

Taking in the Good Course (TGC)

OVERVIEW

Welcome!

Thank you for participating in this course. This overview describes its purpose, cautions, limits to confidentiality, logistics, and curriculum. If you have any questions about the course, please contact its teacher.

Purpose of Course

This experiential educational program is about how to turn fleeting positive experiences into lasting inner resources. This is what's meant by "taking in the good." "Positive" means that which leads to the well-being and welfare of yourself, and often others as well ("negative" means the opposite). Some positive experiences are uncomfortable (e.g., appropriate remorse) and some pleasant experiences are not positive (e.g., overeating), but most positive experiences feel good.

Potential inner resources include resilience, emotional balance, strength, character virtues, positive mood, mindfulness, confidence, feeling cared about, self-understanding, and compassion. We all need resources like these for managing stress, dealing with life's challenges, and having more to offer others.

In this course, you'll learn the three basic steps of taking in the good:

- **Have** a positive experience (either notice or create it)
- **Extend** the experience (help it last, fill your body, and become more intense)
- **Absorb** the experience (intend and sense that it is sinking into you)

And you'll learn the optional fourth step for reducing negative material in the mind:

- **Pair** positive and negative material together in awareness (so the positive soothes and possibly replaces the negative)

Because of its evolved negativity bias (which helped our ancestors survive), the brain learns rapidly from negative experiences but slowly from positive ones. Consequently, this course is *not* about positive thinking or simply having more positive experiences, since these tend to wash through the brain like water through a sieve unless you make a deliberate effort to register them (the point of taking in the good).

Enduring personal qualities, including inner resources, are encoded in neural structure. This course is about using your mind skillfully to help get these resources into your brain: turning positive mental *states* into positive neural *traits*. This is a fundamental mental ability that just about anyone can learn to use better, and no background in psychology or brain science is needed to take this course.

Cautions

The Taking in the Good course (TGC) is an *educational* program, not psychotherapy nor any other kind of psychological or medical treatment. This course is not recommended for individuals with severe depression, a history of psychotic experiences, or flooding with traumatic material when tuning into one's experience.

As in any experiential, psychologically oriented program, it is possible that you may have uncomfortable or otherwise challenging experiences. Please tell the teacher if this is happening for you. In this course, it is assumed that you can handle such experiences on your own; if you think you may not be able to do this, you should withdraw from the course at any time, and you will receive a full refund.

To participate in TGC, you need to be able to read at a high school level or better, and behave appropriately in a group setting. The teacher reserves the right to withdraw any participant from the course (who will receive a full refund).

People get different things out of educational programs, and the results are largely up to them. Therefore, there is no promise of any particular benefits from this course.

By participating in this course, you agree that you understand these cautions, that you are psychologically capable of participating in this course, and that you can handle any difficult experiences related to it.

Limits to Confidentiality

The teacher will not communicate any identifying information about course participants to anyone not in the course, and will also ask participants to agree to do the same. It is also fine to say nothing to anyone throughout the course, including sitting out paired sharing activities.

But the teacher cannot control what participants say about each other. Thus there is no guarantee of confidentiality in this course. It is up to you to decide what you want to communicate in this course.

Sharing Course Materials

You can share what you learn in this course with others. But please: do not duplicate course materials without permission, nor try to teach this course to others.

Logistics

We will meet on six consecutive [Day of week], [Time], [Start and End Dates], at [Location]. To take this course, you must be able to attend the first and last class and at least three of the four classes in between. Class meetings will start and end on time, with a 15 minute break about half way into the class.

Handouts will be made available prior to each class, typically by providing you with a course packet, posting documents online, or emailing pdfs. Please read class materials prior to the meeting of that class, and print out and bring these materials with you.

The fee for the course is [\$], payable before the first class meeting. Please make your check out to [Person or Organization's Name].

The course instructor is [Name]. He/she can be reached at [Phone Number] and [Email].

Curriculum

TGC consists of class meetings, brief readings, and suggested practices between classes (we think of these as "taking home the good"). A lot of material will be presented in each class, but the important points are in the handouts, and there will be repetition of key practices, so you can relax and not try to remember everything. Plus the most important part of this course is its experiential methods, not its information about the brain or psychology. As with learning anything, the more you practice with these methods, the better you're likely to get at them.

A powerful way to strengthen learning is through communicating about it with others. Therefore, two optional though potentially useful aspects of this course are:

- A "buddy" – This is someone in the course with whom you could discuss what you're learning. The teacher will facilitate participants in finding a buddy at the second class if they want one. It is also fine not to have a buddy in this course, to say no to someone who would like to be your buddy, or to start out with a buddy and then decide later that you would rather not have one.

- On-line community – At [Webpage], you can connect with others in this particular course, as well as with others who have taken or will take TGC. This online forum is a place to share ideas, ask questions, and support each other as you work through course material and concepts. Your teacher may also upload course documents, share resources, and post course announcements to this site.

The classes build on each other. Therefore, it's recommended that you attend all classes and do the suggested practices between classes. To maximize time for experiential practices and discussion, please come to each class already familiar with its readings.

