I quote them in the book and I really respect their view and I try to represent it accurately that from their standpoint, um, that which is transcendental either doesn't exist.

Or it's unknowable, or even if it's knowable in some way, it's irrelevant to D practice and, uh, one can go through the process of awakening without engaging something genuinely transcendental. That's okay with me. I'm fine with that. That's still pretty far out. You're getting really close to the Tiffany tip top of the mountain of awakening.

That's cool. And. For those for whom? The, that all seems like the ultimate undiscovered country. The ultimate important possibility to explore or a sense of bull. Of course, I know a number of people whose their attitude about the transcendental is. Of course, uh, for those as well. In terms of inclusiveness, I wanted to speak to, I'm in the latter camp.

Uh, my own experience and my own, uh, reasoning tells me that. Ordinary reality is not all that is. And, um, my own practice inside the natural frame a lot, which is. very grounded in the body, what's happening in the body and what's happening in the immediacy of this moment of experience authentically and honestly, that's where my practice lives, cause I think that's where practice needs to live.

Uh, I'm interested. In the results of that practice, both in terms of the natural frame helping me be a better husband, helping me be less reactive to, uh, you know, the politics of the day while being able also to have wisdom and strength and keep moving forward toward the good. You know, I'm very interested in that, of course.

And honestly being honest here. Um, I'm interested in the fruits of practice within the natural frame that have to do potentially. With becoming more available to the divine.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:43:07] love that. I wonder if I could share with our listeners, um, a favorite quote of mine from the book. It's towards the end. And you, right. It's strange, isn't it? This life you live and love and then you leave. My time will come in yours and everyone else's. Meanwhile, we can be gobsmacked with our in gratitude and committed to enjoying this life as best we can while earning as much as we can and contributing as much as we can each day.

I just think that's so beautiful and,

**Rick Hanson:** [00:43:35] thank you. I'm extremely touched that you pulled that out as one of my really favorite parts. Thank you.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:43:41] Well, and I think your book really offers a collection of, of wisdom and practices and knowledge that can help each of us. Cultivate more of that sense of honor and gratitude and build more of that happiness that, that we all desire. And I love how you have such a flexible approach to, you know, what a diversity of experiences and bodies and circumstances and that you've developed these practices and shared these kinds of practices that we

can flexibly use individually to the best that we can to, to cultivate that kind of happiness that that is so it makes life so much more fun.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:44:18] Oh, good. Well, thank you. And I think that's really important, the fun part and the playfulness part, and one of the neat things neurologically is that playfulness tends to increase neurotrophic factors that promote healthy cell growth and repair and connection in the brain. And I thought a lot about that, about the importance of bringing a playfulness and exuberance, not knowing the child likes spirit to our own practices, which can otherwise become kind of mechanistic and heavy and dry.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:44:48] yeah. And well, and it really comes through and I think your, um, your advice to make it fun is great advice and just makes it a lot more enticing and sort of self self-sustaining, which is, which is a good thing. Well, thank you so much, Rick, for returning to offer your deeply transformative wisdom.

Reading neuro Dharma for me was a mind opening experience and I hope a lot of our listeners have gotten turned on and we'll pick it up. I recommend this book for all sorts of reasons. But, um, there's so many wonderful and specific practices that you offer, some of which you've mentioned here, but so many more, um, to cultivate our highest happiness.

And I know too, that your foundations of wellbeing course offers a host of these practices, and we'll link to, to neuro Dharma your course and then to other books through our website.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:45:33] Oh, thank you. Yeah, thank you. And if I could say one last thing, um, you know, as you know from the book I quoted at the very end. I'll give it away here. Uh, it's a teaching from Joseph Goldstein, who you probably know, um, he's coast a person. And, um, he said to me one time after I was sharing an experience and my wanting to make sure I was on the right track, you know, he's up further up the trail and I'm saying, you know, is this the route that I take this step correctly?

And so forth? And he said, yeah, that's good. Which is important. It's important to acknowledge that you're moving forward and what's working. And then he paused and swelled between cold and said, keep going. And I think that's the truth of it. On any given day, we have this profound

existential soul power to practice or not.

And you can't do anything about the past, but you can practice today. And as we practice in the ways that work for us, and we find our own ways, and we. Practice as it's relevant to particular things. As we practice every day, uh, we grow, we change, we heal, we get happy, we progress, we can see that. And that's the invitation for everyone.

Wherever you are, you can practice and you can practice one of these seven things and you can practice all of them at a beginning level, at an intermediate level and beyond. And maybe I'll finish with this teacher from the Buddha who said, you know, basically.

A path with heart. I'm paraphrasing. A path with heart is good in the beginning. Good in the middle and good at the end.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:47:07] That's beautiful. Thank you, Rick.

**Rick Hanson:** [00:47:09] Thank you.

**Diana Hill:** [00:47:13] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:47:15] You can find us on iTunes, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Please help us out by writing a review on iTunes.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:47:21] We'd like to thank our interns, Dr. Katharine Foley-Saldea and Dr Kati Lear.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:47:26] This podcast is for informational and entertainment purposes only and is not meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment. If you're having a mental health emergency dial 9 1 1. If you're looking for mental health treatment, please visit the resources on our webpage. We're at [offtheclockpsych.com](http://offtheclockpsych.com).