Classes will have opportunities for discussion, but the teacher will also preserve time for experiential activities. Questions and comments are welcome, but please keep them succinct and focus them on the subject of the current or previous classes. Here is a summary of classes and main topics:

1. Engaging the Mind

- Setting the foundation for the course
- The three fundamental ways to engage the mind: "let be, let go, let in"
- The three basic steps of Taking in the Good
- The brain's negativity bias, and how to overcome it

2. Activating Positive Experiences

- Many ways to notice and create positive experiences
- Strategies for recognizing the good in yourself and the resources you possess
- The components of an experience and opportunities to activate these states

3. Installing Positive Experiences

- How to extend a positive experience – helping it be lasting, rich, and embodied
- How to absorb a positive experience - intending and sensing that it is sinking into you, becoming a part of you
- The evolving brain and our three fundamental motivational systems:
 - Avoiding harms
 - Approaching rewards
 - Attaching to others
- The brain's Responsive and Reactive "settings" for taking care of these needs

4. The Avoiding System – From Fear and Anger to Peace

- Awareness of Reactive Avoiding: threat, fear, anger

- Identifying additional inner resources needed for regulating Reactive Avoiding
- “Taking in” key experiences to build these inner resources, such as protection, strength, and safety

5. The Approaching System – From Frustration and Loss to Happiness

- Awareness of Reactive Approaching: frustration, loss, drivenness
- Identifying additional inner resources needed for regulating Reactive Approaching
- “Taking in” key experiences to build these inner resources, such as gladness, gratitude, and fulfillment
- The 4th step of TG – Paring positive and negative experiences in awareness

6. The Attaching System – From Rejection and Inadequacy to Love

- Awareness of Reactive Attaching: rejection, devaluing, loneliness, inadequacy
- Identifying additional inner resources needed for regulating Reactive Attaching
- “Taking in” key experiences to build these inner resources, such as feeling included, appreciated, loved, and loving

Conclusion

We hope you enjoy this course and get a lot out of it. And please let your teacher know if you have any questions or if there is anything that would make the course a better experience for you.

Taking in the Good Course

ENGAGING YOUR MIND

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Introduction

This course involves making deliberate efforts inside your mind. This handout creates a context for those efforts, and addresses some common questions. These questions are central concerns for some people, yet for others they are a non-issue. Feel free to read this handout as deeply or superficially as you like.

What Are the Primary Ways to Engage the Mind?

Overview

Essentially, there are three fundamental ways to engage the mind:

1. Be with what's there

Experience the experience, feel the feelings, etc. Open, allow. Abiding as awareness, letting contents in awareness - sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts (very broadly defined - come and go. Mindful of some object of attention - including perhaps all of the contents of awareness in each moment - without attempting to change it in any way.

2. Release, decrease what's (pragmatically) negative

Softening around it, relaxing, intending and helping it to release. Seeing through untrue, negative thoughts; letting go of unhelpful, wrong beliefs. Imagery, imagining that the negative is washing out of you.

3. Receive, increase what's (pragmatically) positive

Noticing, foregrounding, bringing attention to positive "tiles" in the mosaic of experience. Or thinking of things that call up a positive experience.

And extending, sustaining, the experience. Staying with it, bringing attention back to it, helping it last.

The Mind as a Garden

If we think of the mind like a garden, these three great practices are:

1. Observe the garden, not trying to change it in any way
2. Pull weeds - Prevent, decrease, or eliminate things that are negative
3. Grow flowers - Create, increase, or maintain things that are positive

Or, in six words: **Let be, let go, let in.**

"Being with" and "Working with"

To take this a step further, we could call the first practice "being with" and summarize the second and third practices as "working with" the mind.

In my view, *being with* is more primary than *working with*. You can always be aware of your own experience, the contents of your mind - but sometimes you just can't release or reduce something that is negative, or receive or increase something that is positive.

Further:

- Simply being aware of the contents of mind helps you step back from it - like getting out of the movie and sitting twenty rows back, watching it - and be less identified with it.
- You can learn things about yourself, increase self-awareness, through exploring your mind without trying to change it any way.
- Sometimes simply being aware of a negative content of mind will enable it to diminish or even release.

Nonetheless, *working with* your mind is a vital part of everyday well-being, being effective at home and work, healing distress and dysfunction, personal growth, and - if this is meaningful to you - spiritual practice:

- Awareness alone often does not itself remove negative states or factors of mind, or cultivate positive states or factors of mind.

- It is possible to develop a kind of passivity or inertness with regard to one's mind through remaining aware and not making any other efforts inside the mind.
- Making efforts inside your own mind - pulling weeds and planting flowers - gives you a sense of agency, of being an actor, of being the cue ball instead of the 8-ball. This sense of agency, of being a cause instead of an effect, is a good factor in mental health, especially in terms of protecting against slumps in mood.
- As we will see further on, the states and factors in the mind are represented by underlying neural activities and processes. These underlying aspects of the brain are, obviously by definition, *physical*. Negative - in effect - activities and structures in the brain usually don't just change for the better on their own; they are built into tissues whose structures tend to persist unless they are actively changed. Similarly, positive - in effect - activities and structures need to get built into the brain; they usually don't just develop on their own.

And of course, *being with* and *working with* help each other. We need to work with the mind to enable it to continue to be with, to remain spaciously aware of, mental contents (especially negative ones). We also need to remain aware of - to be with - our efforts to pull weeds and plant flowers, and the results of these efforts.

In sum, the great bird of practice needs two wings to fly: both *being with* and *working with* the mind.

What Is Awareness?

Awareness is the field in which various contents of mind arise, persist, and pass away.

You can be aware of *being with* these contents of mind, which involves a receptive knowing of them in the present moment with no attempt to influence them.

You can also be aware of *working with* contents of mind, which involves deliberate efforts regarding them, such as decreasing negative material or increasing positive material.

Awareness is present in both cases, whether you're *being with* or *working with* the mind.

As you can see, *being with* the mind is one way to be aware of it, but not the only way. *Working with* the mind is another way, and it is not in conflict with awareness.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a *kind* of awareness. It is steady attention, in the moment, not lost in thought, typically with a quality of recollection, of presence of mind. One is mindful of various objects of attention.

For example, you can be mindful of a toddler's first lurching steps, of the state of your retirement account, of the shifts of emotion in the mind of a friend during a conversation, and of the taste of coffee.

You can be mindful of the passing stream of consciousness without trying to influence it in any way - this is *being with* the mind - and you can be just as mindful of your efforts to *work with* your mind.

Being with the contents of awareness is not the only way to be mindful, and *working with* that material is not at odds with mindfulness.

In fact, in almost all states of consciousness, we must *work with* the mind at least a little bit to remain mindful. Wise efforts support wise mindfulness.

What Is Open (Choiceless) Awareness?

In the barest forms of *being with* the mind - called open or sometimes "choiceless" awareness - there is sustained presence in each moment with accepting receptivity to whatever appears in awareness. Preferences fall away; one neither grasps after what is pleasant nor resists what is unpleasant. The typical sense of being "I" often becomes minimal, even absent. There is simply abiding; in Zen, called "just sitting."

Open awareness is a profoundly valuable expression of mindfulness. But as we've seen, it is not the only way to be mindful.

In open awareness, there is only the least effort needed - which can become tiny, almost nonexistent - to remain present and undistracted in each moment. Other than this absolute minimum, there is no *working with* the mind during open awareness practice, and attempts to make deliberate efforts get in the way of open awareness.

Of course, at times before engaging in this practice, it is useful to make deliberate efforts – such as taking in the good – to build up some internal factors so that you can observe your mind with acceptance and not get carried away by it. These factors of open awareness include understanding, intention, relaxation, warmheartedness, and self-compassion.

And after periods of open awareness, it can be valuable to make some efforts in the mind, such as reflecting on the experience or sensing that some of its fruits - perhaps a greater sense of wholeness or peace - are sinking in to you, becoming a part of you, a resource inside you. Besides the general benefits of these efforts after open awareness, some of them will support open awareness itself the next time you engage it.

More generally, unrelated to open awareness practice, life contains many moments in which we need to make deliberate efforts and engage states of mind other than utterly bare, receptive, choiceless, undirected, open awareness. Open awareness is a practice that informs and benefits one's life, but it is not *itself* a way of life.

In sum, it is necessary and beneficial to *work with* the mind - to make deliberate efforts - before and after open awareness practice, and even (to the minimal extent necessary) during it. *Working with* the mind supports open awareness and does not undermine it.

Is It a Problem to Have Goals?

Working with the mind means having goals: you are making a deliberate effort to bring something different into being, such as less anxiety or more confidence.

One concern about goals is that they are dualistic, in the sense that the current condition is seen as different from the goal state. Another concern is that pursuing goals means having desires that will create stress or otherwise lead to suffering.

Regarding the first concern - dualistic thinking - whatever the ultimate cosmic truth of non-dual oneness may be, everyday reality is full of dualisms. For example, there are the distinctions between water and cup, hating or loving others, and things that lead to more suffering or to the end of suffering. You can both see these dualisms and also understand that they are part of a larger whole.

Regarding the second concern - desires - at all levels in the architecture of the body, the brain, and the mind, there are goal-pursuing, desire-driven processes. To live is to have desires, like avoiding harm, approaching rewards, and attaching to others. As a living

creature, you can't not have desires. Even conceptually it is impossible: not having desires is itself a desire!

Given that desires are unavoidable, the only relevant questions are:

- Are your desires (pragmatically) positive? For example, consider positive desires such as the wish that beings (including oneself) not suffer and instead be happy, or the aims of developing greater virtue, steadiness of mind, and wisdom.
- Are you pursuing your desires in (pragmatically) positive ways? For example, can you sustain efforts that feel good to you, don't hurt others, are at most mildly stressful, and avoid harmful self-criticism if they are not successful?

There is no inherent problem with goals or desires. The key is to have positive ones, pursued in positive ways.

And as we'll explore in this course, letting in the results of positive aims pursued in positive ways often actually leads you to have fewer desires since you have brought so many positive states and factors of mind into yourself; they are increasingly "in here" you so you no longer need to pursue them "out there." Your well-being becomes increasingly *unconditioned*, less and less based on external conditions. Moving in this direction is one of the central goals (!) of this course.

Does Taking in the Good Strengthen a Sense of "I"?

The topic of what in the world "I" is, is a big question that's outside the scope of this course. So here are just a few, hopefully down to earth comments.

Yes, taking in the good involves making deliberate efforts in the mind, and this can strengthen the sense of being a "chooser" or "inner executive." It's wise to be a little careful with this, since if you take it too far, you can end up feeling very separated from others and the flow of life. Try to recognize that any sense of "I am making something happen" is simply another content of mind arising and passing away, no different in principle from any other content of mind, including sounds, sensations, emotions, or thoughts. You are the *whole* body-mind, and the sense of "I" is just a part of that whole.

This said, it's also true that a solid sense of what's called "agency" - being a hammer rather than a nail in life - is an important factor in mental health. One of the implicit

benefits of taking in the good is to strengthen your sense of agency, which helps protect against the “learned helplessness” that is a risk factor for depression.

Now, it’s certainly possible to take in praise and a sense of accomplishment - but this does not seem to make people more vain or create a big ego for them. In fact, gradually taking in and building up positive states and factors of mind usually helps a person become less self-centered and egoic - not more - over time. When a person feels fuller inside - with more sense of peace, happiness, and love - then he or she is less likely to get all puffed up or arrogant.

Taking in the Good Course FROM KNOWING TO EXPERIENCING

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The First Step of Taking in the Good (TG)

There are two ways to have a positive experience: (1) Focus on one that's already present, or (2) bring to mind a good fact and then help it become a good experience. But how do we actually do (2), and move from the *idea* of a good fact to a *felt sense* of it? For example, can you let the observation that you've finished the dishes become a feeling of accomplishment? Can the sight of flowers blooming become a sense of beauty? Can the smile of a stranger warm your heart?

Opening to Experience

Try one or more of these ways to help the concept of a good fact become an embodied positive experience:

- Pick a current experience, such as a sensation. Then form an idea about it (e.g., "that feels good"). Notice the difference between an idea and an experience.
- Bring awareness to your body.
- Soften and open, with a sense of receiving the good fact.
- Be a little active in your mind, thinking about aspects of the good fact that tend to elicit a positive emotion, or attitude, or sensation in your body.
- Be aware of any blocks to having a positive experience, such as a wandering mind (see the handout, Dealing with Blocks); take a moment to accept this block and get to know it; then gently bring your attention back to the good fact.
- Have an attitude of kindness toward yourself – perhaps like an inner voice saying: *Go ahead, this is a real fact, it's alright to feel good about it.*
- Imagine that a friend is encountering the fact you're thinking about. What would be a natural experience to have? What experience would you wish for him or her?

Try It Out

Recall the key components of an experience (see Key Points #2): sensory (touch, sound, etc.), emotions, attitudes, images, memories, desires, and thoughts. Then bring to mind a simple good fact, like a recent task you completed, and use one or more of the methods just above to encourage this knowing to become experiencing.

Be aware of the transition from idea to experience. In effect, help yourself *learn* how to encourage that transition, that kindling of the fuel of concept into the fire of embodied experience. Consider young children: knowings quickly become feelings and other aspects of experience. The movement from idea to experience is natural, innate – all you have to do is to give it a little support and then let it unfold.

You can also use one or more of the methods above to gently encourage the positive experience that *activated* in the first step of TG to be *extended* in the second step. Explore what it's like to keep opening, softening, receiving . . . to let the experience become even richer in its sensations and emotions . . . perhaps fuller and more intense . . . bigger in your body and mind . . . even a mild or subtle experience – perhaps gratitude, caring, peace, or well-being – can pervade your mind. Enjoy!

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Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 1 – Engaging Your Mind

- Each day, be aware of the three ways to engage the mind: *letting be*, *letting go*, and *letting in*.
- Notice the *negativity bias* in yourself or others, such as an over-focus on what’s unpleasant and under-focus on what’s pleasant.
- Enjoy experiences of physical pleasure, such as pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, touches, and smells. Turn these mental *states* into positive neural traits through the three steps of taking in the good: *have* a positive experience (noticing one that is already present or creating one), *extend* it (help it be embodied, lasting, and more intense), and *absorb* it (intend and sense that it is sinking into you).

	Be aware of letting be, letting go, and letting in	Notice the negativity bias	Have a physical pleasure	Extend this positive experience
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
<u>Friday</u>				
Saturday				

Sunday				
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- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

Taking in the Good Course SEEING THE GOOD IN YOURSELF

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Why See the Good in Yourself?

Acknowledging your good qualities creates a vital positive experience that supports a healthy sense of worth, lifts mood, helps heal old feelings of inadequacy or shame, and balances self-criticism. It's a matter of justice: you are telling the truth about yourself much as you would tell the truth about a friend. But facing this truth – that you are fundamentally a decent and capable person – is often challenging. That's why it's important to stick up for yourself and really take in both the experiential sense of your good qualities and the conceptual knowing that they're real.

The Friend Test

Consider a friend. Certainly, he or she has some good qualities. Like fairness, talents and skills, grit, and a warm heart. Neither halo nor heroics are needed to have good qualities; we all have some! Would you recognize them in your friend? If you overlooked, minimized, or denied them, would this be a good way to treat someone? Well, turn it around: can you see your own good qualities? Why would it be good to see good in your friend but bad to see it in yourself? The Golden Rule is a two-way street: we should also treat *ourselves* as we would treat others.

Identifying Good Things about Yourself

Now take some time to recognize some of the good in yourself. Over an hour or a day, observe virtues or character strengths in yourself such as endurance, patience, determination, decency, empathy, compassion, honesty, or perspective. Also notice various abilities, even seemingly simple ones like cooking a meal, working a spreadsheet, or navigating a tricky conversation. These are facts, not fiction. If negative thoughts tug at you – *But I'm not always this way . . . and there are bad things about me* – that's normal; just be aware of it and bring your attention back to the facts of your virtues, strengths, and abilities.

Consider what a friend appreciates, likes, or loves about you. Or imagine that you are observing the life of someone just like you: What does he or she draw upon to get through a tough day? What gets contributed to others? What is honorable and

admirable about this person? Or imagine the fairest and most loving being in the universe whispering in your ear, telling you about your own goodness.

Really try to let yourself admit the *truth* of your virtues, strengths, and abilities. Pick one or two of these, and take a few moments to get an experience of it, and then sense it sinking into you. Also open to feeling good about this quality of yours – perhaps some gladness, ease, and confidence – and then sense this good feeling sinking into you. Deepest of all, see if you can take in the sense that are a fundamentally good person.

Notice the effects of recognizing your own worth on your energy, mood, and behavior. And see how these effects on you become benefits for others as well.

Taking in the Good Course Class 2 – Key Points

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Activating Positive Experiences

This class explores ways to **activate** a positive experience. To build up inner resources (or *traits*) like resilience, emotional balance, happiness, mindfulness, or compassion, we need to start with positive mental *states*.

Fifteen Ways to Activate a Positive Experience

Notice a positive experience that you are *already* having:

1. in the *foreground* of attention
2. in the *background* of awareness

Create a positive experience by:

- *looking for* good facts:
 3. in your immediate *situation*
 4. in current or recent *events*
 5. in enduring *conditions*
 6. in your own *character*
 7. in your *past* (including events, conditions, and your character)
 8. in *future* events
 9. in *reframing* facts to recognize what is good about them
 10. in *the lives of others* that you could feel glad about
 11. in your *imagination*
- 12. *caring about others*, wishing them well, making contributions to them
- 13. *directly evoking* a positive experience
- 14. *producing* good facts
- 15. *sharing* about good facts and your experience of them with others

Seeing the Good in Yourself

If your friend had some factually positive qualities - no halo required, but basic decency, grit, goodheartedness, talent, warmth, etc. - would you recognize them? If you overlooked, minimized, or even denied these objectively present qualities in your friend . . . would you consider this a good way to treat your friend? Alternately, how might recognizing, affirming, and feeling good about these positive qualities in your friend be of benefit to your friend - and to you? You can see where this is going. Turn it around:

why would it be *good* to recognize good in your friend and feel good about it, but *bad* to to recognize it in yourself?

Components of an Experience

An experience can include one or more of:

- Emotions – happiness, worry, interest, irritation, love, sadness, delight, etc.
- Perceptions – sights, sounds, tastes, smells, sensations
- Images – “mental pictures,” memories
- Thoughts – beliefs, expectations, plans, knowledge, inner language
- Desires – wishes, wants, hopes, craving, clinging, grasping, aversion
- Behaviors – movement, freezing, responses, postures, inclinations

Any one of these aspects of your experience can be “taken in.” Some might be especially valuable for you, such as the feeling of gratitude if you’re disappointed, or the sensation of relaxation if you’re anxious.

Taking in the Good (TG) Course Class 2 - Activating Positive Experiences

- Each day, *notice* positive experiences already present in awareness (in the foreground or background).
- Also look for ways to *create* new positive experiences by recognizing good facts and letting this knowing become an experience.
- Recognize *good facts about yourself* - such as good intentions, strengths, talents, and virtues – and let this knowing become a positive experience, such as a sense of the good quality itself or a sense of comfort, confidence, or pride that you have this quality. Try to push through any reluctance to see these good qualities in yourself or to feel good about them.

	<i>Notice</i> positive experiences already present in awareness	<i>Create</i> positive experiences by recognizing good	Recognize <i>good qualities in yourself</i>	<i>Extend</i> a positive experience
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
<u>Friday</u>				
Saturday				

Sunday				
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Taking in the Good Course BLOCKS TO TAKING IN THE GOOD

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Blocks Are Normal

In life, when we want to do something positive – something that brings happiness and benefit to oneself, and often to others – we frequently come up against various *blocks*. It's the same with taking in the good. Blocks are common. They're not bad or wrong – but they do get in the way. What works is to be aware of them, explore them so you know what they are, and then decide for yourself if it's better for you to give over to them – or to keep trying to take in the good. With practice and time, blocks usually fade away. Meanwhile, try the suggestions below for dealing with them.

Blocks to Any Inner Practice

- Distractibility – Watch your attention and bring it back when it wanders.
- Out of touch with experience – Explore and get used to simple pleasant sensations.
- Leery of bringing attention inward – You are safe enough to be less vigilant; you can pull attention out of experience if it gets uncomfortable.
- Over-analyzing, pulling out of the experience – Bring attention back into your body.

Blocks Specific to Taking in the Good (TG)

- It's hard to receive, even a good experience – Inhale or swallow and sense that it's OK to let something in; notice that receiving actually feels alright and doesn't hurt you.
- Concern you'll lose your edge – Building up inner resources will aid your success.
- Fear you'll lower your guard – Resources make you stronger; you can still be careful.
- Idea that feeling good is disloyal or unfair to those who suffer – Your suffering will not lessen theirs; your growing well-being could help lift theirs; you matter, too.
- Belief you don't deserve to feel good, or that seeking to feel good is vain or sinful – It's moral to seek the welfare of *all* beings; "all beings" includes *you*; when your own cup runneth over, you have more to offer others: put on your own oxygen mask first.
- Not wanting to risk disappointment – Know that disappointment is unpleasant but not overwhelming; consider what's greater, the cost of occasional disappointment or the benefits of feeling good and building up resources inside, then make your choice.
- As a woman, socialized to make others happy, not yourself – Your needs and wants have the same standing as theirs; you have to nurture yourself to care for others.

- As a man, socialized to be stoic and not care about feelings – You need to refuel or you'll be running on empty; building up inner "muscles" makes you stronger, not less.
- You've been punished for being energized or happy - You're with different people today than those in childhood; notice the people who like it when you feel pretty good.
- Good things in you have been dismissed – What's good about you is *real*; feel the realness of your good qualities; sticking up for yourself today helps heal the past.
- Positive experiences associate to negative ones – Notice this; return attention to the positive experience; focus on particularly sensate and enjoyable aspects of it.
- "What's the point in feeling good, bad things will still happen" – Increasing your inner resources will help you and others when bad things do happen.
- Payoffs in not feeling good – What's better for you: those payoffs . . . or feeling good?
- Not wanting to let others off the hook – Your pain punishes you more than them.
- TG is craving that leads to suffering – TG is compassion in action; by internalizing good experiences, you don't need to reach for them outside you.

Taking in the Good Course KEY RESOURCE EXPERIENCES

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Specific Inner Resources

Almost everyone has *specific* issues related to one or more of the three core needs – Avoiding harms, Approaching rewards, and Attaching to others – that could benefit from equally specific inner resources. For example, a sense of safety might help you feel less threatened or anxious (i.e., Avoiding), and gratitude might help you feel less frustrated or disappointed (i.e., Approaching). Therefore, look for or create the **key resource experiences** that are the building blocks of the inner resources you need, such as using feelings of protection to develop a greater sense of safety or feeling appreciative to develop more gratitude.

Identifying Key Resource Experiences

Ask yourself, “What additional inner resource(s) could make a significant difference for me (perhaps for a particular issue)?” Then ask: “What experiences, if taken in, could help build that resource?” Once you have an answer, try to activate and install these key resource experiences. See the examples just below.

Anxiety → Peace

If you have an anxious temperament, look for experiences of feeling protected, strong, relaxed, alright right now, calm.

Disappointment → Happiness

Suppose you’ve had a disappointment. Look for experiences of pleasure, gratitude, the fullness of this moment, and accomplishment.

Invalidation → Love

Suppose that in your childhood you felt like an outsider, and not seen or valued. Notice, look for, and even create experiences of feeling understood, appreciated, liked, part of a group, befriended, treated with warmth, respected, wanted, sought, even cherished and loved.

Blending Resources

Of course, some issues are blends. For example, losing a mate hits us hard in all three systems: Attaching, obviously, but also in terms of a loss of rewarding experiences (Approaching) and in terms of feeling exposed to new threats (Avoiding). Similarly, some key resource experiences are blends. For example, having a friend or mate provides a sense of connection (Attaching), fulfillment (Approaching), and security (Avoiding).

Taking in the Good Course

Class 3 – Key Points

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Installing Positive Experiences

This class is about the second and third steps of taking in the good (TG): *extending* and *absorbing* a positive experience – which *installs* it in your brain, converting a mental state to a neural trait.

Step Two: Extending a Positive Experience

“Neurons that fire together, wire together.” This means that the neural traces of an experience will be greater the more that it is:

- *Lasting* – Watch attention and bring it back if it wanders. Know you can think about other things later. Give yourself over to the experience, renouncing all else for a dozen seconds or more. Make sanctuary for it in your mind.
- *Embodied* – Focus on the sensate and emotional aspects of the experience. Shift your posture or move to express it. Let it fill your body.
- *Intense* – Inhale a little faster. Intend that the experience become richer, more powerful. Give yourself over to it. Let it pervade your mind. Sink into it.

Step Three: Absorbing the Experience

Just like taking a mental snapshot of a beautiful sunset, you can make your brain’s memory systems “stickier” by intending and sensing that the experience is sinking into you as you sink into it. Some people visualize or sense the experience sifting down into them like soft golden dust or gentle rain, soaking in like a water into a sponge, placed like a jewel in the treasure chest of the heart, warming them like a cup of hot cocoa, or easing hurt places inside like a golden soothing balm. Others simply have a knowing that the experience is becoming a part of them, a resource inside they can take with them wherever they go. Just find whatever works for you.

The Evolving Brain

To simplify, the brain evolved in three layers, each one focused on a deep need:

- Reptile (brainstem) – *Avoiding* harms
- Mammal (sub-cortical limbic system) – *Approaching* rewards
- Primate/human (cortex) – *Attaching* to others

When we experience these needs being met, the brain defaults to its homeostatic resting state. This *Responsive* mode is our home base, in which the body refuels and repairs itself, and the mind experiences peace, happiness, and love. But when we feel disturbed by pain or threat, by loss or frustration, or by rejection or loneliness, the brain shifts into its allostatic setting, its *Reactive* mode, in which bodily resources are burned quickly for immediate survival, and the mind experiences (in traditional terms) hatred, greed, and heartache. While the Reactive mode may have short-term benefits, there is always a cost, and its chronic activation is not good for oneself, relationships, or our planet.

Key aims of a good life – peace, happiness, and love – are also key methods: Every time you experience a basic sense of peace, happiness, and love, you strengthen its neural foundations. *Taking in the good brings you home to the Responsive mode.*

Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 3 - Installing Positive Experiences

- Each day, look for opportunities to find or create experiences of being on your own side, such as good wishes or caring for yourself, the sense that you matter; or a sense of strength. For example, you could recall times when you felt particularly determined.
- Use being on your own side or other positive experiences to explore what works for you in *extending* the experience (helping it be lasting, rich, and embodied) and in *absorbing* it (intending and sensing that it is sinking into you, becoming a part of you).
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	TG caring or good wishes for yourself	TG a sense of strength	Create a positive experience by finding good facts in your past	Put particular attention on <i>extending</i> the experience
Monday				
Tuesday				

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Thursday				
<u>Friday</u>				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Taking in the Good Course

Class 4 – Key Points

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Being Peace

This class is about the *Avoiding harms* system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us deal with pains and threats. Much of the time the Avoiding system activates unnecessarily or excessively. Even when there is a real challenge to avoid, it's common to approach it from the brain's *Reactive* setting, rather than its *Responsive* one, which feels bad plus disturbs relationships and one's own mental and physical health. Taking in key resources helps you manage pains and threats in the brain's Responsive mode, or at least buffer the impact of the Reactive mode and leave it quickly. Then you'll be increasingly grounded in a sense of strength and peace.

Unnecessary or Excessive Anxiety

Our ancestors needed to avoid two kinds of mistakes: 1) Thinking there's a tiger in the bushes when there isn't one, and 2) thinking there's no tiger when actually one is about to pounce. The cost of the first mistake is needless anxiety, but the cost of the second one could be death. So the brain evolved to make the first mistake a thousand times to avoid making the second mistake even once. This threat reactivity – “paper tiger paranoia” – makes us overestimate threats, underestimate opportunities, and underestimate inner and outer resources.

Key Resource Experiences

We all have specific issues related to one or more of our three core needs – *Avoiding harms*, *Approaching rewards*, and *Attaching to others* – and those issues can be really helped by taking in equally specific key resources. In effect, you need iron for anemia, not vitamin C. When you identify a personal issue – say needless worry – ask yourself: What resources inside me could help with this? What would make a difference? Then activate and install the particular positive experiences that would build those resources inside you. For example, feeling more protected and relaxed could reduce worrying, so you could really try to *have* experiences of protection and relaxation (by noticing or creating them) and then *extend* and *absorb* them.

Reactive vs. Responsive Approach

The Reactive mode of the Avoiding system involves: disturbing and depleting bodily systems; a mind full of fear and anger; and actions of fight, flight, freeze, or appease. In an emergency, this approach might be necessary, but there are always costs. In contrast, the Responsive mode of the Avoiding system involves: sustainable use of bodily resources; feeling threatened is contained in mindful awareness; and actions come from calm strength, judiciousness, and compassion for oneself and others. To stay in the Responsive mode, take in the sense of having resources – e.g., abilities, strengths, money, allies, goodwill, protections – and imagine Responsive ways to engage a current challenge, such as feeling already strong, peaceful, fed, grateful, grounded in a basic well-being, connected, cared about, or loved. Take in your imagined sense of a Responsive approach so that your brain will be inclined to deal with challenges in this way.

Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 4 – Being at Peace

- Each day, notice *Responsive* compared to *Reactive* approaches in yourself and others.
- Be aware of unnecessary or excessive anxiety, and take in feeling protected and having resources (e.g., strengths, allies, money).
- Pick a challenge – a situation, relationship, or risk – that you could feel threatened, anxious, or angry about. Next, imagine yourself dealing with this challenge in *Responsive* ways. Then, take in this imagined experience, such as how you would feel in your body, your perspectives and priorities, your guidance to yourself, your use of resources, and the potentially positive results.
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	Be aware of <i>Responsive and Reactive</i>	Be aware of <i>needless anxiety</i>	TG the sense of being <i>protected</i>	TG the sense of h <i>resources</i>
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
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<u>Friday</u>				
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Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 5 – Key Points

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Being Happiness

This class is about the *Approaching rewards* system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us manage pleasures and opportunities. When the Responsive mode of this system is activated, we are engaged with life with passion and purpose, grounded in a sense of being already basically contented, fed, fulfilled, and happy. In this mode, we pursue wholesome ends in wholesome ways; we aspire without attachment. But when the Reactive mode of this Approaching system kicks into gear, the body burns resources chasing goals at an unsustainable pace, the mind is colored by frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and drivenness, and our aims are often harmful to ourselves and often others. Key resource experiences for the Approaching system include gladness, gratitude, fullness/enoughness, contentment, success, satisfaction, and fulfillment. When you take these in, you feel better, plus build up resources inside for an unconditional happiness.

The 4th Step of Taking in the Good (TG)

In the optional 4th step, you hold both positive and negative material in awareness, so that the positive gradually eases, balances, soothes, and even replaces the negative. We all have negative material, both from the present, and especially built up from the past; there is nothing inherently shameful or embarrassing about having negative material; it just means you are a normal human being.

To do the 4th step, you must be able to hold two things in mind at the same time, not be hijacked by the negative, and keep the positive more prominent in the foreground of awareness. Therefore, generally do not use this method for trauma itself. The positive material that will have the most impact is whatever key resource experience is a kind of targeted antidote for the negative; for example, in terms of the three motivational systems, feeling protected or strong antidotes fear (Avoiding), feeling glad or successful antidotes disappointment (Approaching), and feeling included or loved antidotes heartache (Attaching).

In the 4th step, you could simply know that the negative material exists, or sense or imagine that the positive material is connecting with it, going into it, soothing and

easing it. You could also sense that younger parts or layers of your psyche are receiving the positive material. If you get hijacked by the negative, drop it entirely and rest only in the positive; when you're ready, if you want, you can bring the negative material to mind again. Then, at the end of the 4th step, let go of the negative and rest only in the positive for however long you like.

You can enter this 4-step process from a positive experience (either noticing one you are already having or creating one). Or you can enter from a negative experience: in terms of the three great ways to engage the mind, first *be with* the negative: observe it, accept it, explore it. Second, when it feels right, *release* the negative as best you can (e.g., relaxing, venting, distractions). Then, third, *replace* the negative with something positive through the 4th step of taking in the good.

Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 5 – Being Happiness

- Each day, be aware of “antidote experiences” – positive experiences that are particularly helpful for certain negative material. For example, feeling glad or successful helps antidote disappointment, and feeling protected or strong helps antidote fear.
- Practice TG-ing resource experiences related to the Approaching rewards system of your brain. These experiences include gladness, gratitude, enoughness/fullness, contentment, success in attaining goals, satisfaction, and fulfillment.
- Try the 4th step of TG, holding both positive and negative material in your awareness so that the positive gradually eases, balances, soothes, and even replaces the negative.

- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once).

	Be aware of <i>"antidote"</i>	TG <i>gladness</i> and/or <i>gratitude</i>	TG the <i>fullness</i> and <i>enoughness</i> of this	Do TG steps 1 – 3 on feeling <i>accomplished</i> or
Monday				
Tuesday				
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<u>Friday</u>				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 6 – Key Points

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Being Love

This class is about the *Attaching to others* system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us have parent-child bonds, romantic love, networks of friends and kin, and the teamwork and altruism necessary for “the village it takes to raise a child.” In its Responsive setting, the Attaching system is grounded in already feeling cared about, and naturally inclined toward compassion, friendliness, and a wide circle of “us.” In the Reactive setting, there is a background sense of grievance, envy, resentment, dismissal, prejudice, hostility, anger, even hatred, and a tendency to identify with a small circle of “us” at odds with a vast circle of “them.”

Feeling Cared About

Over the past several million years, the survival benefits of love, broadly defined, have been a major, even primary, driver of brain evolution. Primate, hominid, and human bands that were good at communicating, planning, cooperating, and caring could outcompete other bands for scarce resources; back in the Serengeti, exile was a death sentence. Therefore, feeling cared about is deeply important, both while growing up and as an adult. So look for ways to *activate* and *install* experiences of feeling connected, included, seen, appreciated, respected, valued, prized, liked, wanted, sought, cherished, and loved. Even if things aren't perfect, you are focusing on the slice of the relationship pie in which you truly matter to the other person. And if you like, try the 4th step of taking in the good, in which you hold both positive and negative material in awareness; for example, you could sense or imagine that feelings of being included today are touching, soothing, and gradually replacing feelings of being left out in your past.

Healthy Boundaries

As the saying has it, “Fences make for good neighbors.” Autonomy is the foundation of intimacy; you can't sustain “we” if there is no room for “me.” Feeling really grounded in yourself lets you open wide to others without waiving your rights or feeling overwhelmed. Consequently, it's useful to take in experiences in which you feel individuated from others in a healthy way, as if there were a picket fence between you,

or as if you were like a deeply rooted tree through which the emotions, beliefs, and wants of others can blow strongly without knocking you over. This illustrates a larger point, that you can take in any helpful state of mind and make it a part of you, even *pragmatically* positive experiences that feel neutral (e.g., image of picket fence) or even unpleasant, such as remorse about harsh tone with someone or a poignant disenchanting recognition of a friend's limitations.

Giving Caring

So far this course has largely focused on positive experiences related to good things happening *to* you – and as you finish the course and take it out into the world, it's timely to appreciate that you can also internalize positive experiences related to you creating good *process* and good *results*. For example, as process, you could take in experiences of using talents and skills or being determined; as results, take in feelings of empathy, compassion, kindness, liking, and love.

Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 6 – Being Love

- Each day, be aware of “antidote experiences” – positive experiences that are particularly helpful for certain negative material. For example, feeling included helps antidote feeling left out, and feeling valued helps antidote feeling worthless or inadequate.
- Practice TG-ing resource experiences related to the Attaching to others system of your brain. These experiences include feeling connected, seen, included, appreciated, valued, liked, wanted, cherished, and loved.
- Try the 4th step of TG, holding both positive and negative material in your awareness so that the positive gradually eases, balances, soothes, and even replaces the negative.

- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once).

	Be aware of <i>"antidote"</i>	TG <i>feeling</i> <i>included</i> and/or	TG <i>feeling appreciated</i> and/or <i>valued</i>	TG <i>feeling liked</i> and/or <i>loved</i>
Monday				
Tuesday				
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Taking in the Good (TG) Course

Class 6 – Being Love

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- Practice TG-ing resource experiences related to the Attaching to others system of your brain. These experiences include feeling connected, seen, included, appreciated, valued, liked, wanted, cherished, and loved.
- Try the 4th step of TG, holding both positive and negative material in your awareness so that the positive gradually eases, balances, soothes, and even replaces the negative.

- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once).

	Be aware of <i>"antidote"</i>	TG <i>feeling</i> <i>included</i> and/or	TG <i>feeling appreciated</i> and/or <i>valued</i>	TG <i>feeling liked</i> and/or <i>loved</i>
Monday				
